

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

**INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN-
WATERLOO**

At Sydney on Tuesday 8 June 2004

The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Ms J. C. Burnswoods (Chair)

The Hon. Dr. A. Chesterfield-Evans
The Hon. K. F. Griffin
The Hon. R. M. Parker
The Hon. G. S. Pearce
The Hon. I. W. West

FRANCISCO ANTONIO REITANO, Delegate, Redfern Branch, Police Association of New South Wales, 30 Turner Street, Redfern

PAUL HUXTABLE, Branch Administrator, Redfern Branch, Police Association of New South Wales, 30 Turner Street, Redfern

ROBERT RICHARD PRITCHARD, President, Police Association of New South Wales, 30 Turner Street, Redfern, and

GREGORY THOMAS CHILVERS, Director, Research and Resource Centre, Police Association of New South Wales, PO Box A1097, Sydney South, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: I declare open today's hearing and acknowledge that we are conducting our hearing on the traditional land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. Thank you for appearing before this Committee. The Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans sends his apologies. He is unable to attend the inquiry at this stage as he is involved in another committee inquiry. We also need to take care to avoid naming individuals in evidence. In accordance with general committee practice in relation to both submissions and oral evidence we will try to ensure that we deal with issues and not with individuals. You have the lengthy questions that we prepared for you. Mr Pritchard, do you want to make an opening statement on behalf of the association?

Mr PRITCHARD: Yes, I would. I am appearing today to back the evidence of the delegates representing the officers who had to deal first-hand with the riots in Redfern. I also want to place their evidence in a broader context. What is happening in Redfern is a symptom for what is happening in public disorder hot spots all around the State. Following the events at Redfern I asked members to identify areas where they were subject to assault, ranging from minor to serious affrays. The areas identified, which are not exclusive, were Armidale, Auburn, Bankstown, Bourke, Campbelltown, Dubbo, Kempsey, Merrylands, Moree, Mount Druitt, Nowra, Surry Hills, Sydney central business district, Wagga Wagga, Warilla and Wilcannia.

I have worked in several of these areas, including Redfern, and I have to say to you that if you step back and analyse the situation there are common issues that seem to repeat themselves. I think it boils down to three factors. First, look at the crime hot spots and you inevitably see lack of resources—conditions of stations, equipment, and specialist police trained to deal with high-pressure situations. That is why we have called for a dedicated, full-time operational support group [OSG] to be deployed to public disorder hot spots. Second, there has been a massive influx of young police and they tend to be deployed in the State's more turbulent areas. There is a real issue with throwing new recruits into the deep end without sufficient experience and supervision. That is why we are making the status of sergeants a priority in our upcoming award negotiations.

Third, and most important, the Government needs to recognise the link between public disorder hot spots and the breakdown in the delivery of other government services. Health, community services, education and housing are all part of the equation. What should your committee do? Do not be fooled into thinking that the issues police face begin and end at Redfern. Resourcing and recruitment, rightly, are issues for police management working with the association to identify priorities and strategies to resource police in these areas. You can have real impact by assisting my members by arguing the case for better co-ordination between government services, better targeting of government service delivery to the areas that most need them and, most significantly, an understanding that policing occurs in the context of other highly complex social relations. NSW Police are dedicated, skilled professionals but we are not miracle workers. We need the support of the public, through the Government, if we are to make the community safe.

CHAIR: We hope that we can address some of those issues. Having said what you did, it might be sensible for us to start with question No. 3, which specifically addresses why you called for the establishment of an operational support group.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Do any of the other officers want to make an opening statement?

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CHAIR: It is our usual practice to—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It is our usual practice to invite each of the witnesses to make an opening statement.

CHAIR: No, it is not. It is our usual practice to invite the chief person, in this case the President of the Police Association of New South Wales, to make a statement. I am sure that the other three witnesses will have a chance to do so when they are answering questions. We have always adopted that practice, whether we are questioning a director-general or a chief executive officer.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: No, we have not. So are you going to deny them the opportunity to make a statement?

CHAIR: I refer to question No. 3. What is an operational support group? Why do you think it is necessary? Why is it necessary for Redfern to have one? Perhaps it is also necessary for those other hot spots that you have identified.

Mr PRITCHARD: I will ask Mr Chilvers, Director, Research and Resources, to answer that question.

Mr CHILVERS: After the events at Redfern a strike force was set up through the NSW police force—Strike Force Coburn—to look at the resource implications of what happened at Redfern. We made an extensive submission to that strike force in relation to a permanent OSG. We propose to have a permanent, full-time operational support group to provide statewide operational support on a 24-hour basis to local area commands and regions, for example, at events where large crowds are anticipated, at protests and demonstrations, supported policing operations during emergency incidents, and so on. Given that the majority of these sorts of events occur in the metropolitan area it is our proposal to have the OSG basically stationed in the metropolitan area but to have people at all the hot spots particularly trained in OSG operations and with the ability to call people out on a 24-hour basis to support police in these situations. As I said earlier, we made an extensive submission. We are happy to table that submission to the Committee as it gives a lot more detail about what we are proposing.

CHAIR: I think we already have it. What sort of special training and what resources would an OSG have that police, say, in Redfern, Bourke or Auburn would not have?

Mr CHILVERS: It is particularly for large-scale crowd control. Officers are trained to deal with highly volatile situations. An OSG would deal predominantly with volatile situations, where particular skills are required in crowd control and in the management of situations that could potentially turn dangerous for our members. We equip them and train them in the appropriate use of safety equipment in those situations, and they provide a rapid response.

Mr PRITCHARD: Once a permanent OSG is formed you would find that it would need specialised equipment. That would have to be sourced outside. Because of costs, et cetera, you need that one particular group that would be fully resourced and able to be deployed wherever it may need to be.

CHAIR: Perhaps it is sensible to come back to our first question. As you would know, our terms of reference require us to examine police resources in Redfern and Waterloo. Can you or the two local officers comment on the adequacy of resources in the Redfern Local Area Command and whether police numbers in the command, as distinct from the OSG-type structure, need to be increased?

Mr PRITCHARD: Referring to question No. 1, in the latter part of 2000 and early 2001 the tripartite committee was overseeing the establishment of a staffing allocation system to replace the obsolete resource allocation formula. In 2001 the Police Association nominated Assistant Secretary Greg Black as its representative on the steering committee that was formed to develop the Workforce Distribution Scheme [WDS]. Its aim was to design a system that guides the distribution of regional local area command authorised human resource positions. It appreciates the many complex variables that qualify the demand on policing services.

The committee continued to meet until January 2003 and, ultimately, a robust tool was developed that had the capacity to identify staffing needs in a rational way, taking into account workload issues, such as crime, first response policing agreements, local demographics, socioeconomic factors, et cetera. Part of the committee's role was to engage external consultants to validate the WDS and the subsequent validation was positive. We eagerly awaited the practical use of the final product as it was a critical tool to be utilised not only in Redfern but also across the State to objectively analyse workload and the resource needs of all commands. However, the WDS has not been supported by NSW Police senior management and, therefore, implementation has not occurred.

On 9 March 2004 the Police Association wrote to the Commissioner of Police and raised concerns about the fact that the thousands of dollars and human hours that had been spent in the development of the WDS had apparently been wasted. A response dated 20 April 2004 was received under the hand of Dick Adams, Executive Director, Corporate Services, which indicated that a new work group had been formed to reinvent a staffing model in which, once again Greg Black would be invited to participate. We are awaiting our invitation.

CHAIR: Are you talking specifically about Redfern?

Mr PRITCHARD: That is right.

Mr REITANO: On Monday 23 February 2004 the Redfern branch of the Police Association had a meeting, which was attended by some 88 members. At that meeting the branch passed a number of motions relating to staff. Those motions were firstly that the Redfern branch of the Police Association call for operational concertinas to be made a permanent operation, with a minimum of 30 full-time staff. The branch called for the introduction of a full-time robbery unit at Redfern LAC, comprising a minimum of eight police officers to investigate the disproportionate number of robbery and steal from person offences that were occurring in the LAC. I would like to have a lot more to say about that, if I could, in the limited time.

The Redfern branch of the association also called for the introduction of a full-time Redfern drug unit, comprised of a minimum of eight police officers, to investigate the suburb's horrendous drug problems. Redfern branch called for an increase in the number of detectives at Redfern to a minimum of 20, in addition to the robbery and drug units, and also called for an increase in general duty police officers stationed at Redfern by around 20. In relation to the human resource [HR] figures for Redfern, I am aware that the Committee has previously been told that there are approximately 180 operational police officers. Those figures are not quite correct. I have a document from the February OCR, which does break down our figures. The 180 figure also includes the mounted police section out at Redfern.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: How many police are in that section?

Mr REITANO: Our current operational strength as of February was 134. The mounted police in February had an operational strength of 19.

CHAIR: I think when we were given that figure we were also told that you were above your allocated strength, would that be correct?

Mr REITANO: Yes, that is correct. We are above our allocated strength, however, when you have a look at each of the individual sections, I do not think that overall figure reflects the resources that we should have at Redfern.

CHAIR: It might be handy if you could table that for us.

Mr REITANO: Yes. Can I just give an indication as far as our HR figures go, in February 31 per cent of our staff were probationary constables and a further 38 per cent had less than five years service so, if my maths is right, 69 per cent of our staff had under five years service at Redfern. Obviously, that includes plainclothes and everyone else, but when you take the proportion of probationary constables to front-line general duty officers, that percentage comes probably closer to 50 per cent of our general duty staff are probationary constables.

CHAIR: Is that very different from other commands?

Mr REITANO: It is probably not very different from other commands but in a LAC such as Redfern, with the sorts of problems that it has, it could perhaps be beneficial to have police with a little bit more experience in the suburb. In relation to the plainclothes staff at Redfern, the detectives, back in February there was an authorised strength of 19. At this particular time we still only have 19. Out of that staff below the team leader level, out of those positions there are only two actual designated detectives who are operating. Made up in that figure of 19 are also included two probationary constables, myself and another detective, who is leading the pro-active team. The Redfern detectives office, in particular, their strength level is nothing short of woeful.

The next thing I would like to speak about is in relation to the investigation of robberies at Redfern. At the moment we have four police officers out of the 19 who are allocated to investigate robberies. That is four on paper, however, when you have a look, one at the moment is on annual leave and the other one is on leave at court. As of today, we have one officer who is investigating robberies at Redfern and he is a very junior officer.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Did you say one?

Mr REITANO: One officer who is specifically allocated to investigate robberies at the moment at Redfern. To show you just how disproportionate that is, in the first six days of June, Redfern has had 16 robberies, including a serial robber, who is going around robbing elderly people. Since 30 May this particular serial robber—I will not give you any of the details other than just to let you know—this person on 4 June committed a robbery upon a female 68 years of age; on 4 June, a female, 87 year of age; 5 June, a female 62 years of age—he put his fingers around her throat and tried to choke her; 6 June, a 69-year-old female; 6 June a 56 year-year-old female; yesterday a 66-year-old female was attacked; 30 May a 64-year-old female ended up with a broken ankle in three places; 30 May another female 78 years old was robbed because we do not have the resources to investigate these matters properly.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: So this bloke has not been arrested?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: They only have one officer.

Mr REITANO: No, we do not have anyone who is dedicated to investigating the series of matters at the moment because of our staffing levels.

CHAIR: Are people from other units able to step in? I think you said one is at court and one is on annual leave and so on. Are people from other units able to step in?

Mr REITANO: If you want to have a look at the detective strength, we have got a detective sergeant who is going to be tied up at court for the best part of the next six months. Out of the two detective senior constables, well, they are both off. There is only either the two probationary constables today who can do it—sorry, one of those is off—or one of about another three plainclothes constables who can launch the investigation. What Redfern desperately needs is a properly resourced robbery unit. Our figures for robbery are absolutely abysmal. We have had 16 in six days. We are headed towards 100 for this month. Last month we had about 60. Other LACs have approached the problem in a different way. They have employed a specialist approach, for example, Operation Nitsana out at Liverpool. I have got their figures here if you would like to have a look at the sort of work that they have been able to do. They have been able to reduce their robberies down to about 30 a month. They have got four people full time investigating robberies.

CHAIR: To sum up, the association branch believes that you need more people in those specific units—and we do have copies of the resolution of the branch that you referred to—and some restructuring of the kinds of units and specialists that operate?

Mr REITANO: What we need is a minimum of eight, preferably investigators, plainclothes officers, ordinary detectives, dedicated full time to investigating robberies in the Redfern LAC. The units need to be set up either along the lines of Nitsana or along the lines of another unit that is operating at City Central, which has had six officers and an analyst going for quite some time. They

have been able to reduce robberies down to approximately 30 or so per month. Redfern has never had a proper full-time unit dedicated solely to investigating robberies. We have always had piecemeal units, either one, two or three officers, and it is just not enough.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Has the association raised this before with senior police?

Mr REITANO: We have. Paul Huxtable and I raised this issue with Mr Madden at a meeting that we had last year,

CHAIR: Mr Huxtable, do you want to comment as well on that first basic question about resources?

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes. As Frank said, we have not even got into drugs yet.

CHAIR: They are later questions.

Mr HUXTABLE: When we talk about resources, as we said, we are staffed by very junior police and that problem is probably no worse in Redfern, but we should not be using that basis as a benchmark of what is right and what is wrong. There seems to be a plan to try to downgrade what is actually happening at Redfern. I see in the Government's submission it says, "Compared with violent armed robberies, most robberies in the Redfern area are less violent." I wonder with that 64-year-old woman, who has a triple fractured ankle, whether we should be going to her and saying, "You are lucky" or the man who, in broad daylight in February, was punched to the head, kicked to the ground, kicked to the head and knocked unconscious or the man who, without warning, was punched to the face, knocked unconscious with a badly broken nose and received stitches all over his face. Are we saying that these people are lucky; they are not in the most violent category?

When you look at the Redfern detectives office, below the rank of sergeant, we have two designated detectives, to fully qualified detectives. The rest are plainclothes constables. We even have probationary constables working in the detectives office, and these are serious matters. We have had, up until midnight last night, 19 other robberies this month, which is an astronomical amount of robberies, and these are violent street robberies. We have the situation at Redfern where the criminals are walking freely in the street and the residents are locked behind doors with bars on their windows. It has turned around.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I thank you for coming and congratulate you on the work you have done, not only out on the beat but also in trying to resolve some of the issues. In terms of resources, we are here because of what happened on a terrible night in February. It is now some months down the track. If there were a riot tonight, has anything changed in Redfern in terms of resources that would make you better ably equipped to meet that problem?

Mr HUXTABLE: Well, there has been some streamlining. We have had more equipment and I think the channels of information flow in relation to getting more people there in a more timely fashion have improved but, by and large, no, which is why this organisation is calling for a permanent operational support group. Because the OSG police we have now are part-timers—they perform the function of general duties and all other areas—the problem on the night was getting those people to Redfern in a timely fashion. In fact, at one stage the EKG got on the radio and spoke to channels Charlie, Echo, Foxtrot and Delta, which is effectively half the city and they got five OSG police. When you look at a few short years ago, there was an incident in the city where some member of the Kurdish community occupied the Greek Consul's office and if you look at the review of what the police did on that day and the review of what happened at Redfern, they are almost identical, so the police force has had a real problem learning from the problems and getting a remedy.

The only remedy here is a full-time OSG. We are talking about Redfern, we are talking about closing the railway station. If that riot had have gone for another six hours, through to, say 10.00 a.m. on Monday morning and all the train lines at Redfern had been closed, the city would been closed down. When you look at the current environment with terrorism and that threat, we desperately need a permanent full-time OSG response.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: In regard to the violent crime that you have been talking about, we have been told that statistics show that there are also a lot of bag snatches. I do not know what category they fit into, but I have seen some of the footage of bag snatches and they are violent, but I gather they are not considered as serious as robbery. Is there a problem with the actual reporting of crime?

Mr HUXTABLE: I think you are referring to the offence of steal from person. There is a very fine line between steal from person and robbery. The typical steal from person is that the offender runs up, grabs a woman's handbag, for example, and continues to run. That is a steal from person and is recorded as a stealing in the same category I suppose as shoplifting. However, should that woman hold on to that bag, the offender inevitably turns around, punches them to the head, kicks them or punches and kicks them and steals the handbag, so then you move into robbery. Steal from person and robbery are under the same section of the Crimes Act, they carry the same penalty, they are the same offenders committing both offences, and the issue is that it is actually the victim who determines what the offence is, not the offender. If the victim does keep a hold of the bag, then that will move it into the area of a robbery, yet for some reason—and it is not just the police, it is the statistics that draw a distinction between the two.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: This is the computer operated police system [COPS] recording system?

Mr HUXTABLE: I think these figures come from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. I believe that is what the police operate under.

Mr CHILVERS: To clarify that, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research produces reports in relation to this but the data they rely on comes from the COPS system. That is how it is entered in the system.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Can someone update us on the progress of the Timepiece operation? How many people have been charged, how many are on bail and how many suspects are still being sought?

Mr REITANO: At the moment under Timepiece we have charged 35 people. A further six people are listed as wanted, which means that we are actively trying to hunt them down. Off the videos we have clear footage of probably another 20 or so persons but we do not know their identity at this stage.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Are you in charge of that project, Mr Reitano?

Mr REITANO: I am in charge of the day-to-day supervision, yes.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Is Timepiece ongoing?

Mr REITANO: Only until this Friday.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: What happens after that?

Mr REITANO: That is our end date; we are finishing up.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: So what about the people you are looking for?

Mr REITANO: The six listed as wanted, whoever comes across them, that is fine. I do not think too much more will be done with the other 20.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: We have heard about some suspects who have breached bail conditions. Can you tell us about them?

Mr REITANO: We have charged 20 adults. Of those 20, 18 have been refused bail by the police. Of all those people a significant number have breached bail. There is one in particular that members of the strike force are quite demoralised has been given bail. Without mentioning any names

I would like to give you at least some details to show you what we are up against. This particular person was charged with riot-related offences on 2 March 2004. On 5 March he was arrested and charged in relation to breaching his bail. When charged initially he was given bail by the court and released. On 5 March—a couple of days later—he breached his bail, he was arrested and charged, brought before the court, and they released him on conditional bail. On 19 March he was again arrested and charged with breaching his bail. Again the court released him on conditional bail. On 3 April he was arrested and charged with breaching his bail. Again the court released him on conditional bail.

On 28 April he was arrested and charged with breaching his bail. Again the court released him on conditional bail. On 30 April he again breached his bail and we do not know where he is at the moment—we cannot find him. This fellow has been charged under section 47 of the Crimes Act with an offence relating to throwing Molotov cocktails, which carries a sentence of 25 years in gaol. He is only one; there are others who have prior matters relating to riots and affray. One in particular, who was already on bail for those sorts of matters, was charged in relation to the riot and released on conditional bail and he has gone on to breach his bail twice. Each time he has breached his bail he has been released on conditional bail by the courts.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: It must be very hard for police on duty.

Mr REITANO: It is demoralising. At the strike force we have been working really hard to come up with some results and when the courts do this sort of thing it destroys morale.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: During the investigations have you managed to come up with a time sequence of what happened? We have heard a couple of versions and it would be interesting to hear your view of what happened on the night.

Mr REITANO: We have that at the strike force; I do not have anything with me. We have had an analyst draw up a sequence of the night's events based on the police radio log and other logs that have time recording on them so that we know when different things happened. As I said, I do not have that with me but we have done that.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: I return to some original comments about the strength of Redfern and other local area commands [LACs] and the fact that there are probationary constables and a large percentage of people with fewer than five years experience. Is that the case with most other LACs?

Mr PRITCHARD: I think you will find that because we are the youngest police force in Australia in most local area commands we have very junior police. That is why we are advocating that we must get very experienced supervisors, especially into areas such as Redfern.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: There are 19 detectives attached to the Redfern Local Area Command. Is that typical of other local area commands?

Mr PRITCHARD: The number of detectives and the level of general duties at each command are determined by workload, the area they are in and the problems they face. Each local area command is different.

Mr CHILVERS: This is a problem we have been looking at for quite some time. A number of factors have contributed to the difficulty in terms of experience levels. Certainly one of them is that we have had a massive increase in numbers in recent years. As Mr Pritchard said, we are the youngest police force in the country not only in terms of age but in terms of experience. Even though we have older people coming into the job it does not impact on experience levels. We have also had a loss in the key area of experience in supervision over many years. Part of the problem is the way the occupation is structured in terms of promotion. There are simply not enough promotional positions available for people coming up so there has been a drain from the organisation in that area as well.

We have been advocating—and this is one of the major focuses of our next enterprise bargaining—a remuneration model that will attempt to retain that experience level so that people can be rewarded for staying as operational police officers at a supervisory level without having to move

out of that in the promotional scheme. This is a very significant issue for us and it is an issue that the other police agencies throughout the country will face at some stage as well. There has also been a crisis, which we accept, in experience levels and retaining good investigators and detectives. We actively participated in the recent detectives review in an attempt to improve conditions for detectives so that we can retain their experience as well. There have been significant changes in the organisation in recent times. The problem of experience levels is certainly obvious in Redfern, but it is throughout the State as well.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: If the short-term solution is to move more experienced officers into the Redfern Local Area Command that would obviously create difficulties with other LACs that have similar problems with experience. You are saying that there is a big experience gap in the middle—there are people with fewer than five years experience but presumably many people with more experience have moved out of the system.

Mr CHILVERS: That is certainly a major problem and we need to be very strategic in both the way that we attract and retain these people and the way that we deploy them.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: I will move on to question 5 given that witnesses yesterday—like other witnesses who have given evidence to the inquiry—mentioned the serious drug trade in Redfern. A number of witnesses have commented that the community in Redfern know who these people are and they are concerned that not enough has been done to get rid of people in the drug trade. I preface my question with those comments. Can you identify how the current strategies are deficient and what needs to be done to solve some of the issues with the drug trade in Redfern?

Mr PRITCHARD: I will answer initially and then I will pass the question on to my colleagues. There is a need to get the community on side. That is a problem we have always had. We need to keep the community there to support us. Over more than 25 years police have done an enormous amount of good work to combat crime in the Redfern LAC as a whole. The problem before us has slowly but surely shrunk into a small area where they have a major problem, which has always been known as the Block. It needs to be addressed in a manner similar to Cabramatta, where the community fully supports us and gets behind us. They report their problems to us and tell us what is going on. I will ask Frank or Paul to give some specifics about the Redfern area.

Mr REITANO: I will speak more generally and then Paul will speak more specifically about Redfern. Part of the problem we have in Redfern is related to the judiciary and the legislation. They are the two main things that make what we are doing about drugs extremely difficult. I will give a quick example with the judiciary. A fellow was arrested for supplying heroin in the Block and he was fined \$50 and released. Unfortunately, he has since passed away. Those sorts of penalties do not do a lot to boost morale. The legislation, particularly the drug house legislation, has very limited application down at the Block. Cultural issues make it very difficult for police to do anything with that legislation. It is fine out at Cabramatta; it works there. But it does not work in the Block.

The Law Enforcement (Controlled Operations) Act—I have been talking about this since the Cabramatta inquiry—is effectively hindering police in doing their job properly. For example, if you were to tell me today that prohibited drugs were being supplied in premises across the road the police could do very little for a couple of weeks. I will tell you why. There is a limited range of things that we could do. We could take out a search warrant and try to find drugs in the house. But if there were a number of people in the house and no-one admitted ownership of the drugs all we could do was take the drugs and leave them there to deal another day. If we arrested people who had bought drugs at the house in Redfern they would not tell us where they got it from. There is very little we can do. The most effective way to shut down a drug house is to send officers in to purchase drugs.

As to organising a controlled operation, under the present legislation you will not be able to get it done under two weeks. It is very time consuming and overburdening. I took part in one review when I was working at the Minister's office in 2002. We looked at the specific issue of why the authorisation to conduct a controlled operation had to be given by the deputy commissioner and why it could not be delegated down to the LAC level. If it was delegated to LAC level it would be far easier to conduct these types of operations.

Mr HUXTABLE: The problem with dealing with drugs in the Block is that the Block is a bit of a fortress. At other commands I have worked at if someone says, "Bloggs is selling drugs from that house", we would get a search warrant, send in a couple of police and do the job. Here it takes a couple of weeks to organise. You need 20 to 25 OSG police to act as bodyguards for the officers executing the search warrant. It is a monumental task. Rapid response or rapid reaction is non-existent in Redfern. You cannot do it; it is just too dangerous because of the level of violence and the fortress around the Redfern area. Frank touched on the case of the poor chap who got a \$50 fine for heroin dealing. He has since died from a heroin overdose. The system is failing everyone involved in this process, not just the police but the people on the Block and those who travel through it.

I also want to touch on the issue of experience levels. The problem is how to attract experienced police to Redfern. We cannot. Someone asked why we did not move experienced police from Newtown to Redfern and from Marrickville to Newtown. But Newtown and Marrickville do not have any experienced police. We need to be looking at giving incentives to police to stay in Redfern for three or four more years—doing the hard yards. For example, custody manager is a sergeant's job; it is a very important job that involves looking after prisoners and custody issues. I believe that in the last two advertising rounds Redfern has had vacancies and we have not got one application. That is because it is so far down the list of people's choices. When you look at Redfern and the custody issues and the high-risk clientele—members of the Aboriginal community—it is outrageous. We cannot adequately task our command with people to perform the job.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: I want to return to the difficulties with the controlled operations. You said that at the moment approval must be obtained at a much higher level for one of those operations to occur, and you believe that for it to be more effective approval needs to be given at the local area command level.

Mr REITANO: That is correct. If it was given at LOC commander level we could react to these circumstances in a much more timely manner. The problem we have at the moment is that the form that must be typed up is complex. It has to be sent to Court and Legal Services, who want it for a minimum of five days, and if there are any alterations it has to come back. The process takes that long before authority is granted. Once the authority is obtained you have to find the resources to conduct the operation. It is unfortunate, but in those circumstances it takes time to be able to react effectively.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Do you need officers from other areas to conduct those operations?

Mr REITANO: Yes.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Could you utilise officers from your command?

Mr REITANO: We need a mixture. It is mainly officers from our own command, but we need a couple of specialised officers to assist.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Mr Huxtable and Mr Reitano, were either of you at the riot on the evening?

Mr REITANO: No.

Mr HUXTABLE: No. I commenced duty at 6.00 a.m. the following morning.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I assume you have spoken to some of the police officers who were there.

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: A number of them have made submissions to the Committee. Have they indicated to you whether they want to give evidence to the Committee?

Mr HUXTABLE: A number of people have given me submissions, or have indicated to me that they have made submissions. I am not aware of any of those submissions that relate specifically to

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the riot. Probably about eight Redfern police officers have made submissions in relation to their experiences and the violence they have been subjected to. We had a meeting yesterday and they expressed their disappointment that their submissions have not been put on the web site to be accessed and that they have not been invited to appear before the Committee. Some of the incidents—I have some here—

CHAIR: Mr Huxtable, I point out that all of those people originally asked us to keep their submissions confidential. Some of them have recently talked to us about ways in which they might have sections deleted. However, they asked for them to be confidential. It was not a choice the Committee made.

Mr HUXTABLE: I am aware of that, but, as you acknowledge, they have since expressed—

CHAIR: They have been talking to Rachel Callinan about deleting sections. However, it is important to make it clear that the confidentiality was at their request; it was not the Committee's decision.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: But they now want those submissions made public.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Is that all of them or some of them?

Mr HUXTABLE: Probably some; I cannot speak on behalf of all of them. There is also my submission, which has been edited—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Censored by the Labor members of the Committee.

Mr HUXTABLE: —and which details the vicious attacks, unprovoked violence and serious injuries that police have been subjected to.

CHAIR: We have a series of questions about violence if you would like to get on to them. We have asked those questions of other people, and it would be good if you address them now.

Mr HUXTABLE: What question is that?

CHAIR: Question No. 8 with all its different parts.

Mr HUXTABLE: As recently as yesterday police had a bottle thrown at them at the Block and on Saturday night a police officer suffered a badly dislocated shoulder while wrestling with an intoxicated person. These injuries continue to arise. We are talking about people with metal plates in their head, people who have lost almost 100 per cent of their hearing in one ear, people with severely fractured jaws—

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: When you say "people", do you mean police officers?

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes, police officers. Violence seems to be an acceptable form of action against police officers. I refer to it in my submission. In one submission a person talks about the continual violence he has been subjected to. He has suffered fractured fingers and the like. He goes on and on about all the injuries suffered. He goes on to say that many of these people who have committed the violence have substantial criminal histories, but not one has done a single day in gaol in relation to the violence directed at him. Why not attack police? There is no deterrent. These assaults are not in retaliation. Police can be walking past minding their own business and the next minute they have a bottle in the back of their head. The level of violence police are subjected to is outrageous.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I notice that Senior Constable McGowan is back at work. He was the officer hit in the head with the brick on the night of the riot.

Mr HUXTABLE: That is right.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Have you spoken to him?

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Mr HUXTABLE: No, I have not.

Mr REITANO: I have spoken to him.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What is his view at the moment?

Mr REITANO: Mick has put together a report that he showed me. That has gone through NSW Police. He is of the belief that that report is going to be forwarded to the inquiry. I think he is hopeful that at some stage he will be called to give evidence.

CHAIR: There is a certain amount of confusion developing here. The Committee is quite specifically not involved in the inquiry into the riot. As you know the Police Ombudsman, the Coroner and so on are involved.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Why do you think we are here?

CHAIR: Obviously many issues relating to the riot come up. We have a specific heading and a series of questions about it. However, we are not calling people to speak specifically about the events of the riot.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: You may not be interested in the riot, but we are.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: That is why we are here.

CHAIR: That is not within the terms of reference that the Legislative Council gave the Committee. Obviously there are lots of issues about its causes, what followed it and how it fits into the context of what we are dealing with, but in terms of—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Are you saying that you are going to use your numbers to prevent McGowan appearing?

CHAIR: I am talking about the terms—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Is that what you are saying now? You are going to use your numbers again!

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: The terms of reference were designed to cover up—

CHAIR: I am reminding Mr Reitano, as I think he knows quite well having referred to the terms of reference, that the Committee has very specific terms of reference that were given to it by the Legislative Council, and it has the responsibility of dealing with them as fully as it can. It is specifically not looking narrowly at the riot itself. It is looking at police resources and strategies and all sorts of things to do with the Block and the communities in Redfern-Waterloo. I remind you that we are not looking specifically at the riot.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: What we have done so far is give an hour and a half to people who have not even been to the Block. We have four people who work very closely with the Block—

CHAIR: That is why we are now trying to ask them questions about violence against police officers. We have been told, including by Mr Huxtable and Mr Reitano, that there are ongoing problems. That is why we have a series of questions about them. We need to deal with the issues that surround the riot to help explain it. However, we are not dealing with the riot itself—the Committee's terms of reference do not relate to that. If you want to go on, by all means do.

Mr REITANO: In relation to McGowan's report, he addresses those issues. He does not just focus on the riot, he talks about—

CHAIR: In that case we would like to receive a submission from him. In any case, he must speak for himself.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Other people have been called to appear who have not made a submission, so we can certainly invite him.

CHAIR: Ms Parker, can we just get back to trying to deal with Mr Pearce's question? Mr Reitano, I think you were trying to answer the question.

Mr REITANO: As I said, through speaking with Mick—

CHAIR: We are not speaking specifically about an individual. The question about the level of violence—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: The question was about an individual.

CHAIR: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Just let him answer it.

CHAIR: Of course it was about an individual. However, I am saying that we must stick to our terms of reference—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: You are making yourself look like a goose once again. Just let him answer the question.

CHAIR: Mr Pearce, as usual your manners are atrocious. Mr Reitano, will you please return to—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Your manners are atrocious. You are the one who has interrupted the witness. He was adequately dealing with the question.

CHAIR: He is dealing with evidence relating to the broad question about violence against police officers, which I take very seriously, and it relates to the terms of reference—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: No, he can answer my question.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Can we hear the question again?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: The answer was almost finished before the Chair went on with all this nonsense. I simply asked him whether he had spoken to Mr McGowan and whether Mr McGowan wanted to appear before the Committee. I think he had basically finished. He said that as far as he knew Mr McGowan had prepared a report and he was going to send it in. We did not need all of this nonsense.

CHAIR: Can we then go on with the other questions which the Committee has asked and which the witnesses have seen. We sent questions to you about this big problem of violence—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Incidentally, when were these questions sent to you?

Mr HUXTABLE: At 6.00 p.m. Friday.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: They were handed to the Opposition members of the Committee at the beginning of the meeting this morning.

CHAIR: Mr Pearce, you received these questions on Friday.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I was handed these—

The Hon. IAN WEST: You can ask whatever question you like.

CHAIR: This is ridiculous! Mr Huxtable and Mr Reitano, can you give us any idea of how the number and type of incidents of violence against police officers in the Redfern command area compare to other local area commands?

Mr HUXTABLE: I personally worked as a street policeman at Campbelltown, Macquarie Fields and Liverpool, which are very confrontational areas. Nothing even comes close to what I have seen at Redfern. I have seven pages of incidents of police just walking in front of the railway station and the next minute they have 20 people throwing bricks and bottles at them.

CHAIR: These are the incidents that Committee members and many of the media have seen—the ones in your submission.

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes, that is right.

CHAIR: Mr Pritchard was reported in the media this morning as identifying the other hot spots in the State. Are the incidents of violence against police you are talking about similar?

Mr HUXTABLE: I would be interested to see any submission from police at any other police station that details incidents that come anywhere near these. I have seen some figures for the inner metropolitan region, but I do not have the document here now. The hurt-on-duty figure for the inner metropolitan area averages 62 and at Redfern it is 110—almost twice the average. Mick McGowan reported a very severe injury at Ashfield, but he suffered it at Redfern. A number of the injuries reported through the chain of command at City Central, Surry Hills, Newtown and Mascot would have been suffered in and around the Block.

CHAIR: But they may be reported elsewhere.

Mr HUXTABLE: You go through your normal chain of command, whatever police station you are attached to. There are extreme levels of violence. We talked about the incident prior to the riot when two police officers had their guns stolen. These are people who are prepared to mob and attack police, steal their guns and throw bricks at people's heads. People say, "We were bricked." It is a phrase that rolls out. How someone has not been killed I do not know. This is not in retaliation or to resist arrest. Of course, should someone try to resist arrest, the matter gets worse; you get 30 or 40 people set upon you. You have no option but literally to run for your life.

CHAIR: When we spoke to Commander Smith about this problem he told us about the injury review panel that takes place each month. Can you tell us whether those panels are adequate and whether they achieve anything?

Mr HUXTABLE: I cannot speak for him, but I think he is talking about our occupational health and safety meetings at which we review injury reports. Policing is a dangerous profession and in Redfern it is especially dangerous. If people commit violent offences and you have to arrest them they get violent. I really do not know what major steps we can take to prevent that.

Mr CHILVERS: I want to comment in relation to the issue of violence against police, which is reaching disturbing levels across the State. I certainly agree with Mr Huxtable and Mr Reitano about the significant levels of violence against police at Redfern. However, as we said earlier, they are also occurring across the State. Admittedly these are not official police documents, but from our research among members there have been 650 incidents of assault against police in the past three months.

CHAIR: That is across the whole State.

Mr CHILVERS: There are 125 incidents of riot and affray, where there have been potentially serious, dangerous situations for our members. Those incidents include an incident at Kempsey in which four police officers were threatened by 15 people carrying baseball bats and iron bars. In Dubbo, a public notice was put out by the command there—and I am reading from the document—"seeking assistance and support from members of the community in identifying people committing crimes against the community. These crimes include stealing and burning motor

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vehicles." My understanding is that people are dragging motor vehicles out of driveways and setting them alight in the street.

The document continues: "... driving stolen motor vehicles at dangerous speeds through your streets, selling and using drugs in your neighbourhood, breaking into your neighbours' homes, and damaging police cars that come into your community when police are called in to assist citizens when these crimes are occurring." The command makes the very valid point: "These problems are not just police problems, they are the problems of the entire community. They are your problems too." These are incidents of violence against police that are reaching disturbing levels across the State. They are certainly exhibited very openly and publicly in Redfern, but they are serious problems facing the whole community, and it is something that requires a full community response.

CHAIR: On the last occasion, in relation to the segment on violence we asked whether in your view the New South Wales Police Force is doing enough to prevent and minimise the harm and violence against police. If you do not think it is, what do you think needs to be done?

Mr HUXTABLE: One of the issues is a permanent OSG—qualified operational police circulating the metropolitan area, trained to deal with violent incidents, limiting the violence directed against police. One of the other recommendations we made was adequate reporting of violent incidents. Greg touched on that. It is difficult to get any definitive figure, because there is no way of capturing this data. We need a system on the COP system which records violence against police. Under the present system, if someone throws a brick and smashes your police car, it is malicious damage. If someone throws a bottle or something near you, which happens often at the Block, it is a form of intimidation; we record it as some form of thrown missile. These are all acts of violence and intimidation against police. We need them under one distinct heading, so that you can record all those different levels, from calling you offensive names right down to serious assault on police, so that we can readily capture this data and produce it.

CHAIR: We would need to separate offensive name-calling from the violence we are talking about—

Mr HUXTABLE: All under the one heading, but different levels of seriousness.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Mr Huxtable, I understand from evidence previously given that you are a member of the Redfern Local Area Command management team.

Mr HUXTABLE: That is right.

The Hon. IAN WEST: In that capacity, you meet once every month or six weeks with the other members of the team?

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes.

The Hon. IAN WEST: You have been doing that for the last 12 months?

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes.

The Hon. IAN WEST: In those meetings you have been raising all the issues you have raised here today?

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Those particular issues have been documented in the minutes and distributed throughout the command?

Mr HUXTABLE: I would assume so, yes.

The Hon. IAN WEST: You have not seen them?

Mr HUXTABLE: I have seen the minutes, yes.

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The Hon. IAN WEST: I understand the duty officers convey those messages from the management to meetings through the command.

Mr HUXTABLE: Depending on what specific information you are talking about. Depending on what the information is. There might be some information that is to stay within the bounds of the management team.

The Hon. IAN WEST: But information relating to education and training, and police strategies for the command, are related to the command out of the meetings you have as part of the management team?

Mr HUXTABLE: That is correct.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I read in your submission you feel that Aboriginal police officers would be an extremely good thing at Redfern. Can you give us any indication as to the obstacles in achieving that objective?

Mr HUXTABLE: I am not sure how many Aboriginal police there are in the Police Service. In my time, we have had two Aboriginal police officers there, and both have been harassed and vilified and hounded out of the area. Although, one of them was well overdue to be transferred out because he had done a fair amount of time. Notwithstanding that, he had been subjected to a great deal of offensive graffiti at the Block, and he had suffered death threats. The second person whom I think you should be aware of also suffered death threats, vilification and malicious complaints about his activities. So really, it is as uncomfortable a situation as I could imagine.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Are any of those issues talked about at all on the team training days?

Mr HUXTABLE: What issues are you talking about specifically?

The Hon. IAN WEST: The issues you have just raised, about the Aboriginal officers and about the management meetings you have every six to eight weeks.

Mr HUXTABLE: You just said "team training days". I do not have much say in to the content of the team training days.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Who does?

Mr HUXTABLE: The education officers.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Who are the education officers at the station?

Mr HUXTABLE: I think Mr Smith answered that question: Sergeant Trudy Rowell and Constable Huxtable.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Constable Huxtable? Is that in relation to you?

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Madam Chair, how is this relevant?

The Hon. IAN WEST: The command, in its discussions, has been talking with Tranby College and St Vincent's Church at Redfern?

Mr HUXTABLE: So I understand.

The Hon. IAN WEST: About discussing cultural awareness and those sorts of issues?

Mr HUXTABLE: I understand they have.

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The Hon. IAN WEST: I understand from your submission that that is an area that you have some sensitivity to, and you are wanting to help with—

Mr HUXTABLE: Can you directly specifically to the part of the submission that you are talking about?

The Hon. IAN WEST: The part that goes to the issue of training in cultural awareness and the issues related to trying to assist in getting more Aboriginal police officers into the force.

Mr HUXTABLE: You are talking about my submission. What exact part of my submission are you talking about, so I can refer to it?

The Hon. IAN WEST: That you are supportive of those issues.

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes, I am.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Can you comment on the training that police officers receive in cultural awareness of Aboriginal issues?

Mr HUXTABLE: They have regular cultural awareness training days. We have two Aboriginal community liaison officers [ACLOs] who speak with recruits when they first arrive. Over and above that, I understand that the education officers have gone exterior to the standard police response and sought education, as it were, to areas such as Tranby College.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Some of these submissions to the inquiry have alleged that some police officers working at Redfern have displayed racist attitudes towards Aboriginal people in the Redfern area. Are you aware of any police displaying those sorts of attitudes?

Mr HUXTABLE: No, they do not.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Can you advise the Committee as to what the Police Association does in terms of discouraging that type of behaviour?

Mr HUXTABLE: I do not know that it is the Police Association's role. The Police Association is there to serve its members.

Mr CHILVERS: If I may comment on that. I agree with Mr Huxtable. It is the role of the employer to undertake training and to discourage those sorts of attitudes, and we certainly support the employer in its efforts to do that. However, we have had a long history of lobbying the organisation in terms of targeted recruitment to get the organisation to better reflect the community it serves. Indeed, some time ago we were very supportive of bridging programs for Aboriginal recruits, for example, to bring them up to the standards of education required for entry into the Police Academy. We have been very supportive of affirmative action.

Going back more than 10 years ago, when David Landa was the Ombudsman, he had an intensive inquiry into allegations of racism in the Police Service, and we took a very active role in that. So we have been extremely supportive of removing any element of racism from the organisation and making the organisation far more reflective of the community it serves. However, it is not always easy to achieve that. As Mr Huxtable has already pointed out, in many of the communities that we are attempting to target in terms of recruitment, it is very difficult to get people from those communities because policing is not seen as a prestigious role, particularly in many communities from overseas countries where policing agencies are seen as agents of a repressive government. These are very complex areas.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Has the document entitled "Aboriginal Strategic Direction 2003-06" from NSW Police been distributed in Redfern?

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes.

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The Hon. IAN WEST: And the command staff are familiar with the contents of that document?

Mr HUXTABLE: I would say they would be. I cannot speak on behalf of everyone in the command.

CHAIR: With regard to the two officers whom you said had been harassed, are they police officers or Aboriginal community liaison officers?

Mr HUXTABLE: Sworn police officers.

CHAIR: You were not talking about the ACLOs?

Mr HUXTABLE: No, I was not.

CHAIR: With regard to the death threats, what sort of action has been taken by police on that matter?

Mr HUXTABLE: They had to be removed from the threat.

CHAIR: They were removed by the command?

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes. There are now no Aboriginal police officers at Redfern.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I would like to congratulate the police on the extra work they are doing in terms of interaction with young people, taking them to Nippers, camps, and things such as that. Yesterday DOCS officers spoke to us, and we raised with them Mr Huxtable's concerns about the relationship between DOCS and the police. The DOCS officers said that the police did not really understand the role of DOCS. They said that there was a good relationship between DOCS and the police. What do you say about that?

Mr HUXTABLE: I think we have a good relationship with the actual caseworkers, the DOCS workers on the street. If you look at the history of young people—not just Aboriginal people, but people of all races—they have a path that leads from delinquency up to serious crime. You will see that DOCS has either interjected there or been notified along that path, yet DOCS has failed continually to divert that person away from a life of crime, so DOCS is failing.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: You also said that there was no communication mechanism, as there should be, through interagency guidelines and communication back to the police about any notifications you have made. Is that your experience?

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes, that is my experience. DOCS has a phone number that the police can ring. Someone put a picture up on the wall that says "DOCS: Ring this number". Then some police officer graffitied under it, saying, "And wait three hours". It is just that DOCS is not readily accessible—

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It has an average four-minute waiting time.

Mr HUXTABLE: Really? What format? Do they turn the music on, or what? Or do they convert it to another call? I do not know. But that is the reality, especially after close of business. I remember that when I first arrived at Redfern, a woman with two young kids arrived. She had been the victim of domestic violence. We had to get her out of the house. We sat there for three hours ringing around as many phone numbers as we could. It got to the stage where we had to pull out the phone book to try to get her accommodation. In the end, we managed to speak to one of her distant relatives, from I think in Sutherland, to put her up for the night. We then had to put her in the police car and drive her to Sutherland. There were just no support agencies for us to refer her to—or none that we were made aware of. That is a common problem. We now have the Redfern-Waterloo project street team, who are good people trying their hardest, but even they closed down. The police are the only agency there. We have people ringing up because the electricity has been turned off. There is nowhere else for them to turn, but to the police. We shoulder all that burden.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: In your view there is a lack of appropriate services and a lack of communication between those services and the police?

Mr HUXTABLE: They are not readily accessible, nothing that I have seen anyway. If you believe that a child was at risk and took them into your custody, for want of a better word, which has happened on a number of times, it takes hours. We have to entertain them at the police station, which is really inappropriate. But then there is no other option.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Can you describe some of the conditions that you see children living in on the Block that you have referred to DOCS but have not heard anything more from them?

Mr HUXTABLE: The perfect example is the case study I have put in my submission, which has been deleted from the published version. If I am allowed to read that, I think that is—

CHAIR: What you need to do is talk about it in such a way that the identity of the family is not clear. The difficulty is that submissions like yours dealt with a small number of families, and there are a lot of people who can fairly readily work out who they are. By all means, talk generally about them. That has been a problem.

Mr HUXTABLE: I will talk about a typical 2.00 a.m. I am working night shift tonight and I will go down to the Block and there will be kids six, seven, and eight years old walking the streets at 2.00 a.m. with no shoes and syringes strewn about. Head lice are a huge problem. These people are at risk. There are incidents that I talk about of seven-year-olds being run over playing on main roads unsupervised, 13- and 14-year-old people who are heroin addicted, 13-year-old girls who have had three or four abortions, absolutely outrageous stuff. I also refer to an incident of a young child in regional New South Wales. Some of these people have multiple referrals to DOCS, and as I said in that submission one has had 28 referrals. It probably should have been 48, but the prevailing attitude is that if 28 have not kick-started anyone, what is the use of putting in number 29 or 30?

That is the reality of the situation. I will go down the Block today and there will be 10-year-old kids come up and see me. They will talk to me, they will chat and they might be a bit cheeky. That is all fine. In three or four years time those people will be affected by heroin. They will hate the world. They will hate police. They will take part in riots against police. There are so many agencies who have been notified about it. There are so many welfare agencies who are fully aware of it, yet that person, those kids will still progress into that life, a life of heroin addiction, a life of continual poverty, of pain, of unemployment. We are really letting down those people.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: DOCS also said it has plans in the distant future for an influx of resources and funding, but nothing has happened since the riot. Nothing happened in terms of extra resources, is that your understanding?

Mr HUXTABLE: For DOCS?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Yes.

Mr HUXTABLE: I cannot really comment. I do not know.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Did any of you warn anybody about what was likely to happen? Did you say to anyone in the lead-up to that that you had concerns that things might boil over?

Mr HUXTABLE: We have had situations where robbery offences, drug offences were really getting out of hand. We then got some new commanders at Redfern. We thought, "This is ridiculous. We need to really start doing something about this. We need to make the streets safe. We need to try to prevent these young kids from becoming addicted to heroin." So we went in and did enforcements. As a result of that the people are dealing in heroin. The people who make their living this way, they became upset so the stress levels rose. There was more violence against police. We had a riot in May of last year where four police were injured. One was admitted to hospital—hit in the head with a

brick. That is when we said that we fear that violence is escalating and we need extra resources. We got the extra eight police, but nothing more. That is when we first called for a full-time operational support group, but it was not forthcoming. I will be quite honest, even I did not expect anything of the enormity of what happened at Redfern on 15 February. However, I am not surprised that something did happen.

Mr CHILVERS: Can I comment, also, on behalf of the association specifically in terms of warnings on Redfern—probably not. As I said before, in many instances the sorts of things that police are being exposed to in Redfern are being experienced by police in many of the hot spots throughout the State on a regular basis. But certainly what has happened, and hopefully some good can come out of this, is that Redfern has shown quite clearly the sorts of problems that police are facing in various areas.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You are saying that you were unaware that the riot was going to occur? You did not have intelligence? There was nothing abnormal before the riot?

Mr HUXTABLE: People have been critical. They said, "Hold on. These situations happen. There was the death of a young child, they were youths throwing bricks and bottles. Surely, you should have seen something is happening." The thing is, these are weekly events. I excluded the death of them poor young TJ Hickey. But people throwing bricks and bottles at the railway station at commuters, at passing cars, at police is standard fare at Redfern. But there were a number of instances, I think Mr Reitano can touch on that, that are exterior to what has been the common thread.

Mr REITANO: There were two instances in particular in the lead-up to the riot, in that week before the riot that really stirred things up down at the Block. The first was the incident where a constable had his gun removed when he tried to arrest a person down there. He had 12 to 15 people who were hostile and he actually lost possession of his gun. That was the first thing. That stirred things up. On the Thursday before the riot there was the second matter that happened that I think really stirred things up as well. It relates to a complaint of sexual assault by a person, and that complaint was levelled against one of the major drug dealers from the Block. There were allegations that arose out of that incident that the drug dealers down the Block were supplying heroin to young ladies.

In turn the young ladies were performing sexual acts that were recorded on video. These sexual assault matters were thoroughly investigated by the police. A major drug dealer was arrested and charged. As I understand it, there were tapes that were seized. I do not know what is on those tapes. But these sorts of matters have been alluded to by other members of the community at around the same time. On the night of the riot, for instance, we have video footage of Mr Monroe and two Aboriginal ladies who were speaking to him and at one point—

CHAIR: Can we be careful with names? We do not know what the other inquiries are focusing on, but please be careful with names.

Mr REITANO: I will leave his name out of it. There was an Aboriginal male who was very aggressive. There were two females who tried to calm the situation down. One of those females—this is on video—actually refers to "kids down there taking drugs, raping their own kind." That was a big issue at the time. Even on the night of the riot it was an issue. There have been other community members who have also spoken about those sexual assaults, so from my point of view they were the two things that stirred it up before the riot. There are things that I would like to say about the sexual assaults, but I do not want to say it in public, obviously.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: How old were the girls, or the young women?

Mr REITANO: The victim that we spoke to I think is in her early 20s. She is a little bit older, but there were allegations from young right through. One of the main drug dealers who was charged, the way it was stirred up is that he has quite a bit of respect from a number of people down there. He provides employment in one way for them because they do the running for him. By having him charged that really stirred it up.

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The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: He was seen as a kind of a good guide and you are bad guys for arresting him after he did the rape, is that the story?

Mr REITANO: Exactly, yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: And you think that contributed, as well as the death of TJ?

Mr REITANO: No doubt in my mind, yes. I would say that TJ polarised, but these other incidents definitely stirred it up.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you think that when the riot happened it was well handled?

Mr REITANO: I think it could have been handled better.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is the Police Association's view generally that it was adequately handled, or is the Police Association not taking a position?

Mr CHILVERS: I might just add that that has been dealt with by the commanders at the time, and they have admitted that there were problems with management. I would hope out of this inquiry and a number of other ways that they are looking at it now that things will be improved.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Did the association take any part in comments on the management of the riot at the time?

Mr CHILVERS: We have made no comment as to the management because the reports are still coming in on it.

Mr HUXTABLE: Could I just add to that that the rank and file police from Redfern who were there at the riot support the actions of Denis Smith and the duty officers. I know that those individuals I have just mentioned have come under criticism, but the actual police who were there on the night, by and large, I know that not all do, but most and, in fact, we even passed a motion of support for Denis Smith and the duty officers.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So you think that it was reasonably well managed from the point of view of the people there, the officers on the job?

Mr HUXTABLE: With the resources they had, with the training they had I think they did as best as they can under the conditions.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you think the sourcing and training were adequate?

Mr HUXTABLE: No, I do not.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: They did the best with what they had, but they did not have enough?

Mr HUXTABLE: That is right.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In terms of resources, is that personnel resources?

Mr HUXTABLE: Resources, the timely response of suitably qualified operational police and access to resources, yes.

Mr CHILVERS: That is reflected in what we were talking about earlier.

CHAIR: We spoke quite a bit about resources earlier.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You said in your submission that you thought drugs were a big part of the problem in Redfern?

Mr HUXTABLE: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you think hard drugs should be decriminalised?

Mr HUXTABLE: Do I think, personally?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Yes.

Mr HUXTABLE: No. That has different heads. Are we talking about Government prescribing heroin or are we talking about heroin dealers just left unabated to peddle their drugs? In my view the medical profession has been able to take full control of the drug issue overriding the police and social issues. I think harm minimisation has failed. I have some figures, and I can source all these figures. In 2002 there were 195 diagnosed AIDS cases. We talk about the problem with harm minimisation, there will be this epidemic of AIDS if we do not continue it. In 2001 there were 16,000 new cases of hepatitis C, 91 per cent from intravenous drug users. That means there are a hell of a lot of people out there not using clean syringes. Yet for AIDS, only seven of the 195 were put down as intravenous drug users—3.8 per cent. The evidence does not support the fact that harm minimisation, if we get rid of harm minimisation there will be an epidemic of AIDS. The figures just do not back that up.

Fatal overdoses, since harm minimisation came in, which I have been told is roughly 1985, fatal overdoses have increased 300 per cent. I would have hoped that in concert with the heroin drought through various issues that have happened in Asia, if we had attacked that through law enforcement we may have been able to put a big dent in the trade. But, as I said, I do not believe that harm minimisation has worked. I disagree with that philosophy. As I said, there are 16,000 newly diagnosed hep C cases in 2001. Rather than harm minimisation we should be looking at harm prevention. We should not allow heroin addiction to be an option. We say to these young people, "Don't take heroin. It's evil. It's a dead-end street. It's a scourge. It's addictive. But if you are addicted, that's fine. Here's a clean needle. Here's an airconditioned place where you can shoot up your drugs." There is a conflict there. We say to the young kids at the Block "Don't take heroin. Look at how bad it is." But then we park a needle van literally at their front door.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But are you saying that dirty needles will lessen overdoses?

Mr HUXTABLE: Sorry?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You cited overdoses as failure of harm minimisation. Surely you are not saying that dirty needles will lessen overdoses?

Mr HUXTABLE: No, I am not. I am just quoting figures in relation to the period that harm minimisation has been in practice. If we are talking about harm minimisation, surely if it is working legal overdoses should be on the decrease, not going from 247 in 1985 to 725 in the year 2000.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Unless you think that not having a needle means you will not shoot up rather than use a dirty one. The availability of fits should not affect the overdoses rate. The availability of heroin is what affects the overdose rate, surely?

Mr HUXTABLE: Quite possibly, but you cannot push fatal overdoses exterior to the whole harm minimisation debate; that is a part of it. If we are talking about reducing harm we are talking about reducing fatal overdoses surely?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Sure. So you would argue that you are a prohibitionist but you want more resources to enforce that prohibition?

Mr HUXTABLE: I think it is worthy of a fight. What is the alternative? Just to say to people, "If you want to be a drug addict for the rest of your life that's fine. If you want to walk around doped up to the eyeballs bouncing off the walls that's fine. Not only is it fine but we will provide you with some financial assistance", is that what we are saying? My young son turns one on Saturday, I do not want him growing up in a world where we say heroin addiction is an option. We have never really battled it. They talk about the war on drugs, we have never rolled out the artillery. And now with the drought from heroin it would have been the perfect time to combat it in that way. But that is my personal view.

CHAIR: In the Police Association's submission there is a suggestion that there is a problem with the co-ordination, or the lack of it, of social activities conducted by community groups, that there are clashes and the police feel that all these activities are too much. Can you tell us a bit more about that and tell us how these things might be better co-ordinated?

Mr CHILVERS: This was a point that was raised by a number of members when we spoke to them at Redfern and I think it is really a point of fine tuning, but while they thought that the programs were valuable and assisted in terms of developing relationships between the police and the community, that they could indeed be better co-ordinated to get maximum effect out of it so that events and activities did not clash with each other, or double up in some circumstances. I do not think it is a major point but it was a point that was raised by the members at Redfern.

CHAIR: I am not sure what kinds of activities we are talking about. We have also got a question, for instance, about the programs run by the police with young people in the area and how successful they are, although you may want to tell us more about those. Are the mentoring and the involvement of sporting activities the kinds of things you are talking about that are relatively small-scale?

Mr CHILVERS: Indeed, but significant in terms of developing relationships with the community, and given that the areas of success in fighting crime throughout the State have occurred where there has been strong community support for police and working with them. But Paul and Frank may be able to comment better on actual activities.

Mr HUXTABLE: A few years ago there was a movement, called a Superlac, where they wanted to combine Redfern, Mascot and Maroubra police stations into one big police station at Mascot. The members of the Redfern branch and all branches opposed that very strongly. Here we had a brand new state-of-the-art police station at Mascot that we fought hard and won to remain in the squalid hovel of Redfern police station. Why? Because we did not think that we could effectively police that community, Redfern/Waterloo, from Mascot. So that is just an indication of the devotion and the commitment that the police have to the community itself.

We talk about all the activities that police undertake with the youth; there are people saying—and it came up again with the unfortunate death of TJ—that young people are scared of the police. So we have actively gone out and formed contacts with these young people. Quite frankly, if we do not do anything for these young kids nothing gets done because there is a distinct lack of support for these people to try and show them that there is an alternative to growing up not going to school, taking drugs, stealing things, your mum getting belted by your father, that is not the sole course of your life; showing these people, expanding, that police are not evil, that police do have a commitment to them, that police do have a commitment to the community. So we really do have a strong commitment to the people down at the Block.

CHAIR: Referring to question 7, some of our submissions have suggested that some individual police do not have a good understanding of welfare practices and that sometimes, therefore, there is a lack of reference of families to various other agencies. Of course numerous other points have been made, including the comments you made about the police being one of the few agencies available 24 hours a day, but can you comment on the general problem of co-ordination, or lack of it, between the large number of both government and non-government agencies in the area?

Mr HUXTABLE: If you talk about individual police officers not having an understanding of the welfare practices, to me that is a failing of the welfare agencies. It should not be that the police should be out there touting for welfare agencies. I know where the problems are, why not go to the

problem? Why aren't they getting in the face of these people who need help, rather than sitting back and waiting for the police to act as some sort of agent for them?

Mr CHILVERS: In fact, there are strict obligations in terms of reporting, particularly to the Department of Community Services [DOCS], placed on police, and all police know their obligations there; they are checked and double-checked and I think Mr Shepherd yesterday indicated that the reporting procedures were excellent and, indeed, the problem was not in terms of the police not understanding their reporting obligations, the problem was what happened with the reports when they were made. That is where the problem lies.

CHAIR: Do you have a more general comment about the co-ordination, or the lack of co-ordination, which some submissions have suggested exists between government and non-government agencies in the area?

Mr HUXTABLE: I go back to the example I provided in relation to that young woman and her two young kids who sat in the foyer at Redfern police station for three hours whilst we rang around trying to get her a bed for the night. I have heard different people say there are 80 different welfare agencies at Redfern, or 100, and I have heard someone else say 200. I think it was in the evidence here of Mr Coe who talked about the need for a 24-hour Aboriginal welfare agency. I think that is something that we really have to pursue because after hours it is the police or it is no-one. If these welfare agencies are duplicating the service they provide, if we have got 100 welfare agencies working 9 to 5 and zero working 5 to 9 the next morning, that is something that obviously has to be remedied.

Mr REITANO: In my submission I made reference to a particular case involving a 13-year-old. I just want to let you know that last year this particular person was arrested repeatedly, nine times over a period of 16 weeks, I think it was, and each time he was given bail and released back out into the confines of the Block. We tried, with the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers [ACLOs], to find some sort of program where we could direct him to get him out of Redfern because he is 13, using heroin, and committing five robberies a day to support his habit. We tried everything that we could and there just was not anything there that could adequately service this young kid. We ended up becoming so frustrated that we went to an outside agency, to Father Chris Riley's program, to see if they could help.

They actually came in and did what they could. They have a wilderness program that they were running, which for this young person it probably would have been ideal if we could have got him on that program. But part of the problem was that I think there was a certain amount of jealousy between the government agencies and the non-government agencies and we just could not get anything done for this kid. It became that bad, the fact that every time he was arrested and charged he would be released by the court straight out into the same sort of environment, the only way we were able to get action for this kid was someone leaked information about him to a radio program and as soon as that happened the bells rang and all of a sudden we were able to get something done. That was how bad things were during last year.

CHAIR: So we certainly need to look at, as I think almost everyone has said, the relationship between the number of agencies, the government and non-government, and how they work together?

Mr REITANO: Yes.

CHAIR: Our last question is what would you like to see come out of this inquiry? I do not know whether all four of you have your own individual wish list?

Mr PRITCHARD: We need better co-ordination of government services and community groups at Redfern and across the State. We need the introduction of a permanent 24/7 operational support group [OSG] to attend similar incidents, both in the metropolitan area and throughout the State, and OSG training also given to people in distant communities where maybe the permanent group could not attend. We need to reduce the injuries to police by giving them a safer work environment and decent facilities and equipment. We need to use the considerable community support, which the police have at the moment, to attack crime in Redfern and the other identified areas throughout the State.

Mr HUXTABLE: I think we need to identify the truth, not to downplay issues to say, "Well, it is not really that bad". It is that bad, it is horrendous. People at Redfern and Waterloo, especially those who live around the Chippendale area, feel abandoned; they feel deserted by the support agencies. Police are subjected to extreme levels of violence; we need to recognise that. I was down the Block yesterday and there was a bottle thrown at police at 5 p.m. yesterday afternoon—totally unprovoked. We need the support of the judiciary. We need to let people know that it is not okay to assault police. When I first joined the job there was an assault police charge up against the local magistrate and he sat there and said, "How dare you assault a police officer who is simply executing his duty". That seems to have gone by the by. We are now seeing people getting minor fines for assaulting police, that they do not pay, and so it is just business as usual; there is absolutely no deterrent. I think the police, not just at Redfern, all over that State, deserve that protection, because it is ultimately the police who are protecting the community.

Mr REITANO: There is a lot more that Paul and I would like to say but obviously we do not have the time, you do not have the time, but there are plenty of other issues to be spoken about. In a nutshell, what I would like to see come out of the inquiry is, as far as resources go, Redfern desperately needs a robbery unit; we need a properly resourced drug unit; Operation Concertina needs to be made full-time. The other thing that we need is, as has been spoken about earlier, a permanent OSG; we need to reduce the risk of injury for front-line police. The list that Paul and I have provided you of the violent attacks upon our police officers, I would like to see that list made public. I would like the public to know the sorts of things that have been happening to our police. I have a vision for the young children of Redfern that they can grow up and overcome all the difficulties that they have. I would like to see a lot of improvements for Redfern come from this inquiry.

Mr CHILVERS: I endorse everything that has been said. The only thing I would like to see is that the Committee recognise very clearly that the issues that have been identified today are not simply policing issues.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Are you able to table your survey of all of those events?

Mr CHILVERS: These are not public documents at this stage. As I said, they are not official police documents so they cannot be relied on. They are, to a certain degree, anecdotal and have come from our members.

Mr HUXTABLE: There is one question we did not really get to, about the safe injecting clinic.

CHAIR: That is not actually before us, but I know it has been discussed.

Mr HUXTABLE: Let me tell you that the Redfern branch vehemently oppose any safe injecting clinic in or anywhere around Redfern.

CHAIR: In relation to your comment, Mr Reitano, as you probably know, we have the task of producing an interim report in July and the final report in November. Obviously, we have had the oral evidence, we have had a lot of written submissions, which are still coming in, there is our own staff research, and then we will have to think, having done our interim report, what kind of process of further evidence gathering we do afterwards. So there will be many more opportunities for people to talk to us. Thank you all for coming.

(The witnesses withdrew)

RUSSELL CHARLES TAYLOR, Chief Executive Officer, New South Wales Aboriginal Housing Office, 21 Wentworth Street, Parramatta, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Did you receive the questions that we prepared for you?

Mr TAYLOR: I did, thank you.

CHAIR: Do you want to make an opening statement?

Mr TAYLOR: I thought that, rather than making a formal opening statement, I would answer question No. 1, which will put the issue into context and indicate what is the role of the Aboriginal Housing Office.

CHAIR: What is the role of the Aboriginal Housing Office?

Mr TAYLOR: The Aboriginal Housing Office was established under the New South Wales Aboriginal Housing Act 1998, so it is an organisation that is a little more than five years old. It is the agency that is given the prime responsibility for addressing the housing needs of indigenous people in New South Wales. The model has some advantages over previous models, in that it brings together the pooled funding arrangements of Commonwealth and State governments, and we believe it reduces the duplication and overlaps that were previously evident in housing programs in this State prior to the establishment of the office. It is very much predicated on self-determining principles.

The governance of the Aboriginal Housing Office is certainly in the hands of Aboriginal people, but we are responsible to the Minister. The governance model incorporates a board and there is total Aboriginal membership of that board. Senior managers of the Aboriginal Housing Office and I are also Aboriginal. In more practical terms, the role and responsibility of the Aboriginal Housing Office is to address housing needs through the building and purchasing of housing for Aboriginal people, repairs and maintenance of houses, in particular, where they are owned by community housing providers, and to provide sector support and advice to the Aboriginal housing sector. We do that in a number of ways.

Aboriginal Housing Office programs are developed and delivered very much on a planned approach. We have a three-pronged strategic planning process that involves not just the board, the Minister and senior staff; it also involves six regional Aboriginal housing committees, all of which are representatives from communities and they have a strong influence on what the program looks like and how it is developed and delivered. We are very much needs based in our planning approach. I make the point that, for the purpose of the meeting this morning, we have a statewide responsibility. Sydney is an important jurisdiction for the Aboriginal Housing Office, and Redfern is an important component of that. As I said, we do have statewide responsibilities.

I make the point that the success or effectiveness of the Aboriginal Housing Office relies on a partnership with community housing providers. The sectors are basically dissected into two parts—one being the tenancies and housing stock that are owned by the Aboriginal Housing Office and the tenancies and housing stock that are managed by the Department of Housing. That represents roughly about 4,000 houses. The other component of the sector is a similar amount of houses—about 4,000 or more houses—that are currently in community ownership and managed by community housing providers. One of those, which no doubt we will be talking about this morning, is the Aboriginal Housing Company, which is based at Redfern.

CHAIR: That tells us quite a bit in general. As you know, we have a lot of questions about the organisation's specific role in the Redfern and Waterloo area. You mentioned the way in which you have brought together Commonwealth and State funding. Has the disbanding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC] had any impact on your funding and administrative arrangements?

Mr TAYLOR: Under the current pooled funding arrangements approximately \$30 million comes from the Commonwealth. Of that \$30 million, \$12 million is sourced from ATSIC's former

Community Housing and Infrastructure Program. With the disbanding of ATSIC I am not able to give the Committee any certainty in relation to any answers that I might provide this morning because there is uncertainty about what will happen post-ATSIC. The Community Housing and Infrastructure Program will be transferred to the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. The Aboriginal Housing Office has already begun negotiations and it has initiated some preliminary discussions with the Department of Family and Community Services over the future of the ATSIC component of our funding. We will pursue those negotiations.

CHAIR: I turn now to questions about Aboriginal housing in Redfern and Waterloo. Later we will ask a series of questions about the Aboriginal Housing Company. Focusing on Redfern and Waterloo, what are the main issues in those areas? What are the biggest issues of concern for Aboriginal people in those areas?

Mr TAYLOR: The issues are common throughout New South Wales. So my comments go to concerns about Redfern and Waterloo specifically and more broadly across the State. Certainly one of the concerns of the Redfern and Waterloo community would be the issue of unmet need. What does the future hold with regard to the ability of the Aboriginal Housing Office and community housing providers such as the Aboriginal Housing Company? What is our capacity to meet unmet need? Our figures show that, for instance, in Redfern we have 52 applicants on our waiting list. I think you have already heard evidence from the Aboriginal Housing Company that it has strong waiting lists. I am sure that that is also the case with other providers in the area, including the Sydney Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council.

That issue, which is a challenge, is certainly one of concern. We are operating in an environment where costs are rising and where the demand for housing services is also increasing dramatically. I will not go to any great detail about the demographics of the Aboriginal population. Suffice to say that it is a growing population. It is a much younger population than mainstream, which itself provides a challenge for policymakers, not just in the housing area but also in all services of government. Certainly those issues will be acute in the context of Sydney and in the context of Redfern and Waterloo. So the unmet need is a huge issue. By way of demographics, the indigenous population in New South Wales is about 120,000.

The Sydney component of that is about 38,000 at the moment but it has been predicted that by 2010 the Aboriginal population of Sydney will be just under 50,000 people. So the need is growing exponentially. That is probably the major challenge and the major question. There are others, including the quality of housing and the adequacy and standard of management of those houses. The issue that kicks in across the State, but that is particularly acute in Sydney, is one of affordability from both the perspective of those who are renting and those who aspire to purchase their own homes. In Sydney overcrowding is an issue, as is the related issue of homelessness. That would be my summary of issues confronting the Aboriginal community and Aboriginal housing providers.

CHAIR: Most of the things that you have listed would apply to anyone suffering a housing difficulty. Do you have any specific indigenous issues relating to housing, in particular, in the Redfern and Waterloo area?

Mr TAYLOR: They are issues that confront wider society, but they are particularly acute, given the very low socioeconomic status of the indigenous population, generally coupled with poor health, poor education and poor employment opportunities. The picture is not a particularly positive one. I guess my take on that, Madam Chair, would be that they are common issues certainly, but they are particularly serious and particularly of critical importance to the indigenous community.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I am interested in the standards of housing. The Government submission says that of the two houses that the Aboriginal Housing Office [AHO] owns in Redfern, one is up to standard, and of the 11 dwellings that you own in Waterloo, 10 are up to standard. How long have those other houses not been up to standard and what are you doing about bringing them up to standard? What do you consider to be standard?

Mr TAYLOR: I will take that question on notice. We can certainly provide the Committee with details of our housing standards. I do not have those with me this morning. In terms of the specific houses that you refer to, both the Redfern properties have now been upgraded. The

outstanding property in Waterloo still to be upgraded is on the current, that is the 2004-05 program for upgrading. Just for interest, the funding for the upgrading of the Redfern properties totalled \$44,000 and the expenditure of the Waterloo properties is approximately \$134,000 to date. But the outstanding property certainly will be updated in the coming program year. In answer to your question about how long have they been substandard, I can only take you back to when the Aboriginal Housing Office came into being in 1998; certainly, they would have been below standard at that time. It is difficult for me to assume the history prior to that, but it may be that they could have been substandard for some considerable time.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: We have heard evidence from a number of people about the need for short-term accommodation—a variety of accommodation and obviously emergency accommodation. Do you have available short-term and temporary accommodation?

Mr TAYLOR: No, at the moment we do not fund any housing provided for short-term accommodation—certainly, not in the Redfern-Waterloo area. We do fund three other organisations that do provide this sort of accommodation, although our funding, as I understand it, is for their longer term housing stock. Those organisations are the Mac Silva Aboriginal Corporation, Mudgin-Gal Aboriginal Corporation and the Bideegal Aboriginal Corporation for Housing. I would stress that our funding relationship is for the longer term, for more permanent housing arrangements.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: You would be aware of plans to redevelop the Block. Has your office had involvement with the redevelopment of the Block in the past and in terms of what might happen in the future? This is question 20.

Mr TAYLOR: The AHO has not been very heavily involved in those redevelopment plans. At our invitation the Aboriginal Housing Company gave a presentation to the Sydney Regional Aboriginal Housing Committee—that was in September last year—where they outlined their aspirations and outlined the aspects of the model, but we have not been certainly very closely involved in the assessments of that submission and that model. I understand that certainly the Redfern-Waterloo partnership project is co-ordinating and facilitating the Government's response to those proposals and I understand and I am aware that the Government's submission goes into some detail about the assessments of those. However, I would have to say that at the moment I am not personally aware of the current status of those assessments.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Many years ago I lived in Warrawong and houses were built for Aborigines there and were the same as the Housing Commission ones. They were destroyed and more were built, and the houses in the Block are being destroyed. What involvement of Aboriginal people is needed to make appropriate housing?

Mr TAYLOR: I think the answer to that really goes to the issue of sustainability. I have to say that the housing office, in all of our strategies, in all of our programs and in all of our activities we have an eye to sustainability, that is, sustainability of that housing stock that we are purchasing, constructing and repairing, and sustainability of the organisations, from a community perspective, that have the responsibility to manage and maintain those houses. So from the start of a process that goes to the design of those houses—that is whether they are culturally appropriate and appropriate for the climate and location in which they have been built—that is an issue.

Management practices and asset management plans are a huge issue in the context of both the Aboriginal Housing Office's operations and our relationships with our community providers and it is one of the reasons why we have taken such a strong performance-based funding approach: That we simply do not fund organisations that are not prepared to adopt and maintain appropriate management strategies and practices, which includes asset management and establishing appropriate relationships between the community providers and the tenants of those houses, which goes some way to reducing the amount of tenant damage, goes some way to recognising normal wear and tear and responding to that, and goes some way to planning for longer term maintenance of that housing stock. All I can say is that in all our interactions, policy development and funding arrangements we have an eye on that and we continue to have dialogue with our community providers that seeks to address that issue.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: People who have never had tidy, normal houses—if you want to put it that way—certainly in wider society do not maintain them. Is there any cultural training in terms of norms for these things?

Mr TAYLOR: I think you have identified a gap that we have also identified, and that is that no agency can simply assume that the provision of a house and the introduction of a family to that house means that everything is going to go smoothly. There needs to be some provision for budgeting, for familiarity with appliances, et cetera, and all those living skills that go with successfully and safely occupying a house. We at the Aboriginal Housing Office recognise that we need to do more work on that and we have also discussed those issues with the Department of Housing. I think that whilst we have addressed it indirectly—and in some of the other questions I would mention that we have developed some accredited training for the sector that goes to many of those issues—we recognise that we need to do more to provide tenant training and awareness of their responsibilities in terms of their occupancy of housing stock managed by the AHO itself or by community providers.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You have a relatively small amount of housing stock, is that right?

Mr TAYLOR: The Aboriginal Housing Office itself, our portfolio at the moment is just over 4,000 housing stock, and it is a similar amount to the housing units managed by the community sector.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is the key problem in Aboriginal Housing lack of stock, particularly in the Redfern-Waterloo area?

Mr TAYLOR: It is certainly an issue. My earlier comments go to unmet need.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Could you estimate the number?

Mr TAYLOR: No, I would prefer maybe to take that on notice. I have not seen any recent information that gives us a clear picture on that. We are looking forward to the next community housing infrastructure needs survey that might give us a clearer picture on that.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What order of magnitude would you say it is? Are you down by 100 per cent? Have you twice as many clients as you have stock or are you down 20 per cent? How big is the problem?

Mr TAYLOR: All I can say is that on my understanding the level of unmet need is substantial and I would prefer not to—

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You cannot even put a percentage on it? Is it 20 per cent or 100 per cent? How big are we talking?

Mr TAYLOR: If I could just explain why the picture is less than clear. Together with the community housing sector you could say that our housing stock runs to about 8,000-odd houses. If the average occupancy of that is four people—and I am using that as an example rather than something that is near the truth because overcrowding is a real issue—you are talking about 32,000 people being housed. We know that the Aboriginal population in New South Wales at the moment is at least 120,000, so the gap is being either filled by the private sector or by other public housing, including the Department of Housing, because part of the reason why the level of need that is satisfied and the level of need that is unmet is a bit unclear is that we do not know how many Aboriginal people are housed by the Department of Housing in their mainstream housing stock. I can approximate how many are housed by our public housing stock that is owned by the Aboriginal Housing Office.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You are estimating that as 32,000?

Mr TAYLOR: Just simply on the number of houses that we know that exist and are managed between the community sector and the Aboriginal Housing Office itself. But I am happy to take that question on notice and get you more specific information.

CHAIR: Questions 5 and 6 attempt to come to grips with the number or percentage of Aboriginal people who are catered for by the Department of Housing and other providers in the Redfern-Waterloo area. We actually asked for that area, if you knew what percentage of housing you provided. That might be more easy to answer.

Mr TAYLOR: It does give you some indication, and in response to question 5, which asks: What percentage of housing is provided by your office in comparison to other providers? The answer is that we only have two properties in Redfern and 11 in Waterloo, as was mentioned earlier. To give you some indication of other supply, the Department of Housing in the Redfern-Eveleigh-Darlington area—that is the red area—owns in excess of 4,000 dwellings. The dilemma in answering your question is that I have no idea how many Aboriginal people are housed in those 4,000 dwellings. I would suspect that there would be quite a few, but I really have no accurate information about that.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It does suggest, though, that the amount of attention given to Aboriginals over the mainstream, if the ratio is 12 to 4,000, is not exactly wonderful?

Mr TAYLOR: I could stand corrected here but I think that the Department of Housing housing stock is something in excess of 100,000 houses. Ours is 4,000, so it is 4 per cent.

CHAIR: For the whole State?

Mr TAYLOR: Yes. Once again, though, I am happy to take it on notice and get you as accurate information as I can, but certainly the level of unmet need is substantial.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Certainly, the fact that you can come here at this time after all this without figures does suggest that they have not been assiduously kept.

Mr TAYLOR: No. For instance, the Department of Housing forms do not necessarily—there are no sanctions and no legal impediments for tenants to identify whether or not they are Aboriginal or indigenous people. If they choose to tick a box, they can; if they choose not to, they do not have to. The department has a responsibility to Aboriginal citizens as well as to the mainstream. The Aboriginal Housing Office has a specific and exclusive responsibility to Aboriginal people, but the department shares that responsibility. It is not a matter of records not being kept assiduously; it is a question of whether the data is available from existing information.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If someone identifies as being Aboriginal you would think that would be picked up. If they do not identify as Aboriginal it would not be picked up. If you do not identify as Aboriginal when you go into housing and then choose to be so identified later that is no-one's fault.

Mr TAYLOR: Some people have been long-term tenants of Department of Housing houses. In the past there may not have been provision on the documents to identify as being Aboriginal.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I see what you are saying.

Mr TAYLOR: I assure you that what records we maintain we maintain assiduously, but there is a broader picture in terms of data collection and storage and maintenance of those records.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The Aboriginal people have been studied extensively from a health point of view.

Mr TAYLOR: They certainly have, and in a whole range of other areas.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But it appears that housing has not been part of that study. Is that the conclusion?

Mr TAYLOR: There are regular surveys. We rely on those—as I said earlier, we are looking forward to the next one—to give us a more accurate picture of the state of housing and unmet need.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Turning to question 10 and the homelessness action team support and outreach service, I understand that page 229 of the Government's submission refers to a research project into inner-city Aboriginal homelessness. Can you tell the Committee about the project and its time frame?

Mr TAYLOR: The project comes out of the Partnership Against Homelessness, which is a multi-agency initiative. The Aboriginal Housing Office is taking a lead role on this project. The project will focus on homelessness in the following areas: Redfern, Central Station, Surry Hills, Waterloo, Ultimo, Kings Cross and other outlying areas of the inner city. So it is focusing on homelessness in the inner city. The time frame of the project is six months and it is commencing this month—in June. It is expected to be completed by late November, early December. The research will explore the nature and depth of homelessness. We will also try to evaluate the effectiveness of current services that are targeted towards homeless people, and, importantly, provide some pathways and recommendations as to how people get out of a homelessness situation.

The successful research team is led by Dr Paul Memmott from the University of Queensland, who is a leading researcher in this area. He has done work in other parts of the country, particularly looking at the long-grass issues in Darwin and the Northern Territory. We are looking forward to the information that the project will provide. We feel it is an extremely worthwhile project, which is probably overdue. Nevertheless, I hope that by December we will have some very important, valuable, accurate and up-to-date information about the issues around homelessness and pathways that might provide some positive strategies for ameliorating the problem.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I apologise if you have dealt with some of these questions already. You spoke earlier about the involvement of the AHO in redeveloping the Block. Can you elaborate a little more on that?

Mr TAYLOR: It is true to say that, apart from presentations to the Sydney Regional Aboriginal Housing Committee by the Aboriginal Housing Company—which were initiated at our invitation—the submission and the proposal were presented through the Premier's Department. So our involvement has been fairly fleeting. But we are aware that in terms of assessing the proposal and assessing the Aboriginal Housing Company's capacity to manage that proposal, the Premier's Department has commissioned an audit of the company's financial affairs. I have not seen that report. I saw an earlier version some months ago that needed a lot of work. I am looking forward to that report to show us what strategies are needed to get the Aboriginal Housing Company on the front foot and on track.

There is no doubt that the proposal will need to be assessed properly in the context of a whole range of issues. As I have already said, bear in mind that we have not had much involvement in that. But it goes without saying that the proposal will need to be looked at in terms of its viability, appropriateness, design and how the community might think about it. There would also have to be some views about the Aboriginal Housing Company's overall capacity to manage that project. We stand available and ready to provide information and support to a whole-of-government approach to the project. I know the Government submission provides some information about the fact that it is currently being assessed. To finish on a positive note, we hope that whatever recommendations come out of the financial audit of the housing company will enable it to move forward very positively and to get the project considered and assessed and, if those assessments show that it is viable, up and running.

The Hon. IAN WEST: With regard to the whole-of-government approach, have you been approached about involvement in the RED strategy?

Mr TAYLOR: No. I am aware of the strategy but we have not been closely involved. In my view the co-ordination aspects of that strategy are the secret of its success. There is combined, or whole-of-government, support for those processes, including from non-government organisations and the private sector where appropriate. I think that sort of co-ordinated approach is the way to go and is likely to be more effective than any response that a single agency might be able to provide to resolve the issues involved. I am sorry if my answer is a little broad but I have not been involved closely with those strategies.

CHAIR: Implicit in part of Mr West's question—we have a number of other questions—is the problems that the Aboriginal Housing Company has faced for some time. For instance, we refer specifically to the fact that it failed to meet the minimum performance standards set by your office after it was established in 1998. We have other questions about the fact that the office needed to step in and make urgent repairs to a number of Aboriginal Housing Company properties. Putting those questions together, we are seeking some information about whether you think those difficulties have been overcome in part or in whole, where you think the company stands now and what we can look forward to in the future.

Mr TAYLOR: I will try to do justice to those questions in summary. Since 1998 the relationship between the Aboriginal Housing Office and the Aboriginal Housing Company has been progressive and ongoing and directed towards providing support and advice to the Aboriginal Housing Company in ways that might result in its meeting our performance standards. Sadly, it has not been totally effective in that it is still not meeting aspects of our performance requirements. But that is not to say that there have not been some improvements or that the current relationship, and expectations, is not positive. It is a matter of record that since 1998 our relationship has not been very positive at times. There have been periods of disengagement. But during that time we provided advice when required.

We provided specific clauses and conditions in our funding arrangements that recognise the difficulty that the Aboriginal Housing Company has with its governance, management and its capacity to meet these improved expectations. Our project staff have been available. We have provided project staff to assist with that. We have provided specific advice about the company's various business and financial plans. As I mentioned earlier, we have given it an opportunity to address our regional committee not only about its expectations and aspirations but to try to build a more harmonious relationship. The Aboriginal Housing Office recognises that it is a tough game for organisations such as the Aboriginal Housing Company.

It is difficult enough in an ideal situation, where you are working in a community that is reasonably harmonious and where the dysfunctional elements are minimal. But when a community organisation like the Aboriginal Housing Company operates in the environment and framework in which it operates, we recognise that things are extremely difficult and that any achievements and improvements are significant—however little the bar may be raised. I am well aware that the Aboriginal Housing Company has accepted—I think their comments to this Committee recognise this—that they have made some mistakes in terms of financial management and their capacity to meet our performance requirements and that there is still room for improvement. I hope that the report to which I referred—the forensic audit—will also reinforce some issues for management. I do not have up-to-date information but the financials that have been available to the Aboriginal Housing Office previously have given rise to concerns about the financial position of the Aboriginal Housing Company and raised questions about its financial capacity to manage its housing stock.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Is that mainly related to arrears?

Mr TAYLOR: Arrears are certainly an important component of that but it goes to a whole range of things, including solvency. We must remember that the Aboriginal Housing Company is a company in its own right. Our ability to ride in with a big stick is very limited—and that is not the way we choose to operate any way. For the past five years our relationship has been generally positive. I think at the moment our relationship is extremely positive given that in recent times the Aboriginal Housing Office has provided substantial moneys for the repair and maintenance of Aboriginal Housing Company stock. We have spent in excess of \$1 million in recent times and there is still about \$340,000 committed for that purpose. I should also mention that this is for housing stock owned by the Aboriginal Housing Company that is not based on the Block; it is based elsewhere. That is consistent with the company's strategy to relocate. I understand that it has been provided with funding assistance from the Commonwealth to assist with its relocation strategy. One can only assume that that is an attempt to get the Block ready so that it is suitable for redevelopment.

CHAIR: Does the AHO intend to recover the cost of the repairs that you have funded?

Mr TAYLOR: No, it certainly does not. That came out of some discussions and community concerns that were expressed to the Aboriginal Housing Office in 2003 that went to the condition of

those houses and was affecting the relationship between the Aboriginal Housing Company and its tenants. Those funds were earmarked by the Sydney Regional Aboriginal Housing Committee. They were mainly but not exclusively directed at the Aboriginal Housing Company; there were some other organisations also in the Sydney region. Those funds were not handed over to the organisations concerned simply because they did not meet our requirements. Therefore, we were not capable of funding them. But we undertook the scope of the works and the assessment of what needed to be done, and we managed the program. I think Mr Mundine mentioned that that intervention by the Aboriginal Housing Office has helped the Aboriginal Housing Company to improve its relationship with tenants. It has certainly enhanced its viability. Part of its dilemma in getting rents to the correct levels and establishing correct collection practices was due to the deteriorating condition of the houses. It was an impediment to forming a proper relationship between the housing company and its tenants.

CHAIR: In that sense the maintenance is an investment.

Mr TAYLOR: That is right. However, in terms of the specific question, we will certainly not be asking the Aboriginal Housing Company [AHC] to repay those moneys. It is grant money and it has been appropriately acquitted.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: When Mr Mundine and the other Aboriginal Housing Company [AHC] witnesses appeared they said very similar things. Mr Mundine talked about the need to provide employment for young Aboriginals, particularly in the construction industry. What are you doing in that regard?

Mr TAYLOR: We strongly support Mick's approach to that. We have had some success in that area and we will continue to do so, particularly with our own program expenditures. Of course, we are trying to extend that to other areas of government and other providers. As a snapshot, in the 2002-03 program year, the Aboriginal Housing Office [AHO] contracted 20 Aboriginal building companies, which were responsible for the construction of 12 homes, the upgrading of 31 homes and upgrading of 180 homes under the AHO's upgrading program. It is achievable. There is a related question about whether that is appropriate in the context of any development of the Block. The AHO's position is that it is entirely appropriate that Aboriginal people be involved in the construction of whatever development takes place.

It can be done in a number of ways. However, one effective method would be to structure the way the procurement processes are implemented for whatever development takes place. It should be mandatory for contractors to engage Aboriginal workers, to include Aboriginal employment strategies and plans in the specifications and, to take it further, to ensure it happens on the ground. We find that it is effective. We have used it in our contract arrangements. As I said, I have provided a brief snapshot, but we are having some success in those areas. Last year the AHO conducted a special conference for Aboriginal practitioners in the construction industry. We are planning another one in August-September this year. The theme is what impediments exist and how Aboriginal contractors can attract business from government. It is an extremely important issue and one the AHO strongly supports. I am happy to say that we are ready to be involved in any discussions that might push that issue further.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Have you had any contact with the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project run by the Premier's office?

Mr TAYLOR: Yes. I would not say that we have had close involvement, but we have had some. Information has been provided and when asked we have provided information. The facilitation-co-ordination role that is inherent in that model is the critical success factor in making things happen. For example, I understand they are responsible for facilitating the AHC's development project. They can play a co-ordinator role in involving other agencies—and there are many—as well as perhaps extending relationships and linkages to the private sector. As I understand it, this development is targeted at mixed income levels. Obviously, any response from the AHO must be part of a whole-of-government response. However, we would certainly be looking only at the lower income components of that project. It requires other players, including other government agencies, to come to the party in a co-ordinated way. The Government must respond to the needs and the project itself. I believe that the Macquarie Bank has done some economic modelling and so on, but I have not seen that

information. However, if there is a role for the private sector in development, let us highlight it. The Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project should bring those interests into the issue.

CHAIR: Have you been consulted on the human services review?

Mr TAYLOR: No, I have not.

CHAIR: I refer back to the management of the housing company. There is quite a strong statement in the Government's submission on page 222 that any future AHO funding or support of the AHC in the absence of major organisational reform will be problematic. What is meant by "problematic"? You have referred to the audit, but if the AHC is not able to make the necessary changes does that mean the AHO will withdraw funding? If so, what will happen then?

Mr TAYLOR: The broad issue from the AHO's point of view is that funding becomes problematic in any organisation in which solvency is at risk and in which the financial position suggests that the organisation and its assets are under threat. The broad answer is that it becomes less problematic as the financial position improves. The same answer applies to the AHC. I hope and I expect that the latest audit report will contain clear recommendations about what reform the AHC needs to undertake and the pace of reform. I imagine that it would go to governance and financial management issues, and possibly even to structural issues. The AHC will have to make some hard decisions about that. It needs to look at its own capacity and assess its ability to undertake whatever comes in the future. We should bear in mind that the project now under consideration involves about 60 units and ramps up the capacity requirements of the AHC considerably in terms of what it might have been doing in the past. I hope that the AHC is able to undertake and successfully negotiate whatever organisational changes are needed, to resolve its current issues and to move into the future with some confidence and some capacity.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: It has been said often during the inquiry that a substantial number of services operate in the Redfern-Waterloo area. Comments have also been made about the need for better co-operation between the government sector and non-government organisations. Do you have any comment to make about that?

Mr TAYLOR: At this late stage I should say that I am no expert on Redfern, although I know it very well. I do not live there, but I have a long family association with the area. However, agency co-ordination, knocking down the barriers to effective service delivery across all programs and addressing responsibilities is the secret of success in any community. I know from other comments and evidence given to the Committee that it is both a benefit and a disadvantage. It is a great thing that we can say Redfern has all these services. However, of course, it becomes a burden when they are uncoordinated. In fact, it is a waste of effort. As the chief executive officer of the AHO I do not have a lot of day-to-day experience or an organisational perspective, but I do have personal experience having worked in Aboriginal affairs for a long time. I believe that eliminating the dysfunctional elements of cross-agency service delivery will make finding the right solutions somewhat easier.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Police Association members made comments this morning about being unable to contact agencies out of normal working hours. Those comments related particularly to domestic violence issues. Several people have said during the inquiry that the area needs a women's refuge and some sort of crisis centre operating around the clock. Do you have any comments?

Mr TAYLOR: This is not an AHO perspective. There were also comments about a hostel. If effectively operated services—and I emphasise "effectively"—such as those suggested were provided on the ground they would be of great value to the community. I have no doubt about that. The question about the hostel probably needs to be directed to Aboriginal Hostels Ltd, which is the Federal agency that has specific responsibility for establishing and managing hostels. In the context of the issues you are talking about, we know that those services are required. We do not need much more research to tell us that. The answer is that they would be extremely valuable.

The Hon. IAN WEST: You have touched on the issue of strengthening the capacity of the AHC. There is a relationship between the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project and the AHC in terms of looking at structural and organisational sustainability. Page 223 of the Government's report has a

number of dot points, one of which refers to processes in place for tenant selection and rental collection. I am interested in your comments on that point and in regard to organisational reform and sustainability being a fundamental part of the funding process as opposed to setting it up unintentionally for failure.

Mr TAYLOR: I have touched on this already. Reform has been a deliberate policy or sector approach taken by the AHO since its inception. It came out of considerable discussion, debate and consultation between the Aboriginal community and the Aboriginal housing sector that predicated the establishment of the AHO. We have recently held housing summits across the State—about 10 in the past four weeks and approximately two in every region. There was absolute and strong endorsement of the reform approach we have taken; that is, that any funding is based on performance and maintenance of appropriate levels of performance.

I will give a broader response with regard to the specifics on page 222 about tenant selection. One of the dilemmas that causes all sorts of problems for governance and financial management and one of the causes of great disputation in the Aboriginal housing sector, particularly the community housing sector, is the allocation decisions relating to who gets the next house. What we ask is that those decisions are transparent, that organisations are accountable, that in making those decisions they incorporate and involve their members, that their waiting lists are, if you like, quasi permanent arrangements that are not changed from meeting to meeting, and that they mean something in terms of trying to identify the level of need in that community.

In the context of the Aboriginal Housing Company, I think there have certainly been concerns on the part of the Aboriginal Housing Office about those decisions. I am sure that the Aboriginal Housing Company itself has recognised the need to change, and be more transparent and accountable, with regard to those decisions. In fact, I am very confident that it has recognised that. The comments about that, in terms of the funding arrangements, were there as part of the special conditions of our funding, to try to get the organisation to improve that aspect of its operations.

CHAIR: What would you like to see come out of this inquiry?

Mr TAYLOR: The issues involved are extremely complex. I would like to see some clarity. To put it simply, I would like to see some strategies that truly deliver some benefits, and a better social and living environment for the people of Redfern.

(The witness withdrew)

GREGORY JOSEPH STEWART, Public Health and Chief Health Officer, NSW Health, 73 Miller St., North Sydney, sworn and examined,

KAREN BECKER, Director of Drug Health Services, Central Sydney Area Health Service, locked mailbag 1, Rozelle, affirmed and examined,

RICHARD PETER GILBERT, Director of Health Services Planning, Central Sydney Area Health Service, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: You have received a number of questions from the Committee. Dr Stewart, I do not know whether you want to make an opening statement. Perhaps our first couple of questions provide that opportunity.

Mr STEWART: Yes, Madam Chair, it would be useful, given that we had the questions and I have some information about the questions that I think will help the Committee in asking further questions. Particularly because I am about to talk about issues relating to Aboriginal people in Redfern and Aboriginal health, I begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of this land, the Gadigal people. I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear today. It would be helpful to make some opening remarks with a view to placing the issues affecting communities in the Redfern-Waterloo area in the public health context.

I propose to firstly provide a general overview of the important role which public health services play in protecting and promoting people's health, and then to briefly discuss some specific public health issues which relate to Redfern-Waterloo and the strategies that NSW Health is currently pursuing. In the course of this I will describe the evidence and reasoning by which those strategies are based and the information we have as to their effectiveness. I will speak generally, and Mr Gilbert will then speak briefly about specific services in relation to the Central Sydney Area Health Service.

"Population health" refers to a wide range of activities that focus on the health of the population at a broad level, rather than on individual patients. There are many examples, including food safety, elimination of harmful substances like asbestos and lead, vaccination programs, campaigns to reduce smoking, and so on. Within the public health system, responsibility for public health is shared between the Minister, the department and area health services. The department has a broad responsibility in areas of policy development, planning, resource allocation, and performance monitoring. In addition, the Minister and the department have broad powers to deal with emergencies or other significant threats to public health, such as outbreaks of infectious diseases and threats to the water supply.

Area health services are the operational arm of the health system. Established under the Health Services Act 1997 as separate legal entities, they are responsible for the delivery of hospital, community and population or public health—I will use those terms interchangeably—and services within defined geographical areas. Most of the time we are unaware of the operation of public health services, and, like many other public utilities, we tend to take them for granted. Often it is only when something goes wrong—for example, the Sydney water crisis a few years ago—that we are made aware of the essential importance of public health services to our everyday lives.

This lack of public recognition is out of all proportion to the social, economic and health benefits which result from an effective public health system. The best way to illustrate this is to consider the reduced mortality, longer life span and improved health which we now enjoy compared with previous times. Most people would be aware that improvements in medical diagnosis and treatment have played an important role in achieving those outcomes. However, they would not be aware that, in relative terms, advances in public health, antismoking measures, seat belts and drink-driving have made by far the greater contribution. The economic aspects are similarly compelling.

Economic evaluations of individual public health programs routinely demonstrate financial savings which are many times greater than the cost. For example, in relation to measles an investment of \$52 million starting in 1970 has saved around four million infections and 95 lives, and has resulted in financial savings of \$9.2 billion, predominantly because of reduced medical costs. A similar report by the Commonwealth Government in 2002 analysed the economic and health impacts of needle and

syringe programs. The study found that the Commonwealth and State governments had invested a total of \$122 million in such programs between 1991 and 2000. By 2000 this had resulted in the prevention of 25,000 cases of HIV and 41,000 cases of hepatitis C.

The financial return on investment, in the form of reduced medical costs, was estimated to be worth a total of \$7.8 billion over the life of the cases of HIV and HCV avoided. I have a copy of that report which I am happy to leave with the Committee. It is an extremely influential Australian Government report, and it is widely accepted, including by Major Brian Watters, who, as you know, is a leading commentator in Australia on drug health matters. If we attempted to add together all the public health measures and estimated their combined economic value—which would be difficult, and I am not sure that it has ever been done—it would be no exaggeration to state that in developed nations the net economic benefit to society of all the public health systems taken together would represent a very significant proportion of total economic output.

The Committee has already been presented with a great deal of information about the significant levels of social and economic disadvantage in parts of Redfern and Waterloo. Much of this is contained in section 4 of the Government's submission, and I will not go over it here. The important point to make is that measures of social and economic wellbeing are strongly correlated with public health outcomes. The poorer areas within Redfern and Waterloo are no exception to this rule. The result of this situation is that in most of Waterloo and much of Redfern, including the Block, particular public health problems occur at levels that are among the highest in New South Wales. These include infectious diseases, mental illness, tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug use, domestic violence and sexual assault.

These problems are prevalent among the Aboriginal residents, although it is important to recognise that they are not confined to Aboriginal residents. I expect you will have some questions for us on these issues, and I will go into detail at that time. The general point here is that situations of this kind can be very dangerous in terms of public health. Where public health problems exist at high levels, as in Waterloo, the Block and other parts of Redfern, it is especially important to ensure that effective health protection measures are put in place and maintained at an appropriate level. If that is not done, the risk is that these problems can become very much worse in a short time. This kind of scenario especially applies to outbreaks of infectious diseases.

Among the public health issues in the Redfern-Waterloo area, high rates of drug and alcohol use are of particular concern, and are featured prominently already. As I indicated earlier, these problems are prevalent across the area and are not confined to any one location or population. It is quite evident, however, that drug- and alcohol-related problems are having a particularly destructive effect on Aboriginal people in the area and they are especially concentrated in the Block. It does not need to be stated—but I will, and the Committee certainly needs to know that it is a matter of grave concern—that it is an extremely complex issue which involves a range of related problems, such as crime, domestic violence, public safety, and so on. Mr Gilbert and Ms Becker will speak in more detail about service provision for the area.

My last few comments are to concentrate on the public health risks which result from this situation. In particular, I want to discuss the issue in terms of how to assess the magnitude of public health risk and what options are available to manage the risk. The first point to make is that we have very good evidence, going back to 1993 and earlier, of a high level of injecting drug use occurring in the Block. A number of features of this situation should be noted. The majority of injectors are Aboriginal, and heroin is the most commonly injected drug. Much of the injecting has occurred in either open public spaces or derelict buildings; very little has occurred in private dwellings, which elsewhere in New South Wales accounts for 80 per cent of injecting drug use. This so-called open drug scene has occurred in association with a large drug market within the Block.

Reported levels of self-neglect, self-harm and high-risk behaviour, including indiscriminate needle sharing, are higher than elsewhere in New South Wales. Amongst the using population there are higher levels of physical and mental health problems. Health workers frequently report unpredictable and dangerous behaviours, including threats and assaults. Lastly, the majority of injectors have hepatitis C and a number are known to have HIV.

This combination of factors means that there is a very high risk of transmission of HIV. In these circumstances, it is critical to ensure that an adequate supply of clean injecting equipment is available, and that any obstacles to accessing the equipment are minimised. In the event that such a supply was not available, or was withdrawn, the risk of a major outbreak of HIV occurring in the location would be extremely serious. The situation described above represents one of the highest risk locations in New South Wales in regard to a possible outbreak of HIV.

On the basis of the criteria that are generally applied within the needle and syringe program, the provision of a large, well-resourced needle syringe program would be considered to be of the highest priority. There is a second factor in relation to Redfern which considerably compounds and worsens the risk assessment I have just spoken about. It is well known that Redfern is a traditional meeting place for Aboriginal people from all parts of New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, who travel to Sydney for various reasons.

From an epidemiological perspective, this pattern represents the movement of people from areas of very low HIV prevalence to one of potentially very high prevalence and back again. This means that, in the event of a serious outbreak of HIV occurring amongst Aboriginal injecting drug users in Redfern, there would be a very real danger of rapid, undetected spread to other Aboriginal communities, due to recently infected individuals returning to their homes. Rapid spread is more likely than delayed spread, because maximum infectivity occurs immediately following infection and then gradually declines. It would almost certainly be undetected, since the frequency of testing is such that, for most people, a significant period will have elapsed before they became aware of their status.

In many Aboriginal communities, the potential for sexual transmission of HIV is higher than for non-Aboriginal people. This is due to a number of factors, including the prevalence of sexually transmissible infections at higher rates, and access to sexual health and other medical services. At present this does not translate into high rates of HIV infection simply because HIV has not, so far, entered those communities. But the situation could change very quickly if HIV entered those communities undetected following an outbreak in Redfern. With transmission occurring mostly through heterosexual contact in disadvantaged communities with poor access to health care, we would have all the ingredients for a rapid, potentially uncontrolled, epidemic similar to those that are currently devastating the populations in large areas of other parts of the world.

It would be extremely difficult to bring such an epidemic under control and, indeed, may prove impossible. The consequences for Aboriginal communities can only be imagined. I want to emphasise that this is not a fanciful, far-fetched scenario. There are numerous research and reports literature that we are happy to provide to the Committee, which document rapid epidemics amongst injecting drug users in countries as diverse as Scotland, India, Canada and the Ukraine. And we also know that in Canada and the US indigenous populations, together with the Hispanic and African-American communities, are currently suffering disproportionately large HIV epidemics compared to the majority of white populations. These epidemics potentially could have been prevented if effective prevention programs and appropriate resources had been provided. In the course of this inquiry and also in public commentary the need for the needle and syringe service on the Block has been questioned. I trust that I have been able to explain to the Committee, for the Committee's benefit, exactly how that need has been assessed in public health terms.

I finish with three main points, which are, the nature and current level of injecting drug use in the Block gives rise to a grave risk to public health in the form of potential outbreak of HIV among the population, that the risk extends to numerous Aboriginal communities in the rest of New South Wales because of connections with the Block and frequent movement between the locations, and that in the light of the assessment of this risk the first priority in any proposed reorganisation of service delivery in the Block should be to ensure that there is no increase in risk to public health and, in particular, no increase in risk of HIV transmission. I pass now to Mr Gilbert, who has one page on services.

CHAIR: It was a very long six or seven minutes. Mr Gilbert, are you going to add issues specifically related to our questions about drug-abuse issues, or are you going to add to questions about a range of issues?

Mr GILBERT: I would like to outline the broader approach taken by Central Sydney that is looking at not just responding to the immediate drug use in Redfern, but also what the area health service is doing to intervene earlier.

CHAIR: Are they still in relation to the issue of drugs?

Mr GILBERT: Yes.

CHAIR: That might be sensible. Please do not go on too long. We will look at our questions. I think 9 to 17 relate specifically to drug issues. We might try to deal with those and then come back to the much broader health issues that we have also asked about. If you could go through your page quickly we will then look at our questions.

Mr GILBERT: Antisocial behaviour, crime and drug use have been a large focus of this inquiry. This behaviour is often acted out by young people, some of whom are Aboriginal and require a multifaceted response. While the response must include interventions that consider the immediate needs and risky behaviour of these people, it must also focus on the origins of this behaviour and seek to prevent the development of problems and conditions at the beginning of childhood that may have substantial impact in later life. What is the area health service doing to address the drug use in Redfern-Waterloo? There are several actions being taken by Central Sydney, which include the provision of a broad range of local health services to enable them to get over their addiction to harmful drugs.

This includes counselling, pharmacotherapy, detoxification and rehabilitation, provision of a harm minimisation approach to reduce the risk of transmission of harmful diseases, such as HIV-AIDS and hepatitis C to both users and the broader community, and involvement with other agencies in the Redfern-Waterloo area in efforts to engage these young people and offer them alternate activities or referral to appropriate services through projects such as the Street Team, Magistrates Early Referral into Treatment and non-government run projects, such as Kidspeak. All these interventions are required in addition to the efforts of the police in reducing the supply of illicit drugs in the Redfern area. But what will prevent us from being there in 20 years time discussing the same problem?

Central Sydney is involved in a number of early intervention programs in maternal and child health, which are being implemented in the Redfern-Waterloo area. These programs are aimed at improving the capacity of both families and communities to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage, and one of the anticipated outcomes is the reduced likelihood of young people experimenting with drugs of addiction. International evidence indicates that the greatest return on investment is achieved by programs that targeted children in the early years through activities such as home visiting, health promotion, parenting and education, early literacy and improving school preparedness. Particularly in Redfern-Waterloo, Central Sydney has commenced universal home visiting for all new mothers in the Redfern-Waterloo area. This is world's best practice, and Central Sydney early childhood nurses are visiting more than 95 per cent of the new mothers, mostly within two weeks of discharge. This is unequalled elsewhere in New South Wales.

We have an Aboriginal birthing program, in collaboration with the Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern, where all mothers are visited antenatally and managed in partnership by a weekly meeting at AMS Redfern. Antenatal home visiting is even more effective than post-natal visiting, and we would like to be able to offer this to all high-risk mothers. Central Sydney has established a pathways project for moderate to high-risk mothers all the way from pregnancy through to early school age to ensure continuity and teamwork in providing whatever services are needed. Pathways includes a psychosocial assessment for all mothers antenatally to identify risks and hopefully the management of all mothers will identify risks, which may include mental health, drug health, Aboriginality, teenage mothers and other disadvantage, such as domestic violence. A multidisciplinary clinic is provided every fortnight at RPA to co-ordinate the care required by these high-risk mothers. A drugs in pregnancy service aims to prevent the situation where babies are being born in withdrawal to drug-dependent mothers.

These mothers require early engagement and enrolment in methadone maintenance programs to achieve better infant health outcomes. These services are crucial at the moment because we are

currently seeing an increase in young Aboriginal mothers with drug dependencies. We are seeing around 30 Aboriginal mothers per annum with drug dependency out of a total of 100. That number is increasing. Finally, involvement with interagency projects, such as the Connect Redfern project, which provides a morning bus ride to school and breakfast for local children and playgroups. These programs are based on international indicators indicating the appropriateness of such programs in reducing the social, emotional and economic costs to the community of later years in regard to school retention rates, policing and social security. Finally, Central Sydney has a partnership agreement with the Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern, and there is a range of collaborative and effective service arrangements in place. Additionally, Central Sydney is currently developing an Aboriginal health strategic plan.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: We have had a number of presentations to the Committee by way of submissions and witnesses who have commented about the needle van. The majority are not dismissing the benefits of harm minimisation, but they are saying to us that the location of the van is inappropriate—next to a playground—that there are large numbers of needles dispensed, that there is not a needle exchange program, that there are carpets of needles throughout the community and, therefore, children are subjected to needle-stick injuries, et cetera. Could you make specific comments relating to those concerns, which are very widespread?

Mr STEWART: There are four or five different issues there, which I hope we can capture. I will start broadly in relation to discussions we have had about the location of the van. We can provide more detailed information in writing about the history of the location of the van, if you like, because the van has been moved on numerous occasions since we first started providing needles and syringes in the Block in about late 1992. We have been engaged, and by this I mean Central Sydney Area Health Service and to a lesser extent the department, but including the department—and I need to advise the Committee that I worked in Central Sydney Area Health Service up until 2000, so I was very much involved in discussions around the issues of the Block—and I have had several discussions with, for example, Mr Mundine, the Aboriginal Medical Service and various other people about the location of the van.

In fact, I was involved, along with Dr Ingrid van Beek in undertaking a review of the program in early 1999 when there were some concerns raised and some public comment about the needle syringe program. I know the area. Our aims are to provide needles and syringes for the reasons I have said, and I will not go over them. In doing that we are very aware of the concerns in the community, the concerns that have been raised here. As you have said, there have been some witnesses who said they appreciate that it is a difficult situation. There are public health reasons for distributing needles and syringes, and I absolutely endorse that. This is a very difficult area of public policy. We try to put the van in a place so that we achieve our purposes in terms of public health, harm minimisation—I will use the term—and yet at the same time respond to community concerns. The van has been moved on numerous occasions.

Ms Becker will talk about the recent discussions we have had, because there were discussions in relation to a more permanent move of the van down to Abercrombie and Hudson, which included in it, though, the erection of a dispensing machine for needles, which has not taken place in effect because the buildings were knocked down. We are still in negotiation with the Aboriginal Housing Corporation and others about how we might ensure that our public health purposes are met and, at the same time, are responsive to the concerns of the community, which I perfectly understand. I have seen the transcripts and I have spoken to many people down there. I will just make one other comment in relation to litter.

We adopted a much more aggressive approach to needle litter reduction at the end of 2002, and we changed our arrangements for picking up needles. We know that distribution, in some instances, led to needles being thrown away. We are of the opinion, and I think this is well supported by any evidence, that it is a much better arrangement currently for needle litter pickup than there was, say, up until December 2002. I will not go into the details of that. It is a different contractor and more frequent service, and the needles are pick up and disposed of appropriately.

Ms BECKER: Certainly, I support a lot of what Mr Stewart said. I think the other thing in relation to looking at the relocation of the van is that over the years the van has been relocated a number of times. We have been down at one end of the Block, down there in Hudson Street where it is

suggested we should go to now. Literally you can see the history. We can provide it to you. We have been in almost every possible location. We have continued to move the van's location because of a number of community concerns. People have not been satisfied with the location. Some issues in terms of moving the van have been as a result of limited access. Clients just do not come and access the service.

They have stated that down at Abercrombie and Hudson, for example, where we moved from three to five o'clock in the afternoon, it is too far they say. They have also stated that they get arrested if they actually come that far down, and that was supported in some sense by what Superintendent Smith said at the hearing here. In terms of access, clients do not actually come and access the van at Abercrombie and Hudson where we are now located from three until five. We have had a significant reduction in the afternoon service since we have relocated, and I think the statistics show us that an average of three people will access the service in the afternoon on a daily average of three people versus close to 40 in the morning. That is a real concern in terms of where we are actually locating the van.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: What is the harm minimisation regime when it comes to children when you have the van next to a playground, admittedly during school hours, but there is a high dependency rate. What is the harm minimisation regime in regard to children? There are reports of parents rocking up to the van with children in tow being dispensed with needles. What might happen to those children once the parents inject drugs?

Ms BECKER: I can absolutely respond to that. Central Sydney has a very firm commitment to child protection right across drug health services and the needle and syringe services in that, if there are serious concerns about a child at risk, a notification will be made to DOCS, a report will be made, and reports have been made. There are some instances where the clients may be informed and sometimes they know the names and if that is the case that information would be provided. Sometimes a description of the client might be given to DOCS in terms of a notification. Certainly the other benefit of having a service with contact with the health service is that one can actually engage the clients and can actually talk to them about the risks, talk to them about the associated issues in terms of child health. If they are with children or if they come to the van with children, we would ask them, "Are you going to use and what is going to happen with your child?"

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Apparently that is not a common case. Are you sure that that happens?

Ms BECKER: Certainly if there is some concern about somebody coming to the van with children there certainly would be some brief interventions around that issue, or certainly that is what is expected. We have also undertaken training with all needle and syringe program [NSP] staff in a number of different things; we have trained them in terms of motivational interviewing and brief intervention. Central Sydney has a child protection policy and there is mandatory training around that, but we also developed NSP specific policies and procedures because of the Block and the nature of the Block and the difficulties there. We had specific training around those issues and we also developed specific policies and procedures around those issues to try and manage the sensitivities and the difficulties, because, as well, some of the staff that work in the service are actually family members and live on the Block as well. So there are some difficult circumstances for staff as well around those issues.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Did you just say that the staff working in the needle van live on the Block and are family members—

Ms BECKER: Some of them may have been, yes.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: That is a difficult position for them to be in.

Ms BECKER: It is a very difficult position, and I have to say that the staff who work on the Block do an absolutely tremendous job in working in very difficult conditions. The Block itself is very volatile and makes for difficult circumstances but, in addition to that, there is a lot of community pressure around relocating the van and around some of those issues. They are dealing with those kinds of things on a daily basis as well.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: How many trained drug and alcohol workers do you have on the Block providing outreach counselling for drug and alcohol abuse?

Ms BECKER: There has been quite a lot of talk at the inquiry about the Redfern/Waterloo street team. Health has three drug and alcohol workers attached to that street team; we have two Aboriginal health workers and one non-Aboriginal health worker, and they are engaging clients from 10 or 11 a.m. until 2 a.m. and they will actually go out and do outreach and patrols and go out in the vehicles. There has been some indication that since the riot they are a little bit more uncomfortable about going out at two o'clock in the morning on foot, so in terms of occupational health and safety those things have been considered and we are looking at some changes where from sort of 12 to 2 they will only do vehicle patrol but, in the main part, a lot of the kids now know them and access the service directly.

All the staff who work at refuges are health education officers so they are all appropriately trained, and where they are not counsellors they are trained to give some brief intervention. One of the tremendous benefits of NSPs is that they are often the very first point of contact to any health service that clients make. So it is a way of engaging them, developing rapport, developing trust and then actually linking them into the health system and referring them to detox or rehab.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Do you have some statistics on the number of those referrals?

Ms BECKER: We have statistics on the number of referrals and, I stand to be corrected on this, I think it is around 40 per cent of clients have referrals made and I think 65 per cent of clients are given some kind of resources, some written resources, and some of the clients who access the van are not literate.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: They are given a pamphlet.

Ms BECKER: They are given pamphlets and they are given information about services. We would also assist them to link up with a service. Unfortunately, we do not have statistics on how many of them make it and go through necessarily because it is an anonymous service so very often they will not give their names at the needle and syringe program, and we do not keep documentation on those.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: This is a two-part question. When you dispense needles from the van are the people who receive those needles registered users? We have had a lot of comment that dealers are receiving bulk needles when they turn up.

Ms BECKER: Certainly we would not knowingly distribute needles to dealers, and that is quite clear. Drug users are not registered; there is no register for drug users accessing a needle and syringe program. I think one might be looking at other services in terms of pharmacotherapy where clients might be registered who are in other treatment services, but certainly not the needle and syringe program. One of the other things I would like to comment on, which you mentioned earlier, was an exchange. I think that very early on when the needle and syringe programs were set up they were called needle and syringe exchanges, they are now called needle and syringe programs for the exact reason that we do not exchange one for one. One of the reasons is that (a) we do not want to reduce the access to sterile injecting equipment, and we also will not even give out one needle because there is a likelihood of them sharing if we do that, so we will give out two. The other thing, when you were talking about dealers, if one actually reduces access to some of that clean injecting equipment you are actually increasing the black market trade for needles because people cannot get access.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Have you thought of retractable syringes?

Ms BECKER: There has been some looking at retractable syringes. I do not have all the details on that but there certainly was data where we looked at changing the syringes that were being used and being distributed and there was quite an outcry from a lot of the clients because they do not like them; they will not access them and they will not use them because they find that it actually damages their veins and they have had problems as a result of a number of different things.

Mr STEWART: I might say too that I appeared before another upper House committee, a WorkCover committee, and this matter was dealt with in some detail and recommendations made in the report.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: How many syringes a day do you distribute from the needle van in Redfern?

Ms BECKER: I do not have a daily figure on that but we would be looking at something between 15,000 and 30,000 syringes a month, and that depends on a number of factors.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Mr Gilbert, you spoke about some of the specific programs that are operating in the area in terms of health. How significant is the distinction between the health of the Aboriginal population in the area and the non-Aboriginal population?

Mr GILBERT: It is similar to the rest of the country in that there are significant disparities between the health of the Aboriginal people living in Redfern and the non-Aboriginal population. This is due to high rates of exposure to risk factors such as smoking, other drug and alcohol use, physical activity and poor nutrition. In addition, they are more likely to die earlier and experience high rates of illness and disability. We do have local data, particularly again in the maternal/child health area, that does show some of those distinctions. For example, in terms of teenage mothers, 13 per cent of Aboriginal mothers are aged under 20 years, compared to 2 per cent for the total population. 37 per cent of Aboriginal women present late to antenatal services compared to 16 per cent for all mothers. 14 per cent of Aboriginal babies are low birth weight compared to 5 per cent of all mothers, and 17 per cent of Aboriginal babies are born at less than 37 weeks compared to 7 per cent of all babies. So you can see in terms of the very beginning Aboriginal children can get a bad start and then that can be compounded along the way from the disadvantage that they can suffer from.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: So one of the very significant parts of some of the health programs relate to prenatal to postnatal care and the birth of the child. After that particular part of the health programs, what happens then? What other programs perhaps differentiate with young children from an Aboriginal background versus the rest of the population, in terms of care, with early childhood centres and so on?

Mr GILBERT: We have provided early childhood services and we have an early childhood service called "Binya Gurung", which is run out of the Redfern community health centre, specifically for the Aboriginal children. Obviously there is a need for more Aboriginal-specific services. One of the gaps in the services in the area is for culturally appropriate child care and playgroups. The review of human services that is being conducted at the moment needs to look at that. Our services will be focused around birth and the first two years and then we are expecting these to link with other services. The other program that is involved is Families First, which is looking at linking up human services agencies because, as I said before, one of the key things you can do is make sure kids are ready to go to school; kids who start well continue well, and there are services around like Alexandria Park community school that are trying to make sure that kids make a good transition to school.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Are there any other distinct health issues with ethnic groups in the Redfern-Waterloo community?

Mr GILBERT: There are other ethnic groups within the community; I think around 30 to 40 per cent are born overseas and I think there are pockets of particularly elderly Russian and Chinese, but their needs would be similar to the rest of the community in terms of social support. Maybe there is some isolation—some people in the tower blocks who do not feel safe in the community—but it is not a major issue.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: So other than the issues that relate to drug use, the significant health differences would be with Aboriginal children and probably seniors groups within the community?

Mr GILBERT: Yes.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: How would you describe the main mental health issues faced by the people in the area?

Mr GILBERT: Well, again, mental health issues faced by the people in Redfern are the same as those in the general population: things like rates of depression and anxiety disorders affect up to 20 per cent of the population. I suppose the thing that distinguishes Redfern/Waterloo in this regard is that one of the issues for people with mental illness is gaining secure, stable housing, and the Department of Housing has been very good in providing tenancies for people with mental illnesses. That has ensured that there are quite a high proportion of people with mental illness in the public housing estates, particularly in Waterloo. So there is the issue there around supporting those people to live in the community and we have a joint guarantee of understanding between housing and health services to provide those people with mental health support to support those to live in the community.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Does that include a relationship with the Aboriginal Housing Company?

Mr GILBERT: I am not sure that the housing company is a signatory to that agreement. We do have an Aboriginal mental health service that is a shared care service where a weekly service at Redfern is provided by our mental health team.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: The Committee has received evidence from a number of witnesses that there is a lack of co-ordination between service providers in the area—and I think this comment comes about because of the number of services that have been recognised there—and perhaps a lack of co-ordination between government services and non-government organisations. Do you have any comments on that?

Mr GILBERT: Yes, I have certainly been hearing that through the review of human services and I think it has been proved in the past that the multitude of services in Redfern/Waterloo have perhaps operated in silos and have not always worked closely with each other. That has certainly improved in the last few years with the Redfern/Waterloo Partnership Project, which does have a number of task forces that enabled that interagency collaboration to occur. Another major government initiative that helps in that regard, as I said before, is Families First is bringing agencies together to make sure that there is great co-ordination and that Families First programs do include the non-government sector and the community very closely.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Do you think that, in terms of some of the things that are happening now in the area health service, there is an opportunity to perhaps improve the co-ordination between the area health service and some of the other services that are operating, or do you think further changes will come out of the Redfern-Waterloo project and the human services review?

Mr GILBERT: Yes, but it could always be improved. We are working quite closely with those other agencies—with education, the Department of Community Services and housing.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What is the prevalence of hepatitis C in the injecting community? Do you have any data on that?

Dr STEWART: Overall?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In this Aboriginal community.

Ms BECKER: I do not have specific data on that.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I think you said in your opening statement that it involved almost all the injecting community.

Ms BECKER: We have some data from the national fingerprint survey that shows the prevalence of hepatitis C was similar to that in the State, but slightly higher than the national average. I do not have the figures with me.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Of injecting drug users?

Ms BECKER: Yes. Because it is a fingerprint survey, generally, that is done through the needle and syringe programs.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If the figure is high is it likely to be mostly as a result of drug-related transmission or sexually related transmission?

Ms BECKER: I cannot comment specifically on that. It could be one or the other.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If hepatitis C is becoming high in that group it suggests that there is no reason why HIV-AIDS could not be spread in the same way. Is that right?

Dr STEWART: That is correct. That is the point that I made at the start. The reason there has not been a spread in HIV is that it has not been introduced into this community.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But if it were it would spread quite quickly, given that hepatitis C did?

Dr STEWART: Yes, exactly, because of the sharing of intravenous drugs and, as I said in the statement, because of heterosexual spread. A particular issue there is the higher prevalence of other sexually transmissible diseases amongst Aboriginal people.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Does that mean that the needle and syringe program has failed to stop the spread of hepatitis C?

Dr STEWART: It is not a question of it having failed. We have been successful in relation to HIV, yet we know that there is a high prevalence of hepatitis C in general in injecting drug users. We could get some references to that and provide them to the Committee. I do not have them in front of me now so I will not go into too much detail. The key point is that we are confident that this program and other needle and syringe programs across New South Wales have been successful. The HIV prevalence rate amongst intravenous drug users in this State is significantly lower than it is in similar western countries. The Scottish example that I gave is a good example. We could provide more information about that. There was a rapid spread of HIV amongst intravenous drug users in Glasgow, Edinburgh, or both because there was no needle and syringe program.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Might it be related to the virus? You cannot say the same for hepatitis C, which was pretty rare until fairly recently, in epidemiological terms.

Dr STEWART: I do not want to sound too specific, but hepatitis C has been around for a lot longer than HIV. You might recall that it was called hepatitis B for a long time. Hepatitis A and B were around when you and I were first training. I can provide more information about the dynamics of that epidemic, but I would not want to go beyond my area of expertise.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Would an injecting room improve the intervention rate and the penetration of clean needles?

Dr STEWART: I think there has been some speculation about an injecting centre. The Uniting Church runs an injecting centre on behalf of NSW Health. In Kings Cross there has been an evaluation of that. Any decisions about injecting centres clearly are decisions for the Government to make.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Presumably you would say the same thing if I asked you what was your opinion about the decriminalisation of hard drugs?

Dr STEWART: We provide programs in an environment in which certain drugs are illicit. The Parliament has said so. That is how we provide our services and that is how we will continue to provide them.

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The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What opinions you might have are private?

Dr STEWART: I am here as the Chief Health Officer of NSW Health. My answer is in the context of that role.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I refer to the antenatal visiting programs. I think you said earlier that you would like to visit all mothers?

Mr GILBERT: At the moment universal home visiting is postnatal. But the evidence is that if we are to make an improvement, if we start with antenatal services we can take on things like smoking in pregnancy and issues like that. But we do not have the resources to provide antenatal home visiting for all women.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Does that mean that you are unable to pick up people until birth time?

Mr GILBERT: No. We enrol women in antenatal clinics when they come in. We provide services at Royal Prince Alfred [RPA] but we do not go into the community or into their homes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You provide postnatal services?

Mr GILBERT: We provide postnatal services for Aboriginal women. That is the point I was making.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: There has not been any problem of stigmatisation, as was mentioned by Dr Nossar? He said that sometimes there was stigmatisation if you had non-universal programs. Has that been a problem in postnatal visiting?

Dr STEWART: It is a universal program.

Mr GILBERT: Postnatal visiting is a universal program.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: In Redfern?

Mr GILBERT: For the Aboriginal community we are providing antenatal programs; we are not doing it universally.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But you have universal postnatal programs in the Redfern and Waterloo areas?

Mr GILBERT: That is right.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So locally it is universal?

Dr STEWART: Antenatal care is a critical issue. We have developed quite a lot of better integrated services for Aboriginal people across government services—education, health, justice and so on—in the last year or two. The program that was led by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs was called, "New Ways of Doing Business." It is a significant attempt. I think it is showing good signs of being a successful attempt to better integrate our services. I will give you an example. For some years we have undertaken otitis media programs in schools to deal with significant literacy problems that are being faced by Aboriginal children. If they cannot hear they cannot learn to read. We have done that to some extent as a health system. "New Ways of Doing Business" states that we must much more closely relate to the education sector in doing that.

That seems simple but it has been a significant advance. A key indicator that has been developed in measuring the outcome of "New Ways of Doing Business" is an indicator around the first antenatal visit before 20 weeks. There is some dispute that the evidence shows that a first antenatal business before 20 weeks will lead to better outcomes after birth. In that regard we try to have targeted programs with the assistance of Aboriginal community controlled organisations to target

young Aboriginal women and, in particular, teenagers. That is an important point. We have not forgotten antenatal care but it is not the same as a universal program for postnatal visiting, which, effectively, is what Families First is.

Ms BECKER: I refer to generalist drug health services as well. Through the methadone clinic, buprenorphine programs and counselling services women very often would come in during the early stages and let us know that they were pregnant. We would immediately link them up and refer them to the drugs and pregnancy service. We have also done a lot of work with the street team so that they can engage young people if they discover that they are pregnant and refer them in early. We are doing some good work in Redfern. Currently we have increased the number of young people coming to Redfern. The last figure that I had showed that we currently have 18 young women between the ages of 15 and 27 in treatment from the Redfern, Waterloo and Glebe areas. So we are making some significant strides there. They are referred straight on to the methadone program and they are being maintained as well.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So they go on to methadone maintenance?

Ms BECKER: They go on to methadone maintenance, yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What success rate do you have in helping people quit smoking?

Ms BECKER: Some are more successful than others. I do not have figures on that, but we address all issues relating to drug health and harm to babies. So we certainly address all those issues.

CHAIR: I refer to some of the questions that were given to you but that have not yet been addressed. The Government's submission states that there have been a number of calls from the Aboriginal community for the establishment of a specific Aboriginal drug and alcohol rehabilitation service. We heard evidence yesterday and on other occasions from different Aboriginal groups calling for such a service. Can you comment on that? Does NSW Health have any plans for drug rehabilitation services in the area?

Ms BECKER: So far as I am aware NSW Health and the Central Sydney Area Health Service have not received a request from the Aboriginal Medical Service to establish a rehabilitation program in Rachel Foster hospital. The Rachel Foster site is currently being redeveloped. It is proposed to put the Redfern community health centre there. There have been a number of discussions about what sorts of services will be provided. We are providing some places for them. Central Sydney Area Health Service will certainly support the establishment of an Aboriginal specific rehabilitation program in the area if the appropriate resources are provided.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Why have you not done that already?

Ms BECKER: When we look at rehabilitation services we see that a number of different services are available.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What are they?

CHAIR: You provided quite a long list in your submission.

Ms BECKER: We have provided quite a long list. We have eight services that are Aboriginal specific or Aboriginal prioritised. All but one of those services are located outside Sydney.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What services are provided in Redfern?

Ms BECKER: A number of services are not necessarily based specifically in Redfern but clients can be referred from Redfern. There was a detoxification service at RPA and a number of clients were going there. They are currently referred to Rozelle. The RPA is being redeveloped and we will have a 12-bed detoxification service at RPA, which will be close to the Redfern area.

CHAIR: Do you have any problems with an Aboriginal-specific service? Some people have argued about the pros and cons of resources going into Aboriginal-specific services as distinct from mainstream services, not only in relation to a rehabilitation centre but also in relation to calls for an Aboriginal women's refuge.

Ms BECKER: There are two ways of looking at it from an Aboriginal perspective. Some Aboriginal people would prefer to go to an Aboriginal specific service and some Aboriginal people would prefer not to. I think there are benefits in having a specific program and there are also benefits in having a broad program.

CHAIR: There are certainly enough clients to make a specific program viable.

Ms BECKER: Certainly.

CHAIR: Another question that was not dealt with related to the nature of arrangements between Health and police—police surveillance issues and issues relating to whether or not police are allowed to approach or they are encouraged or discouraged from approaching users of the needle van. Would you tell us something about those protocols?

Ms BECKER: Certainly. Central Sydney Area Health Service supports the police and the work that is being done in reducing illicit drug use in the area. We would be in favour of seeing a reduction of drugs of high demand on the Block and in Redfern generally. There is an understanding between the program and police that they do not approach clients who come directly to the van. If a serious crime has just been committed the area health service would step back and support the police in any way, shape or form. But we request that police do not approach them right at the van because clients would not access the service. We do not want police to wait for them right at the service because clients would not access the program.

Dr STEWART: That is in the context of a long-standing policy which was first developed in the mid-1980s, encapsulated in a 1988 police department circular, and more recently in a document that I have that is entitled, "NSW Police Service Guidelines for Supported Needle and Syringe Exchange and Methadone Programs", which states briefly exactly what Karen just said. That applies to needle and syringe programs across New South Wales. Clearly, when needle and syringe programs were established in the mid-1980s, and because of the HIV-AIDS epidemic, there was a need for police and health services to reach some agreement about issues surrounding the needle and syringe programs.

CHAIR: I presume that it would create a certain amount of tension between Health and police?

Ms BECKER: I think that those tensions can be resolved. Next week we will be meeting with Superintendent Smith to discuss some of the issues. We will refer to some of the things that have been raised, deal with some of the concerns that have been expressed by some staff and with some of the concerns that have been expressed by police. We will look at the possibility of developing a memorandum of understanding in Redfern.

CHAIR: We have been told on page 257 of the Government's submission that the issue of placing needle vending machines near the Block instead of the van has been forwarded to the city council for consideration? Can you tell us something about that proposal and where it is up to now?

Ms BECKER: My reading of the Government proposal in relation to that is that they have actually forwarded to the City of Sydney a proposal to actually look at closing Caroline Lane, and the actual proposal of putting up dispensing machines has not necessarily been forwarded to the City of Sydney. However, we have engaged with the City of Sydney as well as the partnership project, as well as the AHC, the police, the Aboriginal Medical Service and a number of other community stakeholders to try to identify the most appropriate location for a dispensing machine.

CHAIR: This would be instead of the current van. There are issues about counselling and picking up some of the issues you identified earlier, such as those relating to a child, or where

corrected

someone says she is pregnant. Those things are provided, presumably, by a van, but not necessarily by a dispensing machine.

Ms BECKER: Yes, I agree with you. Basically, it was a compromise. There is very strong pressure for the van to move off the Block, as you are well aware. The primary role of an NSP is to provide clean injecting equipment to reduce the spread of blood-borne virus. That was the primary goal. If the van was located off the Block, then we could put up a dispensing machine, which could provide the clean syringes. That was a compromise. Certainly, in an ideal world we would prefer to have face-to-face contact with clients to provide a range of different services.

CHAIR: This whole issue is really still under discussion?

Mr STEWART: It is important that while there have been numerous and ongoing discussions about the locations of the van since we first started providing services—the van has not been there for the whole of that time. We had different arrangements. There has been some confusion in the Committee about the Kirketon Road bus, which predominantly provided primary care services and the needle syringe program continued as it had done. We operated out of a station wagon for some time. There have been continuing ongoing discussions in terms of the Redfern-Waterloo project, and that is the main link between government and the people in the community—Mr Ramsey, I know, has appeared before here and he is, as you know, the principal public servant involved in that—between the area health service and stakeholders, including the Aboriginal Housing Corporation and, of course, the police.

We always attempt to get a compromise in relation to our requirements, as I said right at the start, around the need for a public health intervention that has been a successful intervention and the issues that we fully recognise about having a needle syringe program in areas where there are children, playgrounds or where people are living. As I said, it is a very difficult area of policy. We continue to try to get some compromise. In fact, the dispensing machine proposal was a compromise as part of the discussion around a full-time move of the van down to Hudson and Abercrombie.

CHAIR: We have covered almost everything, but I think Mr Pearce has a question. We have not specifically asked questions about the partnership project, but you have all referred to it as you have gone through.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Do you have an average number of users of the van each day? Do you keep that sort of information?

Ms BECKER: Currently, in the mornings, before 3.00 p.m. we are getting approximately 40 users a day. In the afternoon from 3.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. we are getting an average of three.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: So 43 users are using 500 to 1,000 needles a day? Those are the numbers you gave us earlier.

Ms BECKER: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What specific services do you provide in Redfern other than giving out needles and pamphlets?

Ms BECKER: We provide a range of services in Redfern. There are counselling services, which are provided through the RPA and other drug health services and we certainly have links with the Redfern Community Health Centre. We have MERIT, which is the magistrates early referral into treatment program. That commenced in Redfern in March last year and has actually doubled the expected capacity.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Do you have drug workers who actually go out and identify people?

Ms BECKER: We have the street team, who do outreach.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: But that is only since the partnership project.

Ms BECKER: That has been in the last two years but, no, we do not generally do outreach. It is not generally something that has been done in drug health. However, clients will generally come to the service but because of the issues in Redfern we have actually put in an outreach team there.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: But you did not do that, the partnership did that?

Ms BECKER: Sorry?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: The Department of Health did not do that?

Ms BECKER: We developed it as a partnership project, so it was the partnership project, DOCS, Health; we all sat down and discussed and looked at ways of doing it and actually developed it together. It was a partnership approach.

Mr STEWART: They are health workers. Are they employed by Health?

Ms BECKER: They are employed by Health. We have three health workers, three drug and alcohol health workers, two Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal.

CHAIR: We have reached our last question. What would you like to see come out of the inquiry?

Mr STEWART: I do not have anything to add to the evidence we have given, Chair. Thank you for your tolerance at the start. I was very keen to have a systematic approach to why we do what we do and I thank you for that.

CHAIR: You have taken a few matters on notice, such as statistics. Is two weeks from today a reasonable and suitable time?

Mr STEWART: The best way of doing that is if the secretary could send something to me. I have suggested certain things and you may or may not want those. I will certainly leave this report, which we think is a very important report.

CHAIR: Yes. Usually it is easiest to identify from the transcript. As we have gone through we have identified extra information and we would be thankful if you could do that.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Luncheon adjournment)

ANDREW CAPPIE-WOOD, Director-General, Department of Education and Training, sworn and examined:

PHIL LAMBERT, Regional Director (Sydney), Aboriginal Education, Department of Education and Training, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: You have received some questions from the Committee. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: I will make a brief statement. I think it should be noted that a very extensive process is under way—it has probably been noted already but it is worth noting again. The process of reviewing the current Aboriginal education policy is well advanced. This has been going for some time and has involved more than 400 community consultations across the State. This is a major issue for us because Aboriginal education attainment is very close to our hearts and we recognise that there must be some changes in this regard. Hence the future direction that this review will produce is long awaited, and we look forward to it in the near future.

CHAIR: Can we begin by getting a factual picture of the situation regarding the schools that serve the Redfern-Waterloo area and their populations? We have a particular interest in Aboriginal enrolment at the various schools and the programs associated with the schools—we know that all sorts of other things operate out of them.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: There is a considerable number of programs. Three schools principally serve the Redfern-Waterloo community. The Alexandria Park Community School, which is a kindergarten to year-12 school, has 363 students of which 206 are of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [ATSI] background. The Darlington Public School, which is a preschool to year-6 school, has 239 students of which 44 are of an ATSI background. The Green Square special-purpose school caters for 21 students—it is a specialist behavioural school. Of those students, nine are of an ATSI background. It should be noted that 48 different government schools across the metropolitan region list the home address of school attendees as the Redfern-Waterloo area. It is not to say that all children from the Redfern-Waterloo area go to the three local schools—although there is the predominance—they go to a wide variety of schools. I can list them, but there are 48.

CHAIR: If we need to I am sure we can get that information from you.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Would you like me to go through some of the specific programs that are running in the Alexandria Park and Darlington schools, in particular?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Some of the programs are principally around co-ordination mechanisms. The Pathways to Prevention Project, which is running in the Alexandria Park and Darlington schools and Mount Carmel school—it is a local Catholic school—is funded by the Attorney General's Department, with the Department of Education and Training as the lead agency. The program is managed by Darlington Public School and Alexandria Park Community School. It comprises several components. First is Parents As Teachers, for families with students aged nought to five. It is an early childhood parenting education family support program that targets parents who are expecting a baby for the first time or who are caring for infants and young children. It provides information about child development for a parental period to age 5 and promotes children's social, emotional, cognitive and language development. The program offers parents a regular personalised home visit, parent meetings, play-based learning activities with their children and information about other community services.

The other part of the Pathways to Prevention Project is Primary Connect, which is for families with students aged from five to 14 years. The pilot project involves participating departments and agencies working together with students from years five to 12 and their families to assist in building connections from those families to the schools and the community more generally. The project aims to identify and support students at risk and their families, particularly those students who

are at risk from disconnecting from school early, where there has been drug use or other behavioural issues, such as self-harm behaviour, mental, physical problems and so on.

A Sports Development Program is also being run. It is funded by the Premier's Department and managed by Alexandria Park for school students. It has a co-ordinator and part-time clerical support. The program aims to develop the sporting areas of netball, golf, athletics, basketball, football, gymnastics, tennis and rowing. It is attracting increasing interest and support. There is also a range of in-school programs that support the operations of the school. One that is working particularly well is the school bus arrangement that covers Darlington and Alexandria Park. In fact, two buses serve Alexandria Park school. Staff, be they Aboriginal community liaison officers or assistant principals, attend the buses as they go around the local community and the Block and pick up children to make sure they go to school and assist with their attendance. This is of considerable benefit in increasing attendance by Aboriginal children at Alexandria Park and Darlington schools in particular.

Other school-based activities are around school-based traineeships. There are student services team interventions, which include the capacity for an Aboriginal school liaison officer and a home-school liaison officer to work effectively with their schools. We have support teacher and learning assistance program support to assist schools with literacy and numeracy support and to assist teachers with professional training in these areas. The learning assistance program strengthens support to students experiencing difficulty in learning, including those with mild intellectual disability and language disorders. There is the Aboriginal language initiative, which is operating from the Alexandria Park school, Darlington public school and involved their communities. It is also supported by the Port Jackson education area. It is well along the way in introducing the Wiradjuri language as the principal language that Aboriginal children in the schools will have the opportunity to learn. There is a Gifted and Talented Program in year 5 at the Alexandria Park Community School that has been well received by the community.

As I have said already, the interagency support project is Pathways to Prevention. Considerable work is being done with the health unit from the University of Sydney, the Central Sydney Area Health Service and the Alexandria Park Community School student representative council. They have been working together to embed sound health practices in the culture of the new school. That is being reinforced by the healthy canteen policies that were announced recently. The Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project funds the employment of a full-time sports co-ordinator, which I have mentioned. That is producing some good results, and the Little Athletics Centre is encouraging considerable participation in sport. Alexandria Park Community School has also established a partnership with the National Aboriginal Sports Corporation Australia to provide opportunities for students to excel in sports and pathways to greater success in education, employment and career development.

There are various other initiatives under way. The Alexandria Park Community School is identified as a priority school for specific additional funding on the basis of the socioeconomic status of its community. That attracts additional funding and staffing support. A number of additional programs are being run, such as the after-school HSC coaching program. The Class Scoop project is being undertaken in conjunction with staff of the *Sun Herald* to develop newspapers as a tool to gain greater literacy and to develop the capacity to use web sites and newspapers and what is reported in them. Finance First is a new financial literacy education program being undertaken in conjunction with the YWCA and City Bank Australia. They are just some of the programs currently operating in and around schools in the area.

CHAIR: There would not be many schools in New South Wales that would have all of those programs, although a number would have some. To what extent are they targeted towards indigenous children, or do they reflect the fact that the Redfern-Waterloo area has disadvantage that goes beyond the indigenous community?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: The additional staffing and funding from the priority schools program recognises the broad socioeconomic status of the communities from which the children come and it operates across the State. As such, the benefits of that program are enjoyed by the entire school community. Some of the more targeted programs, particularly the Aboriginal language programs and other support programs, are specifically aimed at assisting Aboriginal children at the school. For instance, a specific number of the places in the year 5 opportunity class operating at Alexandria Park

Community School are held for Aboriginal children. That seems to be working well. Obviously some of the sports programs linking through to the national Aboriginal sports networks are there specifically for Aboriginal children. Although we operate for the broad remit of all children attending the school, we have introduced specific programs for Aboriginal children.

Dr LAMBERT: The University of Technology Sydney is about to sign a memorandum of understanding with the school focused on supporting Aboriginal youth in transiting from school to university courses. It recognises that a different level of support might be required in terms of mentoring, understanding study skills and the nature of university. It is making that commitment. There is no funding associated with it; it is in-kind support from the university.

CHAIR: What absenteeism and retention figures are available for indigenous students? The figures for other students in the area might also be lower than the statewide figures.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: The attendance of students at Alexandria Park Community School, which has the largest ATSIC representation, is below the State average. However, I am very pleased to say there is an upward trend. Prior to the formation of the Alexandria Park Community School absenteeism was increasing in that area. It went from about 14.2 per cent in 1999 to close on 16 per cent in 2002.

CHAIR: What is the statewide average?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: The statewide average for absences from kindergarten to year 6 is about 4 per cent. The establishment of the Alexandria Park Community School has reversed the trend. By the end of 2003 the absenteeism rate was 11.19 per cent. That is a decrease from 16 per cent to 11 per cent. Absenteeism is continuing to drop as a result of the efforts of the school, the impact of the attendance buses and the support the students are receiving. It is a supportive environment in which the children and the community feel more comfortable. The community must feel engaged with the educational environment. Attendances are up and absences are down, and the performance of the children in the school is increasing according to the testing regime we have introduced.

CHAIR: What about retention rates?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: The retention rate to year 12 is not always as we would like it to be. It is below the State average.

Dr LAMBERT: We can provide more detail later. About two or three students did the final year at Cleveland Street High School. We have 15 final year students this year and we predict that there will be 18 next year. The number is increasing. The retention of Aboriginal students across the State is not good. A significant decrease occurs once the students reach non-compulsory age. The figure at this school was even lower when it was Cleveland Street High School. However, it is picking up now and it is on an incline with regard to attendance and performance rates.

CHAIR: You seem to be painting a reasonably positive picture of the amalgamation of the Redfern, Waterloo, Alexandria and Cleveland Street schools. Is that a fair summation given that it was a controversial issue at the time?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: It is. We are pleased with the direction it is going and we continue to monitor it closely. It seems to be heading in the right direction. Having visited the school, I am very pleased with the dedication and passion of the teachers. Theirs is sometimes a hard task. I appreciate their efforts because they are producing some good results.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I refer to the closure of Redfern Public School. I am a fan of schools and communities. I note that before my time as a member of Parliament the upper House conducted an inquiry into the closure. At that time it was recommended that the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project be tasked with arriving at holistic solutions to disadvantage in the local community. In light of that the Committee recommended that the Government review its decision to close Redfern Public School pending an evaluation by the project of the school in meeting the objectives of community renewal. Do you have any comments about the reasons for closure of the

school, its future or whether the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project is examining reopening of the school?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Reopening the school is not being considered. The current policy is that the reuse of part of the school for educational purposes will be explored, but not necessarily as a school, and that part of the school will also be considered for disposal. The proceeds will assist in defraying the approximately \$7.6 million that has been invested in those inner city schools, particularly the Alexandria Park Community School, to ensure we have a robust educational model for the area and one which is capable of supporting the community's aspirations. I think the results speak for themselves. I understand that—I was not here either—there was considerable community consultation. Although there were some differences at the time, the community now supports the end result and is pleased with its engagement in the Alexandria Park and Darlington schools.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: In that same report the parents and citizens association noted that the school had been allowed to run down so that numbers dropped. There was not an active campaign to encourage more students and, therefore, the objective was achieved. What do you believe were the reasons for the closure?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: I am told that a rigorous community consultation process was conducted. The intervention was the result of poor educational outcomes and community expectations not being met. In my opinion, addressing that in a vigorous way is an appropriate action. The resulting model is proving its worth because of the faith and confidence that the community now has in those schools and the level of engagement of those communities and parents. That is a testament to intervening clearly and decisively. Investing a great deal of money can produce good results. I am led to believe that action was taken because the indicators at the time were poor. I would like to think that we would do that whenever we saw such indicators.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Bill Crews from the Exodus Foundation appeared before the Committee and suggested that a model similar to the program he is running in Ashfield be adopted in Redfern, with an intensive education program. Would you consider working with him and running something like that from the school premises?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: We are always interested talking to community partners who have the same objective, which is ensuring kids feel comfortable about education and safe in the school environment. We are working with a wide range of community partners. Many of them are already working from the Alexandria Park Community School, and we are looking to increase that over time. I am happy to talk with him about what he has in mind. The more people who come into that partnership the better.

Dr LAMBERT: Father O'Reilly, who runs Youth Off the Streets, is already interested in that approach and the principal has had discussions with him about supporting students who are disengaging. The school has a number of programs, links and networks.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Do you run any special education programs for transient students so they are captured for a period? Do you offer them a module program or simply slot them into whatever is going on in the classroom?

Dr LAMBERT: Do you mean as a transition into the school?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I am thinking of children from, for example, Bourke or Brewarrina who come to the area for a short period. Are they slotted into the normal routine or do you provide a discrete service for them?

Dr LAMBERT: The schools in the area are well practiced in that regard. Population mobility in the area is great. Therefore, the teachers are used to differentiating their practice when students join their classes. A number of support staff assess the students to establish their skill level and whether their teacher should differentiate or have a support teacher to work with them. There is not a separate, isolated group, because the movement in and out for some students is quite significant. The school is well practised at catering for difference, and the movement in and movement out.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: It is about making sure that when those children come to the school, there is that assessment process. They may or may not have been in education where they have come from; they might be from interstate. It is literally about asking where they are up to in their educational attainment, so that we are able to therefore tailor specific supports where necessary, whether they be literacy or numeracy supports. There are many programs whereby we can assist them in that regard. If it is a question of whether they are intellectually delayed, or other issues we are going to have to deal with, again we have programs whereby we can tailor to that. It is about tailoring to the individual, and that is certainly what we try to do.

At the end of the day, we are trying to see how they can be placed in an environment that is supportive for them and their educational outcomes, making sure that they do not lag too far behind. Setting up completely parallel programs, which are effectively out-of-class arrangements, means that eventually you have to blend them back into a classroom environment. That, in its own right, can have its transitional problems. If you have programs running that take children out of classrooms and deal with them separately, you almost need to transit them back into the classroom again. There are many transitional points that we have to look at.

The Hon. IAN WEST: You obviously have a very important role to play in the whole process. The issue of literacy and numeracy cannot be overstated, in terms of its future impact on the individual and on society as a whole. With regard to the audits and outcomes of the success of literacy and numeracy programs, and the readiness of, and the ability for, ongoing education, as well as the assessment and tailoring that you spoke about, can you give us more information about how much emphasis is being placed on that area and what measurements of success you have?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: I might ask Dr Lambert to cover the issue of the ELLA test, which is used as one of the primary indicators in identifying children in terms of literacy and the English language, and how we then tailor some of the results of that.

Dr LAMBERT: The school has really only been operating for five terms as the new facility. The report from our assessment experts it is that this year significant gains were made, not only by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students but by all students in the school. There is a relentless effort in that school with regard to literacy and numeracy, and intervening early. The efforts last year were clearly into year 6, because the ELLA test is conducted in year 7. Although, once a student has progressed from the early years, it is much more difficult to close the gap on performance from the State average. This year's indicators with the ELLA test are that the school is moving towards the State average for indigenous students. As in previous schools, it was actually below the indigenous level for the State, which is significantly below the level for all students.

At the moment the indicators are clear that the programs that the school is applying in the early years have made significant gains. The school has reading recovery support and learning difficulties support. With the support of the University of Sydney, the school has just introduced a project called Scaffold to Literacy, a Commonwealth-funded project that has been found to be highly successful in other locations where there are high populations of Aboriginal students. That project is being applied in the middle years because, although the school recognises one has to intervene early, there are still students in that school in the middle years, from years 5 to 8, for whom we really need to lift the outcomes.

The other programs that Andrew mentioned earlier, the schools as community centres program and the parents as teachers program, look at supporting parents, and their support for literacy, numeracy and social skills in the home. All those elements are important. Attendance is also a key factor. Reading Recovery, for example, is the daily program. The repetition that is needed to continue to learn in that program, and understand literacy patterns, means that one has to be there regularly.

The Hon. IAN WEST: In looking at the audits of outcomes, at times we as human beings tend to put the most positive outlook on the outcomes. Is there some methodology in the auditing process to properly assess failure and follow up? I mention that not in a critical way, but in a constructive way, and I look at your submission regarding programs for young people at risk. I sense we are talking about a past event. In your submission you say the college "was involved" in running the community mentoring program, which had the support of the local community. Am I right in assuming that that is no longer occurring, that it is something that happened in the past?

Dr LAMBERT: Mentoring is still very much in the school. Which section are you reading from?

The Hon. IAN WEST: I am referring to the part of the submission that deals with current issues and activities, where you speak about the Eora College works.

Dr LAMBERT: That is a TAFE program.

The Hon. IAN WEST: In the second sentence you say that the college was also involved in running a community mentoring program, which had the support of the local community. Can you explain that sentence?

Dr LAMBERT: No, I cannot. I think it is a grammatical error. I will need to clarify that with the TAFE providers. I will take the question on notice, and get back to you with information about the status of that program. The Department of Education and Training has the most rigorous data analysis available to principals and schools. It enables the department to plot the performance of students right through from year 3 to the Higher School Certificate. It enables it to look, question by question, at the elements in both literacy and numeracy, and the areas in which students are not performing well, both as individuals and as a group. It enables the department to change its practices, including new programs that address specific areas in which the school is not performing.

The Hon. IAN WEST: You say that there are individually tailored assessments?

Dr LAMBERT: Yes.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I wish to clarify the matter that relates to the discussion presented to us last week by the people from Barnardos. They spoke about an intensive program involving four primary school age children, with a fifth one coming on board, around the ages of nine or 10. They spoke about the difficulties with those children because they were suspended from school for periods of time. Sometimes their attendance was only a couple of hours a day and they were excluded, and that exclusion could be for a couple of weeks. They said that the children are placed in risk situations, that they are doing things like hanging off the light rail and throwing rocks at trains, and that this is all exacerbated by the fact that they cannot attend school. Can you comment on the exclusion of students and what you do about it?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: The general issues around school suspensions and behaviour in schools are issues we treat very seriously. Clearly, all students and teachers have a right to be treated fairly and with dignity, and particularly in an environment that is free from disruption, where there is no intimidation, harassment or discrimination. To achieve that, we are looking to achieve high standards of student behaviour in all schools. In the cases where unacceptable behaviour is evident, and the best interests of the school community have been considered, and all the students involved have been considered, it may be necessary to remove a student from a school environment for short periods of time. It is usually referred to as a short or long suspension. Short suspension is in the order of up to four school days, and long suspension is up to 10 school days.

Every effort is made within the school to ensure not only that it is a safe environment but that the behaviour issues are dealt with appropriately. That is where the Aboriginal community liaison officers come into play. When students are suspended, they are able to work with the families, as well as the students, to address how to get them back into school and also what remedial action needs to be taken in terms of behaviour, and whether they are aware of how their behaviour is being perceived. In many instances, it is about talking to the parents about their perceptions of behaviour as well, and trying to make sure the parents understand what standards of behaviour are expected within schools. In the end, it is a sanction, but it is a sanction that is taken very carefully in terms of considering the impact on the individual and on the school community.

A line has to be drawn. Unfortunately, it does mean that suspensions occasionally occur. But I would be pleased to report that some of the statistics on suspensions are certainly heading in the right direction in terms of reduction. There has been a significant reduction in those suspension rates. In term one in 2003 there were 33 short suspensions and four long suspensions. During term one in 2004

there were only two short suspensions and two long suspensions. So you can see that the trend is in the right direction. It is about setting clear standards; it is also about engaging the community in expectations of what the standards are.

There is a very clear document, "Procedures for Suspension", which is currently under review. Shortly we will release an updated version, and the Aboriginal community has been extensively consulted in the formation of that document. Clearly, some parents are unhappy when their children are suspended, but it is necessary to get them to understand the cause and implications of that suspension. Another activity which we are well advanced in achieving is that at the Greens Square school a suspension centre will be opened shortly. The suspension centre is planned and budgeted, and literally we are looking to see that open as quickly as possible. The suspension centre will have the capacity to have those children in an environment where they will hopefully continue to learn but with more intensive oversight, and in so doing making sure that they are not necessarily just hanging out.

CHAIR: What age group does the Greens Square school cater for, and what age group does the suspension centre cater for?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: The suspension centre will be looking at kindergarten to year 12. Greens Square is a behavioural school, catering for the same age group.

Dr LAMBERT: The main target for the suspension centre is year 5 and upwards. We would be applying the same programs to the neighbouring schools, where we have students with patterns of similar behaviour. The key to it is intervening early, and if we can apply behaviour management programs that are far more informed by the special nature of the centre, they will be far more intense and can be applied at the local level, although at the centre it will be largely looking at older students, from year 5 upwards, or age 10 upwards, who have shown these long patterns of behaviour that have led to long suspensions and who are at serious risk of disconnecting from any form of education and training.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Is the department prepared to commit the resources to establish a roll-out in school detention centres?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: I think there is a commitment for 10 suspension centres across the State with specialist support associated with that, which, obviously, can link into appropriate programs.

Dr LAMBERT: This Aboriginal education issue is a key issue in the Aboriginal education review and there will be recommendations about other forms of any school suspension as a possibility and other forms of intervention that will be options for schools other than suspension.

The Hon. IAN WEST: You are talking about appropriate programs in those suspension centres, and I am assuming it has a connection to employment traineeships, apprenticeships, that sort of thing?

Dr LAMBERT: That is right. There are two pathways for students who, clearly, would want to continue in school but whose behaviour is such that they find themselves suspended, or those who effectively feel that school is not the kind of environment in which they want to progress but training or work would be an option then the centre will look at all those different pathways. Its task is to find an appropriate pathway in partnership with the students and parents.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: The suspension centre will start when, next year?

Dr LAMBERT: 2005 Green Square, yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Are their kids under 10 who are suspended for short and long-term suspension?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: My understanding is occasionally there are short-term suspensions, but they try to keep that to a bare minimum.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What happens to those kids?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: I think there is strong liaison with the family to make sure that there is a clear perception about what has caused the need for this and for the family to participate in looking to reduce that activity in future.

Dr LAMBERT: The general practice after a suspension is to have a return to school meeting between the counsellor, the parent and the student where that is possible. If not, the school counsellor will get involved with the student on the return date to the school.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It is more important to do it when the kid is excluded rather than on the return date. Is there anything that happens when the kid is excluded?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Certainly, the home school liaison officer is notified of the suspension. The home school liaison officer's task is to work with the families and to work with the student to go over what was the cause to get some appreciation as to why this has been necessary and to work with particularly the parents so that it becomes, if you like, a joint responsibility to make sure that the child is ready to learn again and is not going to exhibit all the same behaviours that have caused the original suspension. We have dedicated officers out there working in the community with those families.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Are they succeeding in reaching these families, particularly in Redfern and Waterloo? What is the feedback?

Dr LAMBERT: There is, and, clearly, for some families it is far more complex and the levels of success are not as great. But Janine Williams, the Aboriginal liaison student support officer, does a tremendous job. She has good contact with the families right across Redfern and Waterloo. She is held in high regard and has good relationships there. The statistics that Mr Cappie-Wood provided earlier indicate that we have seen a drop in the suspensions.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Is one year enough?

Dr LAMBERT: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It is not necessarily a trend.

Dr LAMBERT: Not yet.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It is good if that sort of pro-active visitation is going on. What about truancy? How do you follow up on truancy?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: It is the same technique in terms of identifying where there is a pattern of truancy, and the home school liaison officer is working with schools to identify that pattern. In so doing the home school liaison officer has undertaken with the Aboriginal student liaison officer how to tackle those issues—is it a repeat process? Is it a new form of behaviour?—to try to work through what is it that is not engaging these kids. If it is truancy it is not a behavioural issue. What is it? Is it that they are having difficulties and they feel that they are not keeping up, hence can we introduce support programs in their literacy or numeracy catch-up programs targeted to their specific needs? Is it other forms? It might be a learning difficulty that is being exhibited that we need to try to focus on. All of this means that we have to do individualised target assessments wherever possible to make sure that we can tailor whatever it is to get these kids back, but we are not always successful.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Is there a resources issue here? There is only one liaison officer.

Dr LAMBERT: No, they work as a team. There are two home school liaison officers and an Aboriginal support liaison officer and they work effectively as a team. The distinction here is that the student's absence, or a student who is not at school does not necessarily mean that the student is a truant. It could be, and in fact a significant number of absence are, a parent-condoned absence. I am

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informed that the truancy level is low. The high absence rate is condoned absence, approved absence from school.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: You would probably say that it is not really a Department of Education and Training issue?

Dr LAMBERT: It is a concern to us.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It is not you who should be resourced to try to deal with that issue?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: I think it is what is the cause of that parent-condoned absence from school, it is try to appreciate that and it is many of the stresses that relate to those individual families and in those circumstances. That is where the interagency work becomes a key critical factor, to be able to say, "We have identified other factors that may now inhibit the capacity to attend school. Can we work across government to help redress some of those on a systemic or an individual basis?"

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: In evidence this morning the Central Sydney Area Health Service talked about a breakfast program for schools. I am aware of one that operates in the area in which I live. Can you comment on it being a positive program? Does that also help in the retention of children at school?

Dr LAMBERT: Yes, generally we think that it does. There are two breakfast programs, one at Darlington and one at Alexander Park. The one at Alexander Park is run by the Red Cross. I am also aware of a number of other schools where breakfast programs operate. The effective ones clearly are those where it is not say the breakfast but the relationship they have with the people serving the breakfast, and that appears to be the case with Darlington and Alexander Park. If you have something in your belly you are ready to learn. We have found in other locations that a lunch provision as well can be enough to maintain interest in school, particularly in communities where having something in your belly may not be guaranteed for that day.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: I have spoken with various parents and community groups engaged in breakfast programs both here and elsewhere and, while generally very strongly supported, part of the community and other agencies have raised the question about whether the breakfast programs will lead potentially to a reduction in parent responsibility. There is a bit of a balancing issue to be kept in mind here. Generally speaking I would say that the breakfast programs have been considerable successful.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: In the case I am thinking of, the principal and the staff of the school were very concerned about the students' lack of attention while they were in school. They could not concentrate because they had come to school without a meal. The program was a positive thing. But I can appreciate the concern that it removes parental responsibility because those parents no longer have to accept that responsibility. There has been a lot of evidence in this inquiry about employment for young people, and I am not talking about projects at Green Square and so on. I know you spoke about one arrangement, but where do they go from there? Are they doing traineeships or apprenticeships? Several people in this inquiry have said that there is concern about employment prospects in the community and in the area, and that is one of the reasons there has been quite a lot of support for rebuilding the Block and doing other things in the Redfern community particularly.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Those issues of pathways through to employment are particularly concerning to us as an education and training system. Continuity is essential. There is the vocational education and training streams that are delivered in schools to high school-aged children, which are there to give them a flavour, if you like, of vocational education and training opportunities. There are issues around hospitality, business management and even agricultural ones as well. The school system offers considerable opportunities for students to experience and participate in vocational education as well. What we do see for those who do stay on is that there is considerable take-up of that. We would certainly like to strengthen the vocational education and training capabilities within schools. It is about keeping those children engaged and motivated so that they can see that even if they do vocational education and training schemes in their secondary education that they can see some meaning for that and they can see the job opportunities.

We cannot generate the job opportunities but what we can do is prepare them. We work with a wide range of agencies, Federal, State, local, private industry, et cetera, to give those children who are doing vocational education and training in their secondary school work placement, work experience opportunities so that they can see the links between what they are learning and a real job environment. We have to say that for many Aboriginal kids that linkage is not always clear and evident. We have to continue to reinforce that. There are a number of programs available to us and we employ those programs so that those children, be they Aboriginal or otherwise, can see what job opportunities are and the benefit of education and how that can lead them through to work and employment.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Do you think there is a good level of co-ordination and co-operation between the local, State and Federal programs? There have been comments in this inquiry that there is not good co-ordination between government and non-government organisations that run services and programs in the area. Do you think there is good co-ordination insofar as what happens with educational prospects and in future for these young people?

Dr LAMBERT: The field officers in government and non-government agencies have a very good relationship from a school's perspective. Connect Redfern, the school as community centre, for example, has been operating for quite a considerable time and has a number of links with various government and non-government agencies. I think what you are talking about is more into the training level, how we can have better connections there.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: And perhaps just a general comment about co-ordination between the three levels of government and the non-government organisations?

Dr LAMBERT: We can also do with better co-ordination. Certainly, part of the role of senior managers within the various agencies is to improve that. We are probably in the early stages, but I know I sit with other directors within the region around the table and we are committed to better co-ordination. Certainly, the partnership Pathways to Prevention is a clear example of where we have good relationships across those agencies, and that it with Commonwealth Government, State Government and local government.

I can also tell you we have already been approached by a private provider in the building centre who would like to occupy part of Alexandria Park to involve some of our students in training, and that is a connection with a private provider. We are open to that. I think probably what you see from the range of programs is that we are consistently looking at whether—government or non-government—the government will work with those levels. It is up to regional directors such as me, through the senior managers, to get the co-ordination better, but at the local level and the field level the relationship is good, and from our perspective the outcomes for the students and the families are the most important thing.

CHAIR: In talking about that we did have a question also about the involvement of the department in the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project. Do you have any comments on its effectiveness? I guess that also brings in the human services review, which the partnership project has organised.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: I think that the review is something which we would certainly be looking forward to because I think many people here and elsewhere have commented that there is a considerable amount of investment, a considerable number of co-ordinators, and it is about how to make sure that that process works as smoothly and as effectively as possible. In terms of the overall strategy there, obviously we, as with other government agencies, are awaiting some of the final results of the considerable amount of work that has been put into that, and discussing with the community what the Redfern-Eveleigh-Darlington [RED] scheme would potentially look like at the end. So we are awaiting those particular results, and we have been happy to participate in that process to date.

CHAIR: The other major question that we gave you in writing and we have not covered related to the submission which expressed concern about the effects of the riot on indigenous schoolchildren in particular and the way they were reacting—they had the feeling that racist

comments were directed at them and so on. Can you tell us whether you are aware of that and whether local schools in the areas have reported any such problems?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Phil might like to comment, but my understanding is that as a direct result of the riot counsellors across the region have mobilised to be able to support the schools and their teachers in those schools to be able to make sure that if there was any adverse reaction to that they were capable of dealing with it.

Dr LAMBERT: I contacted the schools the day after just to check on both the quality of support we were giving them and also if there were signs of disorder or concern. Following this question I have asked the question were there any indicators, and the answer is no. I guess the other comment I would make is that schools are well practised in dealing with major incidents and so are the counsellors, particularly where there is potential for racist responses—we have certainly experienced that with some global events—but the feedback I had from the schools was that there were no noticeable expressions of racism as a result of the riot, to our knowledge.

CHAIR: Our last question is what would you like to see come out of our inquiry? Do not laugh!

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Perhaps that was a small laugh of sympathy because it is a serious question that actually requires a very serious answer. There is no doubt that the complexity of questions and issues affecting the whole community, not just the Aboriginal community in this area, are ones that were already attracting government attention and, as such, I think the riot and the subsequent publicity of that has only heightened the need to arrive at some answers: some of those medium and some of those very long-term. We would be looking, from our education and training perspective, to be able to get some recognition that the education and training system is responsive to the needs and that some considerable intervention action has already taken place to make sure we can best serve the Aboriginal community and the broader community in these areas.

I would perhaps finish on what I started with, and that is to note that the Aboriginal education review across the State, with its very extensive consultative process, is about to be finalised, and the recommendations for that, in terms of both a systemic response and the capacity to individually cater for the local differences—because, again, it is not one size fits all. It is about saying what we are going to do to meet an individual's, a school's, a community's needs and to make sure that there is flexibility in the system to be able to cater for that, but that there is systemic support for whatever the changes are going to be to make sure that we have the Aboriginal education outcomes for that community across the State equal to that of the rest of the community. That is a long road and we are ready for it.

CHAIR: When you say "about to be finalised", is it possible to give us any indication of a date or when the results of the review might be public?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: I understand the Minister will be receiving recommendations from the review group in the next several weeks. But the answer to his response to that I think will have to wait his consideration of the recommendations, which he has not seen yet.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming. I think you have got a couple of things on notice. For factual sorts of things we normally allow 10 days but they are probably not that difficult in your case.

(The witnesses withdrew)

KRISTINA KENEALLY, honourable member for Heffron, before the Committee:

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: My name is Kristina Keneally, I am the member for Heffron. I am appearing at this inquiry as the member for Heffron in the New South Wales Parliament, representing my constituents. I was elected the member for Heffron in March 2003. The main point I would like this inquiry to take away from my submission today is that the suburbs of Redfern and Waterloo, whilst they share a number of problems, are also quite different in many respects. The suburb of Waterloo is located entirely within the seat of Heffron and, to that extent, my comments here today will be largely restricted to Waterloo.

I note that often in the public mind Waterloo gets tacked on to Redfern as if they are one community. For example, I recall that a journalist interviewing me about the Redfern-Eveleigh-Darlington [RED] strategy asked why the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project provided translators in Russian and Chinese at the community consultations. When I explained that there were significant groups of Russian and Chinese people in the area she was surprised and told me she thought that only Aboriginal people lived there. I note that much of the testimony in this inquiry to date has focused on Redfern, the Block, the recent riot and other issues in the Redfern area. I think it is important that the inquiry understands that whilst these issues are crucial they are not necessarily Waterloo's issues.

Waterloo is one of the most disadvantaged areas in New South Wales. It has a high concentration of public housing, disproportionate representations in the community of people with mental illness, drug and alcohol addiction, single-parent families and the elderly, dependence on income support for subsistence, and lack of affordable housing. These issues do not grab the public's attention; they will rarely prompt a news headline or hours of discussion on talkback radio. These are the age-old issues of equity, social justice, advantage and disadvantage. One of the most defining features of Waterloo is a high concentration of public housing. Heffron ranks fifth amongst the 93 State electoral districts for concentration of public housing, and in Waterloo 76 per cent of residential property is public housing.

Let me be clear: public housing is not necessarily negative, but public housing has changed. It is no longer primarily housing for the working poor, it is now housing for the welfare poor. Public housing is no longer the first step on the way up and out of poverty. Too often it is now housing as a last resort for people with mental illness, the elderly, the disabled and the drug and alcohol addicted. This leads to situations where the Department of Housing is no longer a provider and manager of property, it is becoming a social welfare agency. Significant social services are required to support the residents. The Department of Housing is recognising this shift and is taking steps to meet the needs of the changing population. But the high concentration of public housing in Waterloo means the need is great.

This also leads to a very unhealthy social mix with a high concentration of people who face significant challenges and problems. I can speak generally about a family I know in the area who are raising their three children and living in public housing. They try to teach their kids to respect themselves and others, they ensure their kids go to school, and they have to cope with drug dealing on the street corner, mentally ill people causing disturbance late at night, and last year a murder in their neighbourhood. I do not mean to portray Waterloo as a dangerous and difficult place; there is a resiliency in the community, a community spirit that exists. I have been in the high-rise towers, I have stood on the street corners holding mobile offices, and I have doorknocked the area. I have never felt threatened, I have always felt welcomed. The people of Waterloo who face enormous daily challenges want a healthier community; they want a better social mix; they want a safer community. I welcome this inquiry and I hope that with the co-operation of the local community we can create a healthier and vibrant Waterloo.

CHAIR: I think you have answered several of our first group of questions.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I tried to address them. I am happy to flesh anything out.

CHAIR: Probably different members of the Committee will ask them and sometimes they throw up all kinds of side issues and different questions as well. In a sense you have probably implied the sorts of issues that your constituents raise with you when they come to see you, but do you want to

say any more about that? We have asked you specifically in that first group of questions about the Redfern-Waterloo Community Council, which you served on.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: In regard to the reasons that residents contact my office, largely the primary reason is public housing, and I would like to expand on that in a moment. I would like to say generally that Waterloo residents do not contact my office about one of the regular issues the rest of my constituents raise with me: they do not contact me about speed humps, trees that need trimming or noise from trucks and traffic. I am sure this is not because these things are resolved in Waterloo, it is because the needs they face are much greater. As the local member I know we will have achieved something in Waterloo when the most common complaint I receive from the area is traffic on Elizabeth Street.

I would like to speak a bit about the public housing and the needs of that community. When public housing residents contact my office housing is just one of the many problems they bring with them. They bring the challenges of single parenting, children having problems with school, maybe a partner or a family member in gaol, domestic violence, drug and alcohol addiction, they are elderly, the mentally ill, or perhaps they live next door to somebody who has these problems. As one of my staff members said, it is often a lot to take in in a 30-minute phone call; you just feel overwhelmed. I might note that both my staff members handle Department of Housing constituents as it is just too great to ask one person to handle all these cases. The residents bring with them complex and compound problems. They also bring with them paperwork that indicates they have already been to a range of services and agencies on the ground. So our office is often the place of last resort for the really hard cases.

There are often multiple agencies involved with these constituents; their lives are chaotic. They get differing bits of advice, they get references and referrals, appointments, forms, reporting requirements and it often just causes more chaos and confusion in their lives. When they come to our office it is often difficult to sort out what problems they have adequate support for and what problems actually do need to be comprehensively addressed. We also find that when people come to us from housing estates in Waterloo they might come to us seeking a transfer, when in fact their current property or their current living conditions are not really the problem that they are facing. I suspect that some people seek transfers as a way of escaping from their problems, but those problems just follow them to their new properties.

CHAIR: You said that they often come to you with a mass of paperwork, often from a number of services. One of the issues that has been raised over and over relates to the large number of agencies and services that operate in Redfern and Waterloo. Another issue relates to how effective the co-ordination between both government and non-government agencies has been. Are you suggesting that your constituents have a problem?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: It is a challenge for those constituents who have chaotic lives. They often lack coping skills and they have poor relationship skills. If you made an appointment for next Tuesday at 10.00 a.m. you could not count on the fact that they would be there. Sometimes they are semi-literate or unable to comprehend English, either in written or in verbal form. Often the interaction that they have within a multiple number of agencies confuses them and compounds the problems that they already have. Ms Tanya Plibersek, the Federal member for Sydney, called in her submission for "wraparound services". I support a one-stop-shop type of service where one agency co-ordinates the support services that a person or family might need. I include in that the fact that the Department of Housing would need to be involved with it to some extent.

As I said, residents come to us with housing problems, but housing is just one of the many problems that they face. I have noticed in the area a lack of services for elderly homeless men. Often they are the forgotten group in the Waterloo area and, to a certain extent, in Redfern, Surry Hills and surrounding areas. They are least likely to engage in services and often they are isolated. They are often not in public housing but in boarding houses or they are squatting somewhere. The Federal Government provides aged care packages and there are a significant number of aged care packages in the Waterloo area. However, those packages do not address the needs of those men. For example, Mercy Arms, a service in my electorate, is providing an unfunded outreach service.

It is trying to connect with them; it is trying to get them into transitional housing, which that service has; and it is trying to set them up in some form of supported accommodation or other type of accommodation and provide them with living skills and social interaction. When I refer to elderly men I am talking about 50-year-old to 60-year-old men who have been living on the streets all their lives. Research shows that homeless people age at a faster rate. So a man who is aged 50 and who has been homeless or transitional all his life probably has the physical characteristics of a 70-year-old. These men are not likely to work again, so traditional homeless programs to get them back into employment will not work for them. There is a real need to address the needs of that group.

CHAIR: You referred to the fact that Mercy Arms is trying to do something for one group of people. We have had numerous calls from the Aboriginal community for Aboriginal specific services. We have also heard a lot about the large number of government and non-government services. It is incredibly difficult for the people that you have described to find their way through a minefield of services. The services are there but it is hard for people who do not have language skills or who are suffering from a mental illness. Would you expand on the one-stop-shop? Could it be built at the housing offices that exist in the Block in Waterloo?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: It possibly could be. The department has been trying to have a shift in its focus. It does not just want to be a landlord; it wants to be a provider of social support. It recognises, particularly in that area, that it needs to operate a social support model. I understand—and I would have to double check on this—that there are models like that operating in Victoria. A service based within public housing would be a welcome thing. For example, Mercy Arms, which has worked with the Department of Housing, provides some aged care packages. Residents who are all on an aged care package live on the same floor in a hostel-type arrangement. They have their own units but they have a common living area.

Mercy Arms goes to that floor and provides morning teas, afternoon teas and better and more co-ordinated services, as all those people are living in close proximity. It also develops social networks and social interaction. On the issue of co-ordination I know from talking to youth services and to women's services in the area that they often feel frustrated about the claim that the services need to be better co-ordinated or that they need to work together. They feel that the funding process requires them to compete against each other and to justify their existence. That is not what they want to do, but that is how it is set up. They think that that hinders co-operation and co-ordination.

CHAIR: Is that because of short-term funding for specific projects, contracts and so on?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: That is correct.

The Hon. IAN WEST: And they are competing for the same pool of money.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Yes. Two youth services might be loath to share the type of work that they are doing in, say, an interagency meeting because the next year they will both be applying for the same pool of money.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: When your constituents approach you about other problems where do you go and what do you do for them?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: First, we often have to allocate a significant chunk of our time to an initial interview. That can be anywhere from 45 minutes to two hours. That can often also involve the bringing in of translators. My local member's office obviously has contacts with a number of services in the area, such as Mercy Arms, the Shop, the Factory and Redfern Legal Service. One of my electorate officers was a domestic violence worker in Waterloo. We have contact with number of services.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Are they non-government services [NGOs]?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: No. In some instances we have worked with the Department of Community Services or the Attorney General's Department, particularly if it is regarding apprehended violence orders or child custody and access issues. My office probably spends more time with agencies in that area than it does in any other part of my electorate. We meet more frequently

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with the Department of Housing and with Redfern police. I am more often at Alexandria Park Community School than I am at any of my other schools. So we interact quite regularly with a number of non-government agencies and government services.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: When you have had cause to use the Department of Community Services what has been your experience and what has been the feedback from that department?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: We have had only limited reason to use the Department of Community Services in the Waterloo area. I can think of only one case, and that was a situation in which the school was involved. At the end of the day the school handled the complaint more than my office did.

CHAIR: Was that because of the demographic profile?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I would say it was largely because of the demographic profile. I would have to double check, but nearly 28 per cent of the population is elderly. We have an ageing population in Waterloo. By and large the people who come to see me are either elderly people or single mothers who are experiencing domestic violence, or who are trying to escape domestic violence.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: So in summary, the major area of concern would be public housing?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Other than that you seem to go mostly to private sector organisations to get help for these people?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I would not call them private sector organisation. They are funded either by the Commonwealth Government or by the State Government.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: They are State funded. I am trying to establish whether you find that your first port of call is government departments, or whether you are using these agencies. It seems that you are using these agencies.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I would say that we are using both. The first thing that we do after an initial interview is speak to the Department of Housing. As you can appreciate, the lives of these people are not only chaotic; often we do not get the full story about a range of problems. We do not know whether they have a complaint about a neighbour or whether they are requesting a transfer. We need to go and talk to the Department of Housing. We get them to sign a waiver form and we access their records so that we can determine what situation they are in and what sort of help we can provide them. So the first port of call has always been the Department of Housing. We have a good relationship with the Waterloo Department of Housing.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What do you believe the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project does?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Could you expand on that question? It is doing a number of things.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What are the important things that it is doing? What ongoing work is it doing?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: My experience in community work includes not just my parliamentary experience but working for St Vincent de Paul and working with disadvantaged communities in the United States of America. I have not come across such a comprehensive whole-of-government or whole-of-community approach to community renewal. I think the project is right in trying to take in all aspects—the built environment, employment, human services, community safety and infrastructure development. It is truly a whole-of-government approach. But that is not to say that

the project is perfect. I will address some of those challenges. I believe that the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project focuses on a myriad of challenges in the communities at Redfern and Waterloo.

Real efforts have been made to engage in and understand the challenges faced by communities in Waterloo, particularly Russian and Chinese communities and particularly elderly communities. Representatives of those communities have been involved in forums and are involved in the community council. My constituents have conveyed to me views such as, "This is the best thing that the Government is trying to do in this area. The Government has finally recognised that these communities are not sustainable and that the project offers hope." Some of the challenges include things that could be overcome. Some of them may just be part and parcel of this type of community renewal work. The project has not always communicated effectively and efficiently with the local community.

There were difficulties early on with the logistics of distribution. I know that they worked hard to overcome those problems. I think an ongoing challenge for the project is how to communicate with this community. I also think attention should be paid to consultation and to producing tangible results. In a partnership project consultation and community meetings and forums are incredibly important. Sometimes you want to say, "Just get on with it." The people that I represent feel that way too. What adds to that anxiety and tension about wanting to see results is the knowledge that the funding was originally committed for only three years. So people in the community felt that in three years the project would be over and all they had done was hold some community forums.

That is not the case. I know that project funding has been extended for a further two years, but I think everyone involved in the project understands that it will take a long-term commitment to resolve some of the issues in Redfern and Waterloo. Many people I speak to in the community believe that it is going to take a minimum of 10 years. I would like to see a commitment of any significance from the Federal Government to be part of the project and I would like to see a commitment that extends funding for the project over a significant period of time.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: One of the things that you mentioned at the start of your submission to the inquiry today was that there is a difference between Redfern and Waterloo and that an overarching fact is that there has been more emphasis on the Aboriginal community rather than other groups, particularly in Waterloo. You mentioned that a lot of your constituents are Chinese and Russian, or people who need aged services more than anything else. Can you expand on what services you think are needed, apart from the existing ones, to provide services, particularly for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I might put that question together with how Redfern and Waterloo differ from each other because there are some similarities. I have addressed some of this in my submission, but I will point out again that Waterloo is a pocket of disadvantage surrounded by advantaged communities and that even Redfern relies on more advantage indicators than Waterloo does and that the high concentration of public housing—not to beat a dead horse—creates a situation where there is a disproportionate representation of people who have complex problems. The residents of Waterloo see themselves as distinct from Redfern, and it is important to note that even if there may or may not be a number of real distinctions, the people who live in Waterloo certainly see themselves as distinct from Redfern. For example, one of the youth services has told me that young people in Waterloo do not mix with young people in Redfern.

Their view is that the mega youth service that tried to cover the whole area would not necessarily work. It will be interesting to see if people in Waterloo make use of the Redfern Community Centre. It is a fantastic new facility and I hope they do, but I think it will be an interesting demographic to track in terms of who is using the Redfern centre. The residents of Waterloo are culturally and linguistically diverse. As was pointed out, 41 per cent of the population is from a non-English-speaking background and there are some significant Russian and Chinese communities.

The Russian and Chinese communities are quite resourceful. They have their own informal support systems such as groups that meet to socialise, play cards or sew. They have a sewing group and they have organised their own cooking classes. They are working with the Department of Housing to set up a community garden adjacent to Turunga and Matavai, which are the really tall towers that you see when you are driving around the city. I have noticed with these groups that, although they

might have the challenge of being from a non-English-speaking background and might be quite diverse, they often have quite good family and social support that some other residents in that area do not have. Their cultural groups and their family support systems are stronger. They are also quite able to advocate for themselves.

I would note that the Russian community—and to a lesser extent the Chinese community—can be difficult to tap into from the outside, many not just due to the language barrier but often, particularly the older members of the community, have brought with them a distrust of officialdom and of government so they do not attend the mobile offices that I hold in the area and they do not come to community forums easily. For example, Russian constituents who contact my office will only speak to me; they will not speak to my staff. This is not because my staff members are difficult people. It is because they have a belief that only I can be trusted; any other level of government below the person in charge is corruptible or that their confidentiality could not be ensured.

In terms of whether their needs are being adequately met, I think that is something that will come out of the human services review, but I would note that they are fairly resourceful communities, with strong social support. In particular, the characteristics I have described about the tightness of those communities and perhaps the distrust of government officials need to be kept in mind when extending services or support to those communities.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Given that you have also mentioned that your office deals a lot with domestic violence issues, do you have any comment about existing services in relation to domestic violence? A comment has been made to the inquiry in terms of the Block and Aboriginal communities that children, and women in particular, need a crisis centre or an Aboriginal women's refuge. Do you wish to comment on the existing services and other services that need to be there to support women in domestic violence situations and the children, who ultimately are caught up in this process?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I do not mean to paint this as a rosy picture; it is not, but in some senses the domestic violence situations are the ones that we have been most easily able to resolve because the services have been quite good and because the Department of Housing has been quite good. I think of one woman who had to be transferred out of the area because her husband had come back from out of State and was in the Waterloo area again. It was a very messy situation. She had both good support from the local women's services and the Department of Housing worked quite quickly to get her out of the area and into a three-bedroom house. Those of you who have dealt with the Department of Housing would know that it is not easy to find that type of accommodation quickly. I have to say that those situations have not been the big challenges.

The big challenges have been the people who are suffering mental illness and the great need for support that they have and the problems their neighbours experience—problems often of anti-social behaviour in Department of Housing accommodation and being able to deal with anti-social people who are causing trouble with their neighbours or problems about elderly people who are sick and isolated. Those are much harder to resolve than the domestic violence situations.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: A witness who appeared this morning on behalf of the Police Association gave an example of domestic violence. That witness stated that other agencies, such as DOCS or areas dealing with mental health problems, are open strictly from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. and that between 5.00 p.m. and 9.00 a.m. the next morning there is no way that police can make contact with groups or organisations that can assist them with the person they are dealing with.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I understand that concern and it is a concern that I have heard as well, both from services and from constituents. I am hopeful that the human services review will highlight that situation and we might learn something from the human services review on how we can resolve that, but I would be happy to take any recommendations from this inquiry as well.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: What are the main issues you find in trying to refer people who have mental health problems on to appropriate services?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: The challenge is that the people who are well enough to live in the community but perhaps not well enough to cope completely on their own and they need

somewhere to live where somebody is looking out for them, but they do not need to be in any sort of psychiatric facility. The lack of that space has been quite frustrating and the demand on Department of Housing staff to try to use provide that sort of support when that is not what they have necessarily being trained to do or is part of their role makes it difficult for them as well. That cuts across Waterloo and to a large extent it cuts across probably all Department of Housing, and that is the challenge for the Department of Housing in the future, but I would say in Waterloo that has been one of my office's biggest frustrations.

CHAIR: So is it that community mental health teams and so on are not adequately resourced to cope or are they simply just not around when they are needed, literally, because problems arise in the middle of the night?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: If I had my preference I would like to see hostel-like accommodation or some sort of support services on site in the Department of Housing. Community health teams do a good job under incredibly demanding circumstances and that is not my complaint. My complaint is that in some senses these people need someone or some people watching out for them or helping them at various points in their lives. The intensity of their problem waxes and wanes and if we are going to ask residents of public housing to live next-door to these people, then we need to provide these people with the support that they require.

CHAIR: We have two major areas left. We have not yet talked about policing strategies and resources. We have talked a lot about housing but we have not asked you to expand on your specific comments about the need for more affordable housing in your area.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I would like to talk about affordable housing first. It is one of the most crucial issues facing Waterloo. The average price in Waterloo is already over \$500,000 yet 50 per cent of the families in the area live on \$399 a week or less. You can see right there that it is going to be very difficult for those people in public housing to make a transition to private housing, either rental or to purchase.

One of the principles the community has supported in the RED strategy is to facilitate a diverse sustainable social and residential mix, and that includes affordable housing, and to maintain public housing. Without plans for affordable housing what will naturally occur is gentrification and development of expensive housing alongside a disadvantaged population in public housing. That means that there will be no middle-class in Waterloo or most likely in Redfern. This creates an unhealthy social mix. It means that geographically you have collocated communities without any social cohesion. You have the haves and the have nots, the advantaged and the disadvantaged.

It would also mean that people who work locally, such as teachers, nurses, police, emergency services, social services, et cetera, would not be able to live locally. I believe the key issues the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project and the community need to address are: what does a healthy social mix mean? How will we know when we have achieved it? What are the key indicators? Are there communities that can demonstrate it that we can point to and say, "That is a healthy social mix" and how do we emulate those? Also, what does affordable housing mean? Is it subsidised home purchases? Is it changes to building design and regulation that allow development of less expensive homes? Is it a land bank or a levy for councils to develop affordable homes or is it subsidised rent or rent control?

It could be a mixture of any of those things. I note that the ministerial directions paper for the metropolitan strategy, which was released last month, addresses similar issues. It says that renewal or regeneration programs like the RED strategy need to retain affordable housing and support socially and economically challenged communities. The directions paper also asks whether the cost of building homes is made higher than necessary through excessive local standards and explores whether State environmental planning policy 70 should be extended to give local government the flexibility to increase the supply of affordable housing. My short answer to both of those questions is yes. I cannot predict what standards the new City of Sydney council will adopt for residential buildings in Redfern and Waterloo but I believe the council has the opportunity to ensure that those homes are built inexpensively and sold at a lower cost.

I also support Councillor Tony Pooley's view that if ever there was a community that should have affordable housing, it is Redfern and Waterloo. The nearby Green Square town centre has an affordable housing component of 3 per cent. Council has not yet approved that master plan, and I would have preferred a higher component. But, as is, the Green Square community will most likely comprise entirely people from the upper middle class. This is not necessarily a desirable outcome but it will not create significant social problems in terms of social cohesion or requirements for government support. However, there is a real risk that Redfern and Waterloo will have two very distinct groups: the quite advantaged and the quite disadvantaged. This would mean two disparate communities, with no sense of interaction, no sense of community and no sense of social cohesion or upward mobility.

My preference, as I have stated in my submission, is for a significant component of affordable housing that is inexpensive enough for lower middle income families to purchase and maintain without significant government subsidy and to allow these families to get on the housing ladder in the property market. Home ownership provides stability for family. In Sydney, in particular, it provides significant investment that ensures a family's financial future. It creates roots in the community and encourages people to get involved in the community. It offers upward mobility. If families have to rely on significant government subsidy to purchase a home they are usually saddled with maintenance costs that they cannot afford. So they rely on more government subsidy or the property deteriorates. But if a family is able to purchase a home they can afford and can afford to maintain, they will gain a valuable asset and get on the housing ladder in the property market. But my preference may not resonate with the community. It is important that the project and the community work together toward a shared understanding of what we mean when we talk about a healthy social mix and affordable housing.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What do you mean by "affordable housing"? It never works. You build something that is affordable in the beginning, it slots straight into the property market and ceases to be affordable. That is the problem with that concept.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I would not say that it never works. I have tried to explain that there are different ways of delivering affordable housing, some of which have been demonstrated to work in overseas models and elsewhere in Australia and some of which have been demonstrated not to work. I think the community and the project should discuss this issue. To date, all that has been bandied about is the rather general idea that affordable housing is desirable. For example, councils—I am not thinking of any particular council—require houses to be built with copper pipes not plastic pipes and that houses have a certain number of electrical outlets. Those standards requirements automatically create expensive housing. Perhaps we have already raised the bar too high. We should look at other things, such as the first home buyers grant and no stamp duty for first home buyers. Are there other ways of providing affordable housing, particularly in the inner-city area? Perhaps one way would be to create a bank of public housing that is set aside for middle income workers.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: But then it is public housing.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Perhaps it could be a model whereby people work towards purchasing the property. Perhaps it could be set at public housing market rates so that people are paying rent and producing income for the Department of Housing. A number of options need to be explored. At the end of the day, if we do not have a middle class in Redfern and Waterloo it will be a very unhealthy, sad area, with haves and have-nots. Furthermore, people will have to travel significant distances to work in the inner city. Look at what has happened in the United States with the welfare to work program. People were required to travel for about an hour to work, which created other problems, such as children not being cared for and school truancy. I do not want to see school teachers, nurses and firefighters forced to travel for an hour and a half to work in the inner city. There must be some way of providing housing for the middle class, particularly in Redfern and Waterloo.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: But you do not have any answers.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I have put a few suggestions on the table. I suggest you might like to read Professor Howard Husock's book, *America's Trillion-Dollar Housing Mistake—The Failure of American Housing Policy*, in which he covers a number of ways in which communities in

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the United States, particularly in Baltimore, have provided the sort of affordable housing that I am talking about.

The Hon. IAN WEST: What policing issues do your constituents raise with you?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I went back and checked my records and found that we have had only 12 interactions with Waterloo constituents in the time since my election about direct public safety or law enforcement issues. They were largely concerned about allegations of drug dealing and other drug activity or about safety in their homes, particularly elderly woman who might live alone. One woman came to a mobile office that I stationed on the corner of Raglan and Elizabeth streets and expressed concern that there had been an attempted break-in at her house. I reported the incident to the local area commander and within a week he had sent an officer to her house, who did a safety audit and gave the lady his direct number so that she could ring if she had any further concerns. I have a lot of respect for Superintendent Smith and the crime commander Darren Bennett. I have found them to be very accessible. They have always responded promptly to the cases that I have brought to their attention. They have sent people to my constituents' homes and they have always been accessible to my constituents.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Have you been involved in PACT meetings with the local LAC?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I have been involved in PACT meetings. I am disappointed that we have not had a PACT meeting for a while. I understand it is because the honourable member for Bligh has not been able to make it. We have one scheduled for 5.30 this afternoon.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Can you give us any advice about the school-based traineeships? I understand that there are seven Aboriginal students at Alexandria Park Community School. Can you advise the Committee about the effectiveness of those traineeships, how they are working and their future development?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: To be honest, I probably cannot. I have met the students—I visited with the Minister and also on my own—and spoken with them. Most of them are enjoying the traineeships. One of the girls told me that she really liked getting her wages—it is a bit of money in her pocket. That is fair enough.

The Hon. IAN WEST: It is pretty fundamental.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Exactly. Another girl I spoke to had been considering whether to stay in her apprenticeship and, after talking it over with the school guidance counsellor, decided to do so because she would be leaving school next year and she needed some form of reference, and some sort of work history will give her an extra advantage. In terms of the overall success of the program—I understand that it is still a fairly new program; the school is a fairly new school—it would probably be better to ask the Department of Education and Training about success rates.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I was going to ask the department but I missed my opportunity. I will follow it up.

CHAIR: You have probably answered this question in part, but what would you like to see come out of this inquiry?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I would like to see six things come out of this inquiry. I would like to see a recommendation—I did not speak about this but it is in my submission—that the project develop a case co-ordination framework to enable agencies to manage more effectively high-risk children and young people who live in Redfern and Waterloo. I would like to see a recommendation that the project, in partnership with the community, develop a shared understanding of the following three issues: what is meant by a better social mix; what we mean by the concept of affordable housing; and what is the most appropriate way of housing and supporting people with mental illness or drug and alcohol addiction. I would like to see a recommendation that the project be supported with funding for a significant period so as to give the community and services an assurance that we are working towards long-term solutions. I would like to see a recommendation that the

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project remain with the Premier's Department, for only there does it have the clout to motivate agencies and co-ordinate their work.

To some extent the next two recommendations may be jumping ahead of the human services review, but I would like to see the inquiry recommend that the project take the lead in exploring the use of collocating back office resources, such as administration, taxation and so on, so that services can focus on service delivery. I would also like to see the provision of a one-stop shop or some sort of wrap-around services so that people need to deal only with one agency at a time. Finally, I would like to see the inquiry give some prominence to the problems faced in Waterloo in terms of the high concentration of public housing, the disproportionate representations in the community of the mentally ill, the elderly and the drug and alcohol dependent, and the lack of affordable housing. These are age-old issues of equity, social justice, advantage and disadvantage. This inquiry has the capacity to highlight these issues, and I urge you to do so.

CHAIR: Thank you.

(The witness withdrew)

PATRICIA MONICA BARONE, Director, Community Living, City of Sydney, Town Hall House, Kent Street, Sydney, on a former affirmation, re-examined, and

JOHN DAVID CHARLES MAYNARD, Community Safety Officer, City of Sydney, Town Hall House, Kent Street, Sydney, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Do you wish to make a statement?

Ms BARONE: Thank you for the invitation to give evidence on behalf of the City of Sydney. The Community Living Department is responsible for many of the community services provided by the city and a portion of the social planning. My responsibilities include participating in many of the programs undertaken by the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project, as well as the services run independently from the partnership, such as the Redfern Community Centre. John Maynard is responsible for the Redfern-Waterloo safety plan. The City of Sydney, formerly the South Sydney Council, was the lead agency in the preparation of that plan for the partnership project.

Last night council adopted a submission to this inquiry. That will be forwarded as soon as possible. We hope that the Committee will accept the late submission understanding that at the time the inquiry was announced and submissions requested the former City of Sydney and South Sydney Council were in the process of being amalgamated and there was no elected council to formally consider a submission. In summary, council's submission recognises that the partnership project is important and recommends that it continue for at least a further 10 years. The council submission also stresses the importance of engaging the general community and the business community in the process of improving our community. The Lord Mayor has also asked that I advise the Committee that in recent weeks many groups and individuals have expressed to her the difficulty they face in a community that is divided on many issues. The Lord Mayor has given an undertaking to bring groups together and to facilitate discussion and community meetings to help resolve these issues.

CHAIR: Ms Barone, I know that you previously worked for South Sydney Council. What about you, Mr Maynard?

Mr MAYNARD: I also worked at South Sydney Council.

CHAIR: What do you see as the priority issues for the council in Redfern and Waterloo?

Ms BARONE: I am a representative on the senior officers group and the drug and alcohol task force. We also have representatives on the family and children's task force and are involved with the youth task force. We have developed the Redfern Community Centre and are responsible for the safety plan. The council is also the lead agency for the development of a facilities plan. However, the council agreed to that on the understanding that it would undertake that planning after the human services review had been completed. We needed to know the results of the review to undertake that project. We have been involved in almost every aspect of the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project, including being consulted about and involved with the development of the RED strategy.

CHAIR: What are the priority issues?

Ms BARONE: The council is involved in and identifies a number of priority issues. Of course, council has a role in the development of infrastructure. As a consequence it has committed \$8 million to the Redfern street upgrade. It has also developed the new Redfern Community Centre. It will be involved in the development and improvement of a variety of community facilities. The council sees development and support of the local business community as an important aspect of its role in the area. To that end, the development of a retail strategy has commenced and a retail forum will be held with local businesses. Those issues are covered by other areas of the council. The Community Living Department's priority is to improve and increase the range of community services available in the area. We have a particular focus on children and we are developing our focus on youth. We have also improved the quality of the services we provide to the aged. Safety is an important community issue and a concern, so we have a large role in that area. We also provide

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libraries and other services. Our priorities are the infrastructure and the provision of the right services at the appropriate level to our community.

CHAIR: Will the changes to local government boundaries have a positive or negative impact on Redfern-Waterloo residents? Where will your office be located?

Ms BARONE: So far the changes to the boundaries have resulted in huge benefits. For example, the city was able to allocate a full-time place manager to the Redfern-Waterloo area. That means we now have another senior resource person who can work closely with residents to ensure that waste, cleaning, graffiti removal services and so are provided. Those services are monitored much more closely because we have additional resources. We also have more financial resources to apply and there is more expertise. The Community Living Department is twice as big as it was and many more people can put their minds to the tasks at hand. My department is based at Redfern. We are moving staff from the City of Sydney area into that building so that all the staff working directly with the community are in Redfern, which is the heart of the local government area.

CHAIR: Are there any negatives?

Ms BARONE: We have had two boundary changes in the past two years. Of course, that takes attention away a little from the community; we must be a little inwardly focused to resolve amalgamation issues. That is about all.

CHAIR: Some people might say it is more likely that the needs of one area will be overlooked in such a big outfit.

Ms BARONE: I am not experiencing that. If anything, because of the way the city is structured—that is, the three main areas with place managers—we are able to work much more directly on the ground with communities. We always were, but that is now enhanced.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: In her evidence to the inquiry, the Lord Mayor told the Committee that the council is an active player in the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project. What has the council done as part of that project?

Ms BARONE: We have always been involved with children's services, but we have increased the level of service and the level of focus. As a consequence of the partnership project we now participate in Kid Speak along with Barnardos and the Kid Speak committee, which comprises different members of the community who provide children's services. We have developed some additional services in the Waterloo area. We have also made a commitment to provide additional children's services. The Redfern Community Centre runs activities for 10 to 15 children every afternoon. During the school holidays we had 40 to 50 children attending activities each day. We are now going to extend that service to the Waterloo area and increase the number of days and activities. The partnership supported the council in developing those services and provided some funding.

I will provide an overview of the school holiday program provided in the Block area. We identified the children who needed activities. Staff personally sought out families to get permission slips to take children on day camps and different excursions and we paid for the camps. We also provided support staff to attend with children. We do not ban children and we did not want any children not able to participate because of inappropriate behaviour. We packed their lunches, picked them up and dropped them off. We provide intensive services. The partnership has supported us financially and by putting us in contact with other services. For example, Barnardos provided some of the additional support staff. That is an example of groups working together to tailor a program to meet particular needs.

We were the lead agency for the safety plan. That was a very community-involving process. Our commitment to the Redfern Street upgrade is part of us being in that partnership project, as with our commitment to being in the human services review. Then there is the Redfern Community Centre, which I think you will ask me questions about, so we can talk about some of the things that are occurring there. The partnership enabled us to do what we do better, in association with other people who are doing things in the community. We are starting to achieve better co-ordination as a consequence.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: With regard to children's services, you have spoken about vocational care. Do you have long day care centres?

Ms BARONE: There is a long day care centre in Alexandria, which is just a few minutes away, and that has places for 60 children. We have the Redfern Occasional Care Centre, which has places for 30 children. We were successful in getting some support towards an indigenous support worker who works from the Redfern Occasional Care Centre. That officer works very closely with people at the community centre and families that are already using the Redfern Occasional Care Centre. The purpose of that role is to work with families who are not accessing child care, and to create opportunities for them to do that. That worker also supports some of the playgroups. Three playgroups currently operate at the Redfern Community Centre. One playgroup is the one we run by the Redfern Occasional Care Centre, another is the mobile playbus that comes there, which we support actively, and we also have the Gumnut playgroup, which is for children with disabilities.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: What about family day care and out of school care?

Ms BARONE: After school hours care is occurring every afternoon at the Redfern Community Centre, and we are hoping to build that up to every afternoon in Waterloo as well, at the estate there. At the moment we are only doing one afternoon a week and all school holidays at the estate, with Kidspeak. We need to increase that. I will give you a copy of the next school holidays program for the Redfern Community Centre. Family day care was just not successful. We were not able to get the carers to meet the demand. We tried everything, and we just had to accept that family day care was not a style of child care that was working in that community.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: What sort of culturally appropriate training is involved in the children's services that are available?

Ms BARONE: There is quite a bit. I am very proud of the children's services we run, and I see the same sorts of things across the other children's services in the area. They do culturally appropriate training. Under their licensing they are required to provide these programs. If you look at the programs, you will see the range of cultural activities they participate in, the arts activities that are brought to the school, and the celebration and acknowledgement of different things that are appropriate. You will see those things reflected in the child care centres in the artwork, in the presentation of materials for families, and those kinds of things. I am very confident that we get that range.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: What is your view about the effectiveness of the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project in meeting the needs of the local community?

Ms BARONE: When people say "the partnership project", I think often people think that means the people in the office in Redfern from the Premier's Department. I always stress that the partnership project is all of us. Every one of us who signed up to be a partner is part of that project. So the question is: How effective have we all been? I think that in some areas we are starting to be really effective. We are learning to work more closely with the community, and we are learning to work more effectively together. The safety task force is one example. I hope that the Redfern Community Centre is another example of us being more effective in the community.

At other times I think we could have done better. The submission that the city will be providing makes a few comments about that, and suggests that perhaps we have not found ways to truly engage the community as well as we might have liked to. We need to look at ways of encouraging people to take ownership and responsibility for the things that are happening in the community, and also driving those things, rather than what sometimes feels a bit top-heavy, a bit bureaucratic. We really need to overcome that. In government, all of us providing services in the community can be better at that.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: What sort of time frame do you see as being appropriate to gauge whether the project will work and achieve positive outcomes?

Ms BARONE: I have been looking at the web site, and I know you have had information from Tony Vinson and other people, and that it is in the submission of Sydney city council. The area we are talking about is not that different from many disadvantaged areas. It has high levels of unemployment, high levels of people with mental illness, or drug and alcohol problems, children who do not know anybody who has a job, and all these kinds of issues. Some programs might contribute to an improved quality of life, but if you do not deal with the causes of this disadvantage you will always have these problems and you will have to run the programs forever. I suppose I am trying to turn it around a little and say that as long as there are these issues in the community, you will always have to run the programs, until the causes of that disadvantage are addressed.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: What do you regard as the minimum period to gauge whether or not the programs achieve positive outcomes and can work, so that it is not about funding for 12 months or three years?

Ms BARONE: I understand what you are saying: We are doing these programs with children. When will we know if they worked? We will know if they worked when those children are grown up, and if they have a job, they have not gone to gaol, and they are not using heroin. We will know if they worked, if the probable consequences of that kind of environment do not eventuate. I think that is a long time.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Other than the street team project, what do you see as the concrete achievements so far of the Redfern-Waterloo project? At this time, 2½ years into the project, what measures are there?

Ms BARONE: I have worked with another council. One of the reasons I really wanted to work with this council was that I wanted to work on his project, because I really wanted to work on a project with the different levels of government and different agencies seriously trying to work together. When you work in local government, you are dealing with people's everyday issues, but you cannot make a difference because you do not actually control some of the other things that are impacting on their lives. The thought of sitting around a table with people who do that, and having a serious discussion about "If I do this and you do that, what can we achieve?" was very exciting. I know that is really intangible. The submission says, essentially, "It is a good idea, except we are just not very good at it yet." I cannot see any other way of doing it, except that we have to get better at doing it, and we are getting better by doing it, and that is an intangible thing.

In moments when there has been an issue or a bit of a crisis, one of the things I have noticed is how much more quickly we all pull together and deal with it. That is because we now know each other and we are working together. If something occurs, everybody knows who to call, and we can actually get something happening a lot quicker than we used to. So that is a benefit. The human services review is intangible, because we have not seen the results. But that is such an important piece of research, to look at what is going on and whether it is delivering things we needed to deliver, and how we might do things differently. What we really have to be thinking about is creative and new ways of doing things.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Mr Maynard, Mr Pooley spoke about the community safety plans. Perhaps you might give us your perspective on how they were developed and what they are meant to do.

Mr MAYNARD: My role at council was to take that lead agency role in developing the Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Plan, so that sets it apart from some of the other partnership project initiatives where the Premier's Department was the lead agency.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Who else is involved?

Mr MAYNARD: There is a range of players involved. We set up a Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Task force. That is made up of a range of planners who are part of that partnership project, including officers from the Premier's Department, the Attorney General's Department, DOCS, Health, Housing, Police, and community organisations and community representatives. It involves a range of players looking at a range of issues, working on the theory that there is no magic formula or silver bullet to tackling the complex issues around crime and safety in Redfern and Waterloo.

The process began with a series of eight community safety audits in and around the Redfern area—in other words, taking a group of stakeholders around the community, identifying aspects of the physical environment which might impact on their feelings or perceptions of safety, and looking to make those physical improvements. There is a lot of research showing that if you can make tangible, physical improvements, people can start to understand that things are happening, and you can then involve them in the next stage of the process, in this case developing the plan.

We established a task force, we undertook an extensive community consultation process, we looked at the range of consultations that had been conducted in the past, we also looked at the range of existing research which had been conducted in the area in the past. We pooled all that together in this document. At the safety task force meetings we looked at what were the key themes in addressing safety, but more in terms of building and strengthening the community, taking a medium to long-term preventative approach to tackling the underlying causes of crime. We addressed the key issues of improving the social environment, looking to intervene as early as possible prior to children and families finding themselves in crisis situations, looking to support young people, looking to address health and drug and alcohol use and misuse issues, and issues concerning planning and the environment.

We invited to our meetings experts from each of those fields, to inform us as to what we as a partnership need to do about addressing those issues. We then developed this plan, which will be launched next week and which we are currently implementing and monitoring.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What were the eight areas you looked at?

Mr MAYNARD: The eight areas were in and around the Block area, and Department of Housing properties in East Redfern and Waterloo.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Did you look at Caroline Lane?

Mr MAYNARD: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: What have you done as part of those audits?

Mr MAYNARD: We have made the necessary changes.

CHAIR: I assume we will be able to get a copy of the report next week?

Mr MAYNARD: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Does the report contain the audits?

Mr MAYNARD: No. It makes mention of the process, where it was audited, and so on.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: May we have the audits as well?

Mr MAYNARD: Yes.

The Hon. IAN WEST: At recent hearings at the Redfern Community Centre criticisms were made about the limited involvement of the Aboriginal community in the development and structure of the centre. Do you have comments to make on that, and could you tell us about who is using the centre?

Ms BARONE: There are always criticisms about consultation. The consultation prior to the construction of the centre and the tendering process was prior to my time at council. So we went through the files to check. We found that during the initial consultations 11 Aboriginal organisations were consulted about the development of the facility prior to the facility even being built. So a number of those organisations would have had the opportunity to say, "These are the things we would like to do" or "This is how we would like to be involved."

Since that time and the time that I have been with the council the consultation was as extensive as we could possibly do. Some 5,000 of these were letterbox dropped and at the community barbecues we sat with people and I just talked about what would be in the centre. People could tick the box about the kinds of things that they would like to see happening at the centre and their suggestions for the name of the centre and all of that kind of thing. We did 5,000 of these and we had 250 back. It is not a lot, but at some of the barbecues we sat with children and they made their comments about the kinds of things that they like and asked what those different things meant. We had two community barbecues prior to opening the facility. We invited as widely as possible. We even got hard hats and took children and other people on tours of the site so they could see what was going on behind the fencing. These were the invitations to the barbecues. We had an opening. We had about 700 to 1,000 people attending the opening.

As well as that general scatter gun kind of consultation, which is why the centre started out and hope that people will come, we visited 31 community organisations in the immediate area. I know that because I went to most of those meetings and attended board meetings or met with staff. We held up the boards and we said, "This is what's happening. What do you think should happen?" Many of those organisations were Aboriginal organisations. People gave their feedback. Council made it really clear, and into the consultation it was really clear that people wanted council at the moment to run the community centre. But we also knew that we could not make a success of the centre—we are still working on making a success of the centre—unless lots and lots of people were involved and lots of community organisations were engaged. We tried a program, and I will give you a copy of the draft program, where we did as many of the activities in partnership with the different community organisation so that everyone could have a piece of the action and everyone's idea, as many ideas as possible, could be represented in the program.

The things that are going on there at the moment? There are four initiatives that are around employment. One of them is called Lights Camera Action, which is basically like a casting agency for young people 12 to 24. We have a youth worker that is dedicated to the program. They can go on to the web site, which is all very protected. It is a highly recognised web site for casting agencies for casting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people—other young people as well, but it is largely that. We have 164 people on the web site now and we are expecting another 140 before our launch. A number of young people have got work out of this. We just did a huge *All Saints* shoot. A number of our young people participated in that. When it is on we will turn on the telly and have a pizza and celebrate.

I guess this is kind of typical of the way that we work: we acknowledge that in functional families parents would sit there and go through your lines with you and parents would take you to the shoot, but we are dealing with young people who often do not have that. The youth worker is there to work with young people, go through their lines, pick them up at four o'clock in the morning and take them to the shoot. That is what happens. That is not the first time it has happened, it happens regularly. That is one of our employment initiatives. Driving for Employment is another one because, as you know, for many jobs you need to have a driver's license and you need to log up so many hours in a logbook. If you live in an area where your family does not have a car or you do not have a family then how do you get that experience? We provide free driving lessons and that opportunity. We have lots of young people doing that course. They are two of our employment programs.

We have a recording studio and the first CD has already been made. We have children's dance classes that are going quite well. We have an Auntie's morning tea every week. We have had up to 40 women attend that, and that morning tea is basically an opportunity for us to hear how things are going in the area and to get suggestions from people. We have an arts project with Mudgin-Gal, which is a women's Aboriginal organisation. We are doing a joint arts project with that community group. We have Koori women's boxing classes with up to 40 participants, Pilate's classes with 15 participants and tai chi with 12 participants. At the moment, all of these classes are free. That is just an example of some of the things that we do. But the important thing is how we are doing it. With each one we try to form a partnership with an organisation. With each one we try to work out if we do this, what can you offer and provide to us. We really see all of them as community building activities with other outcomes.

The Hon. IAN WEST: You talk about partnerships. Are the local Aboriginal organisations, whatever they may be, using the centre in their own right and running their own programs?

Ms BARONE: There is an Aboriginal men's group that meets, and they do language and culture activities. Eora College will run courses. All of the exercise classes are run by Aboriginal women who have come to us and said, "We run fitness classes." There is an Aboriginal Corporation catering group. The women's group arm of that has now had 15 jobs out of the centre to provide catering. Redfern Aboriginal Corporation now has the contract for three years to do all of the cleansing and care taking of the centre, and cleansing of the whole area. That is a very large contract. Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You seem to have a lot of local government programs. Presumably, South Sydney council is offering far more programs per head of population than most councils, is that right?

Ms BARONE: I think what local government provides is a kind of horses for courses thing. It depends on the community and the capacity of the organisation to run it. In some communities we would say that this community is strong. It has good strong community organisations. Council might say, "We will provide some support in the form of funding or grants", or simply by provide good infrastructure around those activities. In some areas, and this is an area in point, we are directly providing services because we feel that they are needed.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Presumably, you have worked in other councils?

Ms BARONE: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is this exceptional in the amount of resources South Sydney is providing at an absolute level?

Ms BARONE: South Sydney council in the local government benchmarks was providing a higher level of support to community service-type activities than many other councils. It was the choice of the council to support more of those activities. We do get grants for lots of these, and that is why I have to acknowledge the partners in that partnership project. There are a number of grants coming from the Department of Community Services and, hopefully, the Attorney General's Department. Different sources support us to do some of these enhanced programs, things that we might not normally do but feel that we need to do in the area.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: To what extent is local government patching up the deficiencies in other programs that might be on a per head basis or per need basis, would you say?

Ms BARONE: I will return to children's services. After-school services, for example, are normally funded through the child-care benefit scheme, which is where the family is subsidised and the subsidy is based on your income. But to participate in the child-care benefit scheme, and this is in our submission, the family has to sign a form. The family has to participate. The family has to drop the child off and pick the child up. In our really high-need communities, and it is not just Redfern and Waterloo we have the same issue in Surry Hills, Waterloo and Glebe where we are running these services, we have groups of children who do not have that kind of family support. We fully subsidise services. They should be funded through those other levels of Government.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So you are picking up the scraps that others have dropped?

Ms BARONE: In some areas we are, yes, because the nature of the funding does not enable us to access it.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You are fixing holes in other umbrellas? The other systems—DOCS or child care from Federal and State governments—are not fixing things that you, being more local, can fix and you are doing so and you are then putting together the money from taxes and from other projects?

Ms BARONE: And from getting grants from those other arms of government, and we do get grants and support. Premiers did support us in that school holiday program, for example. That is a broader question of what local government's role is. Over more recent years local government has started to do more things like that and, certainly, the question often arises: Should we be doing it and should we be paying for it? Certainly, that is a valid question.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The question is: Are there lots of holes in the other umbrellas? Are there lots of people not being covered? You would answer yes, in your area, presumably?

Ms BARONE: In highly disadvantaged areas, and this is one of them, the way of providing services and the range of services really needs to be considered.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is there duplication of services? We have had evidence that there are three youth services in Elizabeth Street: South Sydney Youth Service, the PCYC, Fact Tree and I believe the Pentecostals have one as well. Is that true and is their scope for rationalisation if that is the case to get a 24-hour service?

Ms BARONE: Obviously, I am awaiting the results of the human services review to give us a bit more information about that because youth is one area in which we have been less active, although we are starting to be much more active in it now. We have initiated the development of a youth strategy, working with all of the different agencies in order to get to the bottom of some of these kinds of suggestions that perhaps we are not using the resources as efficiently as we could. We are taking the lead role in developing that strategy so that we can try to get that efficiency. I cannot really comment as to whether there is duplication, but again we all need to keep talking and keep looking at what is happening and asking ourselves whether we are putting our efforts into the best places and most effectively.

CHAIR: You may not be able to answer this for the reason you just gave, but our question 10 drew attention to evidence to the opposite effect. Instead of there being a surplus of services for youth there are actually only limited services for youth. We have found this a lot. Obviously, the different submissions are saying opposite things. But it may be that if the council has not moved into that area you cannot comment on that.

Ms BARONE: Not confidently, no. That is right.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Your comment on question 10 earlier was that the council is looking at youth services. Obviously, the question is whether someone will pull out if there is found to be duplication and you tap someone on the head and say, "Why don't you put all your money into this one?" They might not be so keen, but that is obviously the next step down the road, which you probably cannot answer anyway.

Ms BARONE: When I say we are looking into youth services, one of the things—again it is in our submission—is demonstrating leadership. It is not about us then providing a service, it is more that we can provide support around co-ordinating stuff, support around providing information, providing facilities so that more services can occur. Our support does not need to be in the form of direct services. It could be in the form of a better skateboard facility. It can come in many forms. When I say we are looking into it, we are looking into how do we best contribute to the youth area.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: There was some criticism of the limitation of the Aboriginal community in the construction of the Redfern Community Centre. Do you have any comments to make on that?

Ms BARONE: As I said, I was not involved at all with that so I am not quite sure what occurred there. Although as I said, in the file it was really clear that many Aboriginal organisations were consulted and, clearly, would have known that a tender had gone out. If they could they would have made representations to that effect. But I do not really know about that.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: How do you consult with the Aboriginal community when you are doing projects?

CHAIR: We went over that in some detail earlier, using the question specifically.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Nine?

CHAIR: Yes, and Ms Barone actually showed us a number of pamphlets and ran through the figures and the number of organisations. Although it was one example, it was a fairly major example.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: We have had a lot of discussion about the needle van and harm minimisation. The Government submission states that placing needle vending machines instead of the van near the Block has been forwarded to the City of Sydney council for consideration. Can you tell us where the proposal is within the council's decision-making process?

Ms BARONE: I cannot answer where it is within the decision-making process I can just tell you where we are up to with the kind of meetings around all of this. We participate in the drug and alcohol task force and this comes up at every meeting. The issue of the vending machines was one option, so it was like if we do not have the van is this an acceptable option? The city of Sydney will just be consulting with the local community around their tolerance to that idea and really we do it via the partnership project, via the drug and alcohol task force, because that is the appropriate mechanism. We also have a syringe program for the whole city where we roll out the syringe bins and we are responsible for co-ordinating cleansing around syringes and that kind of thing. So it is an issue that we deal with all of the time. But it is a question that is continuously debated amongst the community and there has not been a resolution about that. All we can do is keep looking for other solutions that might work.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Perhaps you can take it on notice, because we understand the submission has been made that it is up for decision by the council. Can you perhaps come back to us at some later date with a status report on that?

Ms BARONE: Yes.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Because it has certainly been discussed a number of times.

CHAIR: Rachel can get back to you with the relevant part of the transcript relating to anything that we need followed up. In regard to policing strategies, do you have any comments on the relationship between police and the local Redfern and Waterloo communities? You may have comments as well on the resources and strategies issues that we have discussed.

Mr MAYNARD: I work very closely with the police in my role, and they have certainly been very active participants in the partnership project. Dennis Smith, the local area commander, has a very good understanding of community-based policing strategies and looking at the preventative stuff, which I am involved in, so I cannot comment on any of his law enforcement methods. I work mainly with the police in the community liaison roles within the local area command and I have enjoyed nothing but their full support on the projects that we have been working on, such as the community safety audits and some partnerships we have got going with the NRMA. People in the consultations have talked about a fear of crime, so we have got a community safety van which will travel around the local government area now in response to hot spot issues so that people can be provided with information; we have got a project through the police youth mentor project; we have got the two youth liaison officers there, which other local area commands do not have.

Those officers are involved in taking young people out on excursions and activities, buying them equipment, taking them to school and sitting with them in their classroom and in the playground; their duties are really outside the normal role of the police, and it is often done without training and in their own time. So I think that sort of work needs to be acknowledged in terms of taking the medium to long-term approach, as we need to do to so many of the problems in Redfern and Waterloo.

Ms BARONE: I just find working with Dennis Smith and his staff quite extraordinary. I cannot tell you how many times I have gone back up to my office and seen Dennis or a member of his team in a staff meeting, having a discussion with a staff member about this or about that. They just turn up; every time we have an issue they get in touch, we try to work it out, and the first thing we

always try to do in working it out is say, "What can we do? What can council do? What can our community workers do? What can our children's workers do to solve this before it becomes a police matter?" It is just amazing to be working with people who think like that and work like that.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I have difficulty in comprehending the trigger—what ignites this. As you have indicated, the RWPP is effectively an inert object; it does not have any triggers, it is just a piece of paper. You talk about all these things happening, but there does not appear to me to be any real initiation. You talk about people coming together to talk about these issues but who finds out about an issue and who brings the people together, and where do you meet?

Ms BARONE: We work there. We walk around the streets there everyday. We talk to people everyday. More people know my name down there than where I live. That is the way that the department works and that is the way I certainly encourage the staff to work. We roll our sleeves up and we go and cook a barbecue and we talk and talk and talk and say, "What do you think about this? What do you think about that? What can we do here? We have got a problem with this, okay, what can we do?" I know these things sound intangible and small things but we just recently had an example where one Aboriginal group were not happy with what another Aboriginal group were doing and they were always using us to mediate.

I was speaking to one of them and I said, "Look, I can't solve any more problems, I'm exhausted, we can't do any more", and then I got a phone call saying, "Well, we went and talked to them and kind of worked it out". That is normal, of course. I am not saying that people do not do that but what I am saying is that it is intangible and then there are small things that are achieved. We have been saying we cannot always mediate—this is around the centre stuff I am talking about because that is our role. Obviously, in other areas people are doing that all the time too. I guess what I am trying to say is that we just participate. In fact, one of the first principles that we talk about in the submission is working from within the community. We see ourselves as part of it. We see council as part of the community; we see ourselves as people who are active, who work, and many of us live, in the community, and that is what we do.

CHAIR: The little group of questions we sent to you but we have not yet asked you are the two specific questions about the proposals for the Block: what are the council's views about the Aboriginal Housing Company and its management of the Block, and do you have views on the type of accommodation that should be provided in any redevelopment of the area?

Ms BARONE: I am not going to be particularly helpful here because the council has not made any kind of statements about views on it or the accommodation. All council has said is, "Let's do something about it. Something needs to happen there. It cannot continue to stay the way that it is".

CHAIR: Is this covered in the submission that we will get?

Ms BARONE: Yes.

CHAIR: What would you like to see come out of our inquiry?

Ms BARONE: I guess we hope that the efforts of people in the partnership will be acknowledged. We hope that people will recognise that this kind of social change is long-term and that we need to make a commitment to being there for the long haul and focusing on the needs of the community, focusing on what people need and making that what drives us to continue.

CHAIR: Did you want to add anything, John?

Mr MAYNARD: No.

CHAIR: I think there was only one thing we asked you to take on notice. Rachel will probably contact you about that. We normally give people 10 days for that. We will get the official submission next week?

Ms BARONE: Yes.

corrected

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your attendance today.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.40 p.m.)