CORRECTED

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

At Griffith on Tuesday 5 August 2008

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m. at Tirkandi Inaburra Cultural and Development Centre Inc.

PRESENT

The Hon. I. W. West (Chair)

The Hon. G. J. Donnelly
Dr J. Kaye
The Hon. T. J. Khan
The Hon. M. S. Veitch

COLLEEN MURRAY, Executive Officer, Tirkandi Inaburra Cultural and Development Centre Inc.,

ADRIAN ANDREAZZA, Service Coordinator Youth Work, Tirkandi Inaburra Cultural and Development Centre Inc.,

ANNE-MARIEE McINTOSH, Casework Coordinator, Tirkandi Inaburra Cultural and Development Centre Inc., and

NICOLE GIBBS, Service Coordinator Youth Work, Tirkandi Inaburra Cultural and Development Centre Inc.

CHAIR: Aunty Colleen, thank you very much for having us. We acknowledge that we are on Wiradjuri land and pay our respects to elders past and present. We are in your hands as to how you wish to conduct this recorded session. We are enthusiastically waiting to ask many questions. Is there anyone else you would like to have present?

Ms MURRAY: We could bring in some of the service coordinators, but they will need to come and go as the boys break for meal breaks because they are responsible for overseeing what goes on. I will get Uncle Adrian and Aunty Nicole.

CHAIR: In this "informal" formal exercise because we are recording the conversation we need to be more disciplined in asking questions. Are there any opening remarks you would like to make before we ask questions?

Ms MURRAY: I would like to say that I am pleased to have the opportunity to show you something positive that is happening in Australia for Aboriginal youth. We are the only one of this kind and I would really like to see it replicated because we cannot solve the woes of everyone, yet we are getting lots of representation from people out of catchment areas trying to send their children because there is a need out there.

CHAIR: We appreciate the opportunity to be here. The message is out there that Tirkandi Inaburra has good stories to tell.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Could you take us through the criteria or the set requirements to bring someone into the site to take them through the course. In other words, what is the background and basis on which a person gets an opportunity to come here?

Ms MURRAY: Well, first of all, they have to be indigenous and they have to be between the ages of 12 and 15 years. As I said before, that age limit has been prescribed to me, so that is what we run with. I do not think it is ideal. This is an early intervention centre and the boys need to be just coming to the notice of police, disengaging from school, family life and community life, exhibiting antisocial-type behaviours. They can actually come because they are significantly disadvantaged academically—we like these type of boys—because here they can get close to one-on-one attention. It would be really pleasant if we had lots of those boys with no behavioural problem, but that is not the reality. It is a chicken and egg thing: once they are severely academically disadvantaged, then they have got behaviour problems. We find that consistently.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: What is the application process? They come to the attention of the police perhaps on their radar, so to speak. What is the process for putting them forward for consideration?

Ms MURRAY: There are a couple of ways the boys can get into here. One, they can actually apply themselves, and that does happen because as more and more kids graduate, more and more kids tell each other and they ring up and want to come in themselves. Or they get sponsored in. We say it is sponsored in because we expect, well, we hope that the parent or the agency that sponsors them or refers them will take responsibility for their after care as well. But that is a challenge that we have to take up because they are not doing it. They are the two ways that they get in here: self refer or somebody else refers them. We are also finding that we get them referred by ex-graduates. The ex-graduates will tell some child at school, "You need to get to Tirkandi."

Mr ANDREAZZA: Yes, they tell them all the fun things. There is the school part and the cultural part, but they always say there are a lot of fun things to do out here and that is a good way to keep the boys here too, to try to make it a positive thing.

Ms MURRAY: But that is a challenge for us while we are trying to change behaviour. Once you confront behaviour, the behaviour will get worse. While we are trying to do that, we have got to make it fun because it is voluntary. That is the significant difference in this program to nearly any other intervention-type model I know.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: You say it is a voluntary program, but what sort of commitments do the boys have to make to participate in the program?

Ms MURRAY: When they come in?

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Yes?

Ms MURRAY: We go through the throes of trying to get them to think about Tirkandi and think about what the rules are at Tirkandi. We always inform them of what we do here and what they have to do. Then they actually sign a little document that says, yes, they want to. But that is basically a bluff. It is trying to get a child to understand why he is coming here. But he loses track of that because, you know, they are boys. But that is the only thing we can do. The way we manage behaviour here is like that as well. We have levels of contracts for behaviour. They know once they get to a contract level three they have to come and see me, and they do not like getting to a level three. They are always anxious about whether or not they can actually go down: "Can I go down? I don't always have to go up, do I?"

Mr ANDREAZZA: We have the authority levels, yes. They see me more often and so I have a certain amount of authority being a service coordinator. The youth workers have a certain amount of authority and as you go up the chain it gets a little bit more serious.

Ms MURRAY: And it is bluff. It is just a strategy that I have developed to give them this sense about it is not acceptable to behave like that; you have to try to change it because there are consequences for what you do in life. That is what we do here. We talk about invitation to responsibility, but I will not get into that. I will answer your questions.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: How long have you been operating?

Ms MURRAY: We opened the doors late January 2006.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: There are 17 staff employed in your operation, is that right?

Ms MURRAY: That is right, yes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You have a funding model of $2 million a year is it?

Ms MURRAY: Yes. Originally the promise was $2 million a year. The reality has been that that has decreased every year according to underspent moneys. It is taken off the top. Anything that is not spent is taken off the top of the next year's grant. We have been operating with about $1.8 million.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: What was the cost of building the place?

Ms MURRAY: The original cost was $4.6 million to my knowledge and that was the whole construction, outfitting and all that.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It caters for a maximum of 16 boys?

Ms MURRAY: Yes it does.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: But generally you run with how many?

Ms MURRAY: Generally we can manage to get 10 to 12 through. We have difficulties about the mix of 16 boys and, you know, things that boys get up to when there is such a large group of them.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: When we were in one of the residential blocks you spoke about your eligibility criteria in respect to those you allow in and those you will not have. I will come to that in a second. This facility caters only for boys; what happens to girls?

Ms MURRAY: We are asked that a lot. We are absolutely asked that a lot. What I need to make clear is that Tirkandi Inaburra is a consequence of a vision. It was a 20-year struggle to get this place up and running.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am not being critical when I ask the question.

Ms MURRAY: Yes, I know. I realise that. It was a 20-year struggle. They started the struggle when Aboriginal people around this region decided the kids had lost respect: our future is being jailed, we are not going to have a future here, we need to intervene. They had this way that they wanted to intervene and all the work that came after that. It was because the figures 20 years ago were indicating that the difficulties were with indigenous boys—and they still are. But what has happened over the last 20 years is that the girls are now also in that situation, which was practically unheard of before. So, somebody needs to champion the girls' cause because I am absolutely sure from some of the things I see that sometimes the girls' behaviours are worse than the boys. That is what happened. It has taken 20 years to lobby and get this ready and to build this place. It was all as a consequence of the figures back then.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I want to ask about governance and how decisions are made here. There is a board that runs Tirkandi Inaburra?

Ms MURRAY: We have a very unique governance structure. We have a management committee, and it is called management committee because we are incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act. That is how you need to refer to it. But it is the higher management committee and it is made up of all Aboriginal people from across the catchment area. There are eight positions on that management committee.

Dr JOHN KAYE: How are they appointed?

Ms MURRAY: They go through the normal processes of the annual general meeting and they actually nominate to go on.

Dr JOHN KAYE: So there is a population that has control, as it were, and selects them? Who are the members who attend the annual general meeting?

Ms MURRAY: There is a membership of about 50 people made up across the regions and the catchment area. The catchment area actually starts at Lithgow, goes to Bathurst, Orange, across to Forbes, Lake Cargelligo, Condobolin, out Griffith way, ends at Balranald and goes straight down to the Victorian border. So, it is a huge catchment area and the membership is across that area. There are roughly two reps in every sort of major area in that.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Are those reps selected by lands councils?

Ms MURRAY: No. Those reps apply to the membership and the management committee accepts them. It is by invitation onto the membership. That is sustained and every year we call for nominations to the committee and it comes from those members.

Dr JOHN KAYE: The management committee makes financial decisions?

Ms MURRAY: No. The management committee makes global financial decisions, for want of a better word. It actually accepts grants from the Attorney General's Department, motions, all that sort of stuff, does strategic decision making about catchment areas, eligibility criteria and all those sort of costs of the place. It has delegated powers for the management of this centre—what they call the management board. The management board is another structure. It sits underneath them and it has on that board five representatives from the committee and three Government representatives. The Government partners on our board are the Department of Health—in particular, Justice Health—the Department of Education and Training [DET], and the Attorney General's Department. Also on that board, in an ex officio capacity, is a representative from the Department of Community Services [DOCS] and me.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: No DAA?

Mrs MURRAY: No.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Can I ask why no DAA?

Mrs MURRAY: I think because the DAA was not around when they set all this up. Remember that it had that regional presence years ago. Then it shrank into the city, into Sydney, and it was not back out in the regions when all this started.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Aunty Colleen, I want to ask you about this organisation's relationship with the Department of Community Services and with the Department of Education and Training? I will start with DOCS. How do you interact with DOCS? Is that successful? Are there things that you would change about how you interact with DOCS?

Mrs MURRAY: Yes, there are things that I would change relating to how we interact with DOCS. DOCS being a partner at this table is problematic in the way that our client base perceives DOCS. But in saying that, the representative from DOCS that we have on the board is a former person from ATSIC—a person who has been with this organisation. In fact, it was his vision. He worked with regional councillors on this for about seven years. He was the brains trust behind this vision and he is very supportive. But if that changes I am not sure how that relationship will pan out because of what is creeping into DOCS after three and a half years. I think that they are just putting forward what they are hearing in the communities.

What is Tirkandi doing about the after care of children? My issue is—and DOCS made this perfectly clear—that I am dealing with them here and I am changing them. DOCS has the services, the money and the infrastructure. What is it doing? It is responsible for children and Aboriginal children. We have quite a good relationship with DOCS.

Dr JOHN KAYE: But is there tension with its politics?

Mrs MURRAY: I think that that will come after time if they continue to expect more and if it extends our role beyond what we were originally designed to do.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I will finish by asking you about your relationship with DET.

Mrs MURRAY: The relationship with we have with DET is that it is a partner here in kind. It funds the teachings positions at this centre. There are three teaching positions here and two teacher aide specialists, so there are five DET staff on board. They have a significant say about what goes on in the school and what goes on in the centre. That relationship has been good but there have also been tensions. At times the types of children that DET is prepared to take because of its policies are significantly different from the types of boys that Tirkandi needs to take.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Is Turkandi a registered school?

Mrs MURRAY: No. The children are enrolled at Coleambally Central School, which is 15 kilometres up the road, and basically they are taught here.

Dr JOHN KAYE: So this is a campus of Coleambally?

Mrs MURRAY: Yes, it is campus.

Dr JOHN KAYE: And the teachers are employees of DET?

Mrs MURRAY: Yes, that is right.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Are they employed under standard DET conditions?

Mrs MURRAY: That is right. They are employed under standard DET conditions and they have standard rules and standard everything else. Sometimes there is tension because of that, because they want certain things to occur that do not sit with Turkandi's philosophy, its vision, and what we are trying to do here.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Earlier you were talking about the catchment area. Are the boundaries that you spoke about the Wiradjuri boundaries? Do you border the Wiradjuri area?

Mrs MURRAY: No, it does not. It is a bit of an amalgamation of the old ATSIC borders. The ATSIC regional council that was driving this for years and years was the Wagga Regional Council—the Binaal Billa Regional Council. It is its borders, less Dubbo.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: So the boys who come here do not have to be Wiradjuri; they can be Ngunnawal?

Mrs MURRAY: Often they are, in particular, those boys who that are coming in from Bathurst, Orange and those areas. Their backgrounds are not Wiradjuri. Some of them are Barkindji and Nyampa. But when we teach Aboriginal culture we teach generic culture.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: That was my next question. You have done well.

Mrs MURRAY: We teach generic culture and generic history. The only thing that we do that is strictly Wiradjuri involves the boys learning to say a welcome to country speech in Wiradjuri on graduation day. But, apart from that, it is Aboriginal history, Aboriginal culture, and not necessarily tribal culture.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: So the only sort of language that the boys are instructed in is the welcome to country in Wiradjuri?

Mrs MURRAY: Yes, that is all. That is mainly because we have had difficulty getting qualified teachers here, which is very sad. A group of people in Griffith have been learning the Wiradjuri language for a considerable amount of time. Despite all my representations to them I do not think they have the confidence to teach it. I cannot get them to come out here, which is really sad.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: That is a shame.

CHAIR: The Committee, in its deliberations so far, has narrowed down the issues that it wants to try to focus on and has come up with four or five themes. There is the question of measuring success. How do you measure it? What is success and what is not? How do you coordinate your service delivery? There are all those vexed issues that you have just talked about. Who drives it, how do you avoid burn out, how do you deal with training and all those types of issues? How do you deliver the services in partnership with the Aboriginal community?

Obviously there is also the ongoing and vexed issue of insufficient funding and problems with unemployment et cetera. The main theme on which I would like to get some ideas is how you measure success, especially in light of the difficulty of maintaining the driving force that started it—the original ATSIC person about whom you spoke earlier. You did not name that person and I will not ask who it is. Other themes include the issue of burn out, which you talked about, and the issue of training. Can you give us some thoughts on that?

Mrs MURRAY: When we started out I had a business plan, but there was no model. I have developed a program and a lot of material behind that program which shows us the way we need to do business. Originally we said, "These are the rules that the boys need to stick to." That created confrontation like you have never seen, so we went back and re-thought the issue. This place is about an invitation to responsibility and there are certain things around that. We say to the boys, "This is your life. You can make a decision. The decisions you make in life affect you now and they will affect in the future, so you need to practice to be a better decision maker."

As a consequence of that we have a discipline policy and we have a behaviour management policy that involves them deciding, on a daily basis, how to behave. If they behave well we consider that they are warriors and we make a big fuss about them being warriors. If they are behaving badly but they stop when they are challenged about that behaviour, they are starting to self-regulate their behaviour, and we say that they are deadly. We also make a fuss about them becoming deadly. If they have bad behaviour and they keep on with their decisions relating to bad behaviours we give them what we call a red card and they get no rewards. They also get a consequence for their bad behaviour. When we get boys to do a consequence it is a bluff. After all, what are we going to do, as this is voluntary? If it is really bad behaviour we have a lot of window washing, floor sweeping, and cleaning of toilets. We have a lot of scrubbing of toilets.

CHAIR: Cleaning windows, which we can see is done fairly well.

Mrs MURRAY: For really bad behaviour they have to scrub the toilet with a toothbrush. When we give a child a consequence he might say, "No I will not do it." However, I might add that the language is much more colourful than that—it is a bit more far flung than that—and what we then do is escalate the consequence. We say, "Okay. You are not going to wash the dishes. If you do not do it tonight you will do it for a week. We will give you five minutes to decide what you are going to do."

Ms GIBBS: They usually pick the one night.

Mrs MURRAY: They usually pick the one night. They work out that one night is better than all week. If they say, "No, I am not doing any of it", we pick the consequence for them. If there are movies on Friday night we say, "You are not going to the movies." Over time they learn to manage their own behaviour.

CHAIR: And even to choose the consequence?

Mrs MURRAY: And they choose the consequence for their behaviour. If they are warriors we give them rewards and we give them things that they need—mainly clothes—or we give them a meal out to a place of their choice. Usually it is Maccas, which is 60 kilometres away.

Ms GIBBS: With Coke. They make sure that they get their Coke.

Mrs MURRAY: We deliver on our promises and we build trust with that. They trust that whatever we say is going to occur. We can then use that. If we say, "You are going to get a consequence" they know that they are getting one.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Do the boys who do not start out as warriors and who have a red card get cranky when they are sitting there and they are told that they have five minutes to decide? Can you see transition point when they take the consequence?

Ms GIBBS: After the fourth or fifth week, when the boys were getting the red cards and consequences, they were up doing their consequences straight away, or they stop on their second notice. I say, "That is one", or "That is two. You know that when you get to three it is a consequence", and they stop after the two.

Mrs MURRAY: One of the things that we have employed—it is something that they teach toddlers—is a program called 1-2-3 Magic. We use that here for these teenage boys and it works. We say to them, "That is once, that is twice, and the third time you will get a consequence." We give them a warning. We say to them, "That is once. I will not ask you again. That is twice. Right. The third time you get a consequence." Over time they come from the three to the two to the one.

Ms GIBBS: The time that we are now in now is really hard—from the first week to the fourth week. But by the fourth week you can see the change. They know the rules and they know what will happen. They will get a consequence if they go any further. Usually they end up doing what they are supposed to be doing.

Mrs MURRAY: The warrior awards are for good behaviour—we call it citizenship. The deadly award is when they are modifying their behaviour. Then they get smaller items that they need, such as underarm deodorant, combs, socks and jocks.

CHAIR: In the short term and in the long term how do you measure success? You said that 130 young boys have gone through here. Have they come out as warriors? In the long term how do you measure the success of those 130 boys? How do you measure the success of your current class?

Mr ANDREAZZA: When they go back to their home environment, back to their community, some of them have 100 per cent school attendance rates, which is a good figure.

Ms GIBBS: Some have got apprenticeships and jobs.

Mr ANDREAZZA: We have an after care coordinator.

Mrs McINTOSH: Last week I just finished ringing around. I have talked to the boys who have graduated from here and to their parents and schools and I find out what they are doing. Some of them are doing TAFE apprenticeships and going to school regularly. Some are involved in the community and are keeping out of trouble.

CHAIR: So you can document what has happened to each child who has gone through.

Ms McINTOSH: Who has graduated.

CHAIR: Whether they have become a warrior or a problem?

Ms MURRAY: We have got some money out of the Department of Community Services and created a database. We capture that stuff and follow them up quarterly to find out what they are doing. We have been doing that since day one. It is part of our key performance indicators that we report to Attorney Generals on. That statistical stuff is there. The difficulty is how you describe change. That has been the difficulty for me.

We have been subjected to an evaluation and monitoring project, and the report is due out in December 2008. It was done by the Social Policy and Research Consortium at the University of New South Wales. Catherine Spooner was the principal research officer. I am looking forward to what that tells me, but it was far too early in the process because the cohorts they examined were the participants from term two 2007 and we had been operating for one year.

Mr ANDREAZZA: And we were just learning.

Ms MURRAY: Yes.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Who funded that?

Ms MURRAY: The Attorney General's Department. I think it is too early. But as far as I am concerned any evaluation helps us.

CHAIR: Have you expressed any views on the validity of the key performance indicators?

Ms MURRAY: In our funding agreement?

CHAIR: The key performance indicators in the evaluations.

Ms MURRAY: Yes. I have expressed my concerns about it being too early. I am particularly concerned if they are going to use that as a tool to justify decreasing funding. I am suspicious; I am an ex-public servant and I used to do it my self. But it concerns me that they were examining a cohort so early in the process. At that stage we were really new. As I said, we have trained our youth workers from the ground up. When we opened the doors in late January 2006 we did not have one trained youth worker.

CHAIR: In terms of the marketplace—that is, the geography you have outlined—or that catchment area, do you have any figures for the demand? You pick up 16; what is out there?

Ms MURRAY: Huge amounts. We originally had a lot of kids on the list, but we have had to go around it and say, "You are sending us children who do not fit in to this criteria." That is part of the problem and the struggle we had in the first two years. We have a lot of children put on the list by sponsors. When I say "sponsors", I mainly mean the Department of Education and Training, Juvenile Justice and the Department of Community Services—that is, all those people who should know better. They have all sponsored children to us who do not fit into our criteria, who have significant problems and who should never have been referred here. We have had to deal with those children. In saying that, some of those children have gone on and been very successful.

We have had one boy here who was charged with 15 counts of graffiti. Under our eligibility criteria he would have to have been considered a repeat offender. That was not disclosed to us until after we had him. He stayed six months and then I got a phone call from the police in Blayney who said, "I don't know what you did, but it worked because we have no graffiti in Blayney at all."

Ms GIBBS: We got him into art because he was into graffiti. He did a whole heap of graffiti art on the paper and he stuck to that.

CHAIR: Nicole, you have been here from day one.

Ms GIBBS: Yes.

CHAIR: Can you give us your views on the issue of training and burnout?

Ms GIBBS: That is a big one.

CHAIR: But an important one.

Ms GIBBS: It is harder at the start—in the first four weeks when the boys come in and are changing their behaviour. We do shift work because we have to run the place over all different hours. I could work today from 1.00 p.m. until 11.00 p.m. and then drive home to Griffith, which is 45 minutes away. I have to get up at 5.00 a.m. to leave Griffith at 6.00 a.m. to get back out here at 7.00 a.m. There is also a lot of abuse from the kids. In the first four weeks it is very hectic. There are many things that need to be done and programs need to be done on time. When you have one kid not doing it here and another not doing it over there and there are four staff on, it is very hard for two staff members to get 12 kids in to do a program and watch two others who are walking home or running up the road or the highway.

Mr ANDREAZZA: Or hiding somewhere.

Ms GIBBS: We cannot find them or they have gone for a bushwalk.

CHAIR: Understandably, a number of your colleagues have either been poached by the Department of Community Services or said they have had enough.

Ms MURRAY: Yes.

CHAIR: You have stuck it out. Why?

Ms GIBBS: I think we have good support from our higher management. If we need help or advice, we get it. It is mainly from the assistant manager, the caseworker or Aunty Colleen.

Ms MURRAY: Why have you stuck it out?

Ms GIBBS: Because I love the job. These kids are exactly the same as I was when I was younger. I was living on the streets and doing the things that these boys do at that age. I did not have any support. I think this is a significant place. I wish there was something like this for me when I was that age because I might have gone on the right track earlier.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: How do you personally manage your stress levels? What sort of things do you do?

Ms GIBBS: I leave my work at work.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: That is often harder.

Ms GIBBS: Yes. Because you get home and say, "I forgot to do that!"

Ms MURRAY: She is a single mother and she has taken home the 1-2-3 magic and applied it to her son, which has made it a lot easier.

Ms GIBBS: And it works; I have him under control.

Mr ANDREAZZA: We also have the drive home.

Ms GIBBS: Yes.

Mr ANDREAZZA: We can put on music and wind down.

Ms GIBBS: That is also a problem because it is so far away. You can get up in the morning and be pumped for work and then drive for 45 minutes and it is gone.

Ms MURRAY: The biggest thing is that there is a lot of commitment, passion and affinity for the cause in this place amongst the staff.

Ms GIBBS: You have to love the job.

Dr JOHN KAYE: And you get good rewards in seeing kids leave here transformed.

Ms MURRAY: Absolutely.

Ms GIBBS: I love graduation day. I have cried every graduation day.

Ms MURRAY: We all cry—the kids too. We are shocking.

Ms GIBBS: It is sad to know what some of the kids are going back to. You get the families in and you can see they are not interested. That is sad. You have spent six months with some kids and they are like my own.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: I thought the program was for three months. Do many boys stay for six months?

Ms GIBBS: We do three months and they graduate and then go home for the holidays and then they come back.

Ms MURRAY: We have not taken many back. We have taken some back because they are severely disadvantaged academically or we know their family circumstances and we are trying to give the kid a break and a life before he has to go back and face the music.

Ms GIBBS: Whatever he is going back to, he knows how to look after himself—he can make his bed, clean his room, cook his own dinner, wash his clothes and hang them out and so on. He would not have been taught that at home.

Ms MURRAY: It has not been mentioned, but one of the things we are trying to teach here is resilience. I am very frank with the boys that I cannot change what happens at home: "I cannot fix it for you, baby. I cannot stop mum from drinking and dad from drugging and all that stuff. But I can teach you to look after yourself. You only have to wait three years and then you are out of there." It is about teaching them to be resilient.

Ms GIBBS: They can do it here, but they go home to that. We get kids ringing up all the time wanting to come back. They know they did it here and they go back to that, but once they get old enough they can do it because they did it here.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Earlier we were talking about disabilities and what conditions you accept here. Can you take us through that again?

Ms MURRAY: We have the capacity to take kids with disabilities. I am not sure that we would be able to take children with significant vision problems, unless there was something the school could come up with—some solution—or severe deafness. We have had children with hearing loss, but not significant hearing loss. We cannot take children with diagnosed mental illness. While we have a lot of children here who I think have undiagnosed mental illness, and we work through that, we particularly cannot have boys who are disturbed and who self harm because we are not equipped for that. As I said, I am a qualified nurse, but I am the only qualified nurse here. Everyone else is first aid trained and we need to make judgements about the care we can provide.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Do you have boys on medication regimes?

Ms MURRAY: Yes.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: How do you manage that? Is that your responsibility?

Ms MURRAY: No. Medications are given out by service coordinators and I oversight that. We have boys with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and oppositional defiance disorder. Most of them are on dexamphetamine, Ritalin, Concerta. What we have noticed in the two-and-a-half years is that dexamphetamine use has been decreasing—thank goodness.

Ms GIBBS: It is no good.

Ms MURRAY: We have also had children with pervasive disorder, which is an amalgamation of all those things but cannot be categorised. But they have really typical behaviours.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Are you talking about Aspergers and autism spectrum?

Ms MURRAY: Yes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Do you take them?

Ms MURRAY: Yes. We have never had a child diagnosed with autism. But they have come in classified by the Department of Education and Training as "IM", and I think there is some degree of autism among them.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: That is intellectually moderate.

Ms MURRAY: Yes. We take any child we can to give him a chance.

Ms GIBBS: I cannot think of his name and his medical condition, but we had a boy who had to get up at a certain time in the morning to have his breakfast.

Ms MURRAY: Yes, that was pervasive disorder. They are really regimented.

Ms GIBBS: Any noise would trigger him.

Dr JOHN KAYE: That sounds like Asperger's.

Ms MURRAY: That is right. They called it pervasive disorder because he did not have all the typical symptoms. You are right. We have also had children with haemophilia. We are lucky in this district to have a whole family that has it and we have had a couple of the boys through here. We have managed that really well.

Ms MURRAY: It means a lot of organisation if you go on excursions and whatnot. We have to make sure we have a lot of blood products on hand or available at hospitals.

CHAIR: Because of the focus of our committee, can I return to the issues. Have you any ideas that might help us with measuring success and trying to ensure the longevity of organisations like this? Time and again we see organisations and individuals that have the passion and they are successful. In trying to ensure that passion and in dealing with staff burnout and poaching, we can at least assist through our recommendations in overcoming all those difficulties you face. Have you any thoughts, ideas or recommendations that might be able to ensure the longevity of this program?

Ms MURRAY: Measuring it is really difficult, but what we are doing here is charting behaviour. We are reflecting that in the quarterly reports that we send to the Attorney General's Department. We are also following up quarterly and so we can tell you at any given time throughout that year how many are participating, how many have been convicted of an offence and how many have engaged in community life. So, those measurements are there. I cannot measure the increased happiness of the children, but if I could measure it I would because it is significant. The way you report is numerical, basically.

CHAIR: In respect to the involvement of the Aboriginal community and of the community generally, if you had to leave tomorrow, or if Aunty Nicole had to leave, do you feel there are people who could take your place?

Ms MURRAY: If I had to leave tomorrow, what I have been doing over the last three years is creating a structure that is succession planning. You are looking at the next assistant managers. I have said it to Nicole and Adrian over and over again. They say, "Oh, we can't do it." I said, "You can" because it does not matter, we have the model of intervention. We have developed that model. It has been hard yards, but we have got it and we know it works. They are dealing with the model of intervention and that does not change. The management may very well change, but the model we have does not because we know it works.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: One thing that concerns me with you reporting to the Attorney General's Department is whether the skills set exists within that department to learn from your experience?

Ms MURRAY: That worries me too.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Let me take it further. I can see you being capable of succession planning here, but could we be confident that the Attorney General's Department is capable of replicating what you have done here at another location?

CHAIR: Or even comprehending?

Ms MURRAY: At the moment within the Attorney General's Department we have a project officer who is a champion for this place. She has been with this place since day one. She has that social background and is very empathetic towards what we are doing, but if we lose her and she is replaced by a project officer who is strictly a bean counter, I would be concerned. I do narrate the change in these children in the reports that are numerical and narrative, and for them to comprehend that and understand that is fragile. The other thing that concerns me is that we would get into that position. The difficulty for me is do we want to change transgenerational issues or do we not? If we do, then they need to contribute and they need to replicate this place or they are not going to change it. What we have seen here is that these children are the consequences of a significant lack of nurturing, and if there is not an intervention it is going to get worse.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Is it the board or the committee who selections the applicants for the program? If it is not the board or the committee, who is the selection panel that selects the applicants?

Ms MURRAY: I select them. What happens is that all the paperwork comes in. Annie is the casework coordinator and she goes over the top of them against our criteria in a tick and flick, and makes a recommendation. Then I deal with the Department of Education and Training representative, which is the principal of Coleambally Central School. Between John and I we determine what children should be taken, who should be allowed to enter on the intake. He is very good, but there are certain children he will not allow. So we negotiate that. I mainly win. Between he and I we come to an agreement about the list.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: When the boys come in, obviously, it is a three-month program for most of them. So that they actually understand and comprehend in the best possible way how they have progressed over that three-month period, do they evaluate themselves at the start and compare that evaluation at the end? Or do you assess them at the start, using that bit of a narrative or facts sheet, and then at the end describe them again and show the changes? How do they understand how they have developed, progressed or changed over the three-month period?

Mr ANDREAZZA: Through their achievements.

Ms GIBBS: You get boys that come up to you and say, "Aunty, I can read. Want me to read to you?"

Ms McINTOSH: When they come in they do what is called a SWOT analysis—strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats—case plan.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You assess them?

Ms McINTOSH: Yes, they are assessed. When they leave they do an exit questionnaire. So then you can compare.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Compare and contrast?

Ms McINTOSH: Yes, that is right. Plus there are graphs. At the start of last term there are graphs of their cards: red, yellow and green cards. So, it is graphed; it is visual.

Dr JOHN KAYE: They have access to those graphs?

Ms McINTOSH: If they want to, yes, for sure.

Ms MURRAY: But they know.

Ms McINTOSH: They can tell by their rewards they have earned while they are here, how many bags they have got to take home.

Ms GIBBS: If one of the boys is having difficulty doing something, you will see all the boys will swarm him and help him. They will teach the other boys.

Ms MURRAY: We never talk about it. I would like to get on the record that we do four core things here. One is the education, which is a school-based education, but that education is taught differently to what you will find in any other high school. It is actually taught using the COGs model framework, which is the framework they teach in primary schools. So, the boys have an activity here with all these learning outcomes that come off it. That is the way they are taught, and they respond well to that. The difficulty they have in high school is that many of these boys do not transition well into high school and the behaviours start at that point because they are significantly academically disadvantaged. Once they get into the high school system they are expected to be an independent-type student, and they are not. So, that is how they are taught.

Then we have the life and living skills program. The living skills is what you could imagine: they have to learn to wash, iron, cook and look after themselves. They have things like personal hygiene instruction, sexual health instruction and all that sort of stuff. Then we have the life skills program. The life skills program is about emotional intelligence. So, it is things like how to make friends, self-esteem, self-image, how to be happy, how to set goals, what is conflict and conflict resolution, and those sorts of things.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Anger management?

Ms MURRAY: Anger management, yes, that is right. We create little worksheets for them to complete to increase their awareness of issues and emotional intelligence. That answers your question about how do we know how they are going. We only did it yesterday. We said, "Okay, there are some bad behaviours going on here, what are they guys?" Then they come up with the list: no spitting, no swearing, no this, no that. Then we talk to them, "What have you got to do to stop that?" And they said, "Well, you've got to do all these things." I said, "Well, how are you going to prove to me that you are doing this, that you are actually changing your behaviour and you deserve to stay at Tirkandi Inaburra?" We make staying at Tirkandi Inaburra a real prize because we talk to them with strength-based communication: "You've been selected to come to our school; you've been selected to come to Tirkandi Inaburra, you're special, and you are special because we believe you've got potential." So, it is all that strength-based communication that we go into. I said to them yesterday, "How are you going to prove to me that you should be allowed to stay at Tirkandi if you're doing all this foul, disgusting stuff?" And we come up with the measurements: they are going to have so many cards in a week and all this sort of stuff. So, they are planning that and they are measuring that and they are choosing and striving to get that goal.

CHAIR: And the goal is?

Ms MURRAY: And the goal is up the top being a respectful, young indigenous male or young man or something like that.

Mr ANDREAZZA: And the goal ladders are plastered up all over the walls.

Ms MURRAY: They are on the walls. We did it yesterday, so they have been involved.

CHAIR: We have talked about the exit polling, for want of a better term, but when they leave and go back to their previous environment, is there an exit follow-up in putting into progress what they have learned here on an ongoing basis?

Ms MURRAY: That is after care. There is a big issue about that. Can I just say because we have got off track, that the other program we are doing here is sport and recreation. We do a lot of sport and recreation because that is the lever to making them feel good about themselves. Many of them are quite talented sports-wise, but not academically. So, we make them feel good about themselves and use that. Then we have the main program, which is the cultural side of things because the purpose of this place is to give them identity, to make them feel proud of who they are and proud that they are Aboriginal boys. Culture is threaded through everything we do here. One of the significant features we do here is that when the boys come in they go down to the back shed and select a blank didgeridoo.

They sand that didgeridoo, they decorate that didgeridoo, they learn to play that didgeridoo and they play it on graduation day and take it home with them. If they are sent home from Tirkandi Inaburra or leave of their own volition, they are not allowed to take that didgeridoo. And a lot of them will hang on just to take their didgeridoo. They also make clap sticks and boomerangs and things like that. Culture is threaded through everything we do to make them proud of who they are, to give them identity because many of these children know nothing about their Aboriginal backgrounds—absolutely nothing. I am horrified at the amount they do not know. That is the program. I got a little off track; I am sorry about that.

Mrs McINTOSH: We were talking earlier about after care. The after-care position is not funded. I think I am right in saying that.

Mrs MURRAY: Yes.

Mrs McINTOSH: That means that the money that is being used for after care is taken away from other things. But it is an important position in that the person—who happens to be me at this stage—

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: That is why it is important.

Mrs McINTOSH: I am doing both jobs.

Mrs MURRAY: It is not her job.

Mrs McINTOSH: It is not my job; I am juggling two jobs. That person needs to be in contact if one of the boys rings up tomorrow and says, "This is happening in my life. What can I do about it". So you talk to them and you point them in the right direction for support. We try to get mentors happening for the boys when they go home. We feel that it is integral to their growth to have some support, or some form of interaction with role models when they go home. Unfortunately, it takes a lot of money. At this stage that cannot happen until we get a lot of money. We have tried really hard to get those things happening.

Mrs MURRAY: We have advertised for voluntary mentors and we have done lots of other things but we just do not get them.

CHAIR: So the after care is not your job and it is not funded?

Mrs McINTOSH: That is right. It is just not funded.

Mrs MURRAY: It was recognised quite early that in order to sustain this we needed to have someone to try to plan the after care. The board created a position but no additional money came with that. It has been at the expense of other things.

Mrs McINTOSH: It is just because we have a passion—we want to see each and every one of these boys succeed in life—that we do this follow up. If we go down to Albury we might make a point of going to their place and saying, "How are you going? Mum and Dad, how is he going? Is he doing his room? Is he doing his washing?"

CHAIR: How much of your time would be spent on after care? Is that an unfair question?

Mrs MURRAY: It is a full-time position.

Mrs McINTOSH: It is full-time care. At the moment it might be one day of after care or one day of case coordination. At the moment I am trying to average that out to fifty-fifty.

Mrs MURRAY: The difficulty that we have is that we put a significant amount of effort into learning about each individual child, what his strengths and weaknesses are, and what his supports are. We plan that in what we call an exit plan. We send that out to schools in particular and to other people that we have partnered with to provide some sort of after care follow up for the child. However, in reality these people at the other end are not doing their job. We are telling them, "We are dealing with this child. We know what works with this child. This is the way in which we recommend you continue with him." However, they are not doing their bit. It annoys me that there are so many services out there. They are everywhere. It is a nightmare to link them and to get them to implement what we need to support these children.

Ms GIBBS: When they go back it seems that some of the parents and sponsors send them out here just to get rid of the problem.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Respite?

Ms GIBBS: Yes.

Mrs McINTOSH: One of the things I thought about last term—and I have spoken briefly to some services—relates to when the boys are here. I have not worked out the proper way around this yet but we have to help the family while the boys are here. The boys are just going back to the same old situation. Some of them are very violent situations. While the boys are here someone could also be working on the families. That could be done in parallel.

CHAIR: Are you coming across blockages of the silos?

Mrs McINTOSH: Yes.

Mrs MURRAY: There is a lot of that. We are struggling to get mentors for these boys. Quite a few boys from Wagga Wagga have come through. We are struggling to get mentors and support for boys in Wagga Wagga, yet we are told that 12 youth worker positions have been funded in Wagga. Come on!

Mrs McINTOSH: We cannot get someone to mentor one child.

Mrs MURRAY: It defies belief. I wonder what these people are doing. I find that amazing.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: I worked in the disability sector for 15 years. What Aunty Annie is talking about is holistic and integrated case management. It is very difficult to do. The Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care [DADAHC] has been working on this for a while. Maybe there are some models that you could look at replicating here. If you talk to bureaucrats about something that exists they know what it is.

Mrs MURRAY: Who has those models?

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: DADAHC.

Mrs MURRAY: That is good. I am on the Home Care Advisory Board and I am going there tomorrow. I will be looking for those models.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: Go and talk to it about its integrated holistic case management models for the disability sector.

Dr JOHN KAYE: If you were to reproduce this model—and, clearly, this is a hugely successful undertaking and we should have more of them—how would you go about doing that? What steps would you take to build another one of these somewhere else?

Mrs MURRAY: You would have to have a look. You have to have the evidence-based stuff. You have to look at the evidence and find out where the hotspots are, and there are hotspots around. Then you have to get community engagement. In reality you have to get the people to own the place. At the end of the day they will not own it, but they will be supportive of it. If you do not do that they will misinterpret it as a juvenile justice facility. That is what has happened to us. Some people out there think that we are a juvenile justice facility.

Ms GIBBS: They say, "I am not sending my kids there because that is a juvenile justice centre."

Mrs MURRAY: Despite all our information and what not, they have that perception. One of the problems I mentioned earlier is that we have DOCS as a partner. People are aware of that and they are suspicious about what our link is with DOCS. That has been difficult to overcome.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Aunty Colleen, your talked earlier about finding the hot spots but there is no question that there is a need for your services, which are oversubscribed, as it were. There is a need for more services?

Mrs MURRAY: Absolutely. We are oversubscribed.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Effectively you are bringing young boys here from almost all over the State. Just doubling your facility anywhere would ease the pressure on you, would it not?

Mrs MURRAY: Absolutely.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Because it is a residential program, are there benefits in having it located close to where a family comes from, or does that not matter so much?

Mrs MURRAY: That does not matter so much.

Ms GIBBS: I think it should be located further away. The kids know that it is only 45 minutes away from home and they can just go home. We have had two graduates from Griffith and we have had other kids from Griffith, but they have gone home because they knew that they could.

Mrs McINTOSH: It does not matter where it is. This is central to a lot of places. The parents will not come anyway; they just will not come here for a lot of reasons. They have not got the money to get here, or it is too difficult to get here. There are a lot of excuses.

Mrs MURRAY: We have not got the room. The behaviour of some of these boys is so difficult and challenging that there is practically a family breakdown. The parent is over the child and the child is over the parent. It is a catch-22 thing. The respect between them is gone. When they are here and we can get them to come into the family stay, basically you can see their relationship mending. You can see it. They have never seen their child well behaved and relaxed and they take on a different view about their child. You can see that.

Ms GIBBS: Some of the feedback I have had is, "We cannot get over how well-behaved and well-mannered he is. I can see the difference in him. He is happier." You get all that from the parents.

Mrs MURRAY: You can see the family healing stuff that goes on.

Ms GIBBS: They sit there and thank you. They say, "Thank you very much for what you have done for my son."

Mrs McINTOSH: I often say that this place is a healing centre. A lot of these boys have suffered abuse and neglect. They have a lack of trust. It all needs to be instilled in them again, in particular, the trust. This is a place for gentle healing.

Mrs MURRAY: What we are doing here is unlearning learned behaviour. There has to be a recognition of the fact that much of this behaviour is learned.

Ms GIBBS: A lot of it is learned. We had a boy who lived with his dad who had no respect for women. He was just like what his dad was like. But we turned that around.

Dr JOHN KAYE: In just three months you turned that around?

Ms GIBBS: Yes.

Mrs McINTOSH: Sometimes the boys have not learned how to socialise and be social people out there. They have no idea how to do it. We have to teach them.

Ms GIBBS: That young boy turned around and said to the others, "Do not talk to Aunty Nicole like that." He is telling them.

Mrs MURRAY: It is pretty horrific. Whilst their behaviour is challenging the vast majority of it is learned and they have to unlearn it because they do not know what to replace it with. They have no idea. The lack of nurturing is horrific. It is because a parent has his or her own set of problems, and the child has his set of problems and he challenges. I will not mention names, but we kept one boy for six months. When he first came here he was 12 years old and no high school would accept him. When he came to us he was having two-year-old tantrums. It did not take me too long to realise that they were two-year-old tantrums. He was having those tantrums six times a day, was he not?

Mr ANDREAZZA: Yes, he was.

Mrs MURRAY: He was kicking, screaming, swearing and smashing windows. There was a lot of talk about the fact that he needed to settle and heal within. I said no.

Ms GIBBS: They said that he had attention deficit disorder, or something like that.

Mrs MURRAY: I said, "No. He can heal within and he can settle but, in the meantime, he follows rules." We worked with him, but he followed rules like everyone else. Over time we kept at him.

Ms GIBBS: We kept at him.

Mr ANDREAZZA: We just had to set the rules for him and he understood that after a while.

Mrs MURRAY: His tantrums got less and less.

Mr ANDREAZZA: Markedly. You could see it happening.

Ms GIBBS: If he had a tantrum at the end of three months it would be a quick one.

Mrs MURRAY: We used to say, "Knock that off. Get in here and wash the dishes."

Mr ANDREAZZA: We have a wide range of youth workers as well. We have black, white, male, female, young and old. The message gets through to the boys one way or the other and they can identify with one person somewhere along the line. We always got the same message going to the boys. It is important for us to be on the same page if the community workers are to be vigilant and consistent.

Mrs MURRAY: I have had this question put to me a few times, "Why is this place being run by non-indigenous youth workers. Why do you have non-indigenous youth workers?" I also get asked that by Aboriginal people. We are replicating society and the people who are employed here are employed for their skills. I refer to them as knowledge workers because they are going to be trained as youth workers. However, I refer to them as knowledge workers. It is because of the knowledge that they have about life, which is why they are here. They are all here for a specific reason—to impart that to the boys. That is what we are replicating here and they have to learn to accept authority. When they will not accept authority that is what gets them into trouble.

CHAIR: Is there support for the knowledge workers when they are trying to deal with their frustrations and anger?

Mrs MURRAY: Yes. They can come and see me.

Mrs McINTOSH: I think we missed something earlier when we were referring to training. We have training regularly, in particular, every time they close down for the two-week school holidays. That is full-on training for the staff and other training is provided throughout the year. Some of that training also involves how to look after yourself. We are always making sure that the workers have their breaks and that type of thing.

Ms MURRAY: We spend a lot of money training because we attract subsidies to train youth workers. I use those subsidies to give them back training. They have done a lot of training on behaviour management, in particular, challenging behaviour and conflict resolution.

CHAIR: And that tries to deal with those issues of poaching and burnout?

Ms McINTOSH: I hope so.

Mr ANDREAZZA: We also have socialisation during the two-week break.

Ms MURRAY: I always try to take them away on trip—a reward—for two or three days. We look at something that someone else is doing and see whether there are other models or practices. It is also designed to give them an idea of how other people in the industry are working. If they can survive Tirkandi Inaburra, when they walk out of here they will be the most talented and multi-skilled youth workers in Australia. If they can survive changing attitude and entrenched bad behaviour, youth work anywhere else is a piece of cake.

CHAIR: What is the usual length of stay? Nicole, how long have you been here?

Ms GIBBS: Since it opened.

CHAIR: How long is that?

Ms GIBBS: Nearly three years—three years at the end of the year.

CHAIR: Is that the longest? How many staff are there?

Ms MURRAY: There are about 12 youth workers.

Mr ANDREAZZA: And five or six are reasonably new.

Ms MURRAY: Only four have been here since the start.

Mr ANDREAZZA: That is myself and Col.

Ms MURRAY: Another four have been here 18 months, and a new bunch are about to start.

Mr ANDREAZZA: It is getting easier to impart knowledge to the new youth workers.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: But you have a turnover rate of 30 per cent to 50 per cent.

Ms MURRAY: It is about 50 per cent.

Ms McINTOSH: Increasing fuel prices have caused a problem because of the amount of travel.

Ms GIBBS: That is why not many workers want to come out here or stay in the job.

Ms MURRAY: It is the distance. A centre like this has to be relatively isolated. You could not run this in town.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Could you imagine the resistance you would get in town?

Ms GIBBS: You would have kids everywhere.

CHAIR: It would be the not-in-my-backyard syndrome.

Ms MURRAY: There was enough resistance here. They had to have big meetings like the land rights meetings. You would have thought we were taking over the land when they were going to build this place. There were meetings with farmers and so on.

Dr JOHN KAYE: But that is all in the past. You have good relationships now.

Ms MURRAY: Yes, but we have to work on it because people misinterpret what we are trying to do.

Dr JOHN KAYE: But there is no adverse interaction between the boys here and the neighbours.

Ms MURRAY: Definitely not.

Ms GIBBS: Only when we get one walking up that way and we get a phone call asking us whether we are missing a boy.

Mr ANDREAZZA: But that is very rare.

Dr JOHN KAYE: But they are not fussed by that or threatened.

Ms MURRAY: No.

Ms GIBBS: They are very supportive.

Mr ANDREAZZA: There are no threats.

Ms MURRAY: In fact we are building that relationship. There is a lot of misinformation. Because there is no similar facility people do not believe that there is such a thing as an early intervention centre—it must be run by Juvenile Justice.

Ms McINTOSH: And they are very surprised that there are no high fences.

Ms MURRAY: Getting over that hurdle is very difficult. At Coleambally—which is a traditional farming community—it has been really difficult. We are breaking down those barriers. Last term we had the biggest morning tea. We invited all the elderly people from Darlington Point and Coleambally. Everyone from the nursing home at Coleambally came. The boys were in week five and they were on their best behaviour.

Ms GIBBS: They went around with the food and drinks.

Mr ANDREAZZA: They were gentlemen.

Ms MURRAY: They made the scones.

Ms GIBBS: They even made sausage rolls.

Mr ANDREAZZA: We had our own float.

Ms MURRAY: They invited them to the graduation. We had 20 more people we did not know about.

CHAIR: You could have a whole marketing budget

Ms MURRAY: Graduation day here is very special.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Have you had any success in building a partnership with the schools in the feed-in area?

Ms MURRAY: We have had difficulty with that. Our instructions are that we do that at a board level. Therefore we must go to the representative on the board. He is the one who feeds out. The Department of Education and Training has Principals that are practically untouchable; it is really hard to get near them unless you go through their chain of command. That makes it difficult. I must say that some schools have been really good to work with. It depends on the will. Some Principals are really good supports. With the last intake the head teacher here went around to the schools to let them know who she was. There are still people who refer to the black fellas on the hill out here. There are professionals out here. She has been going around schools trying to get that relationship going so they take seriously what we are doing. This is serious business; this is a child's life. That is getting better.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am not thinking only in terms of getting recruits but also that after-care function that you spoke of.

Ms MURRAY: We need them. That is the difficulty of establishing the network and maintaining it. Maintaining that network and getting them to do what they need to do for these children is a whole different ballgame and set of skills.

Ms McINTOSH: You asked a question of Aunty Colleen about what would she would do if we had another centre somewhere else.

Ms GIBBS: You would have to get Aunty Colleen to run it.

Ms McINTOSH: Initially you would have to have some of the people from here to staff it.

Mr ANDREAZZA: That is precisely right.

Ms McINTOSH: It is unique.

Dr JOHN KAYE: You would seed it by taking some staff from here.

Ms MURRAY: At the minimum you would use our experience.

Dr JOHN KAYE: You would train staff here and move them there.

Ms MURRAY: Yes. We desperately need another one in New South Wales.

CHAIR: One?

Ms MURRAY: We have to get at least one.

Ms McINTOSH: And some for girls.

Ms MURRAY: That model is already done. Liz West from Attorney General's has the model and they have already done the community consultation. It is up in the Dubbo and Wellington area—in the north west. They are looking for funding. That is the issue.

Ms McINTOSH: We have telephone calls from people from Broken Hill, Western Australia and everywhere.

Ms MURRAY: South Australia.

Ms McINTOSH: They want to send their kids here.

Ms MURRAY: Sydney, Canberra, Batemans Bay—everywhere.

Ms McINTOSH: It is terrible to have to say we cannot take them because they are out of our quadrant.

Ms MURRAY: I have an application sitting on my desk from a child from Coomealla. The load there would be huge. If we could get another centre up I would then want to get into a debate about changing the boundaries. The difficulty is that we have trouble keeping Orange-Bathurst boys because they are so far out of country. They are just different boys. There are boys out of Wilcannia, Moree—all those top towns—and they have been resettled. Their parents have been resettled into the Albury and Bathurst area. We find they are angry children.

Mr ANDREAZZA: Because the parents are angry.

Ms MURRAY: Their parents are resettled people and they are obviously angry about that. They are radical and therefore have taught their children that anger. Their behaviours are atrocious.

CHAIR: But understandable.

Ms MURRAY: Yes. They are out of country and it is difficult.

Ms McINTOSH: We talked earlier about transgenerational stuff. I know the Federal Government is sending all that money to the Northern Territory. In New South Wales we have whole communities where transgenerational abuse is happening. That is happening in a number of indigenous communities in New South Wales, but the money has gone to the Northern Territory.

CHAIR: I apologise, but we must conclude.

Ms MURRAY: We should shut up. We could talk forever.

Dr JOHN KAYE: We could spend the whole day here.

Ms MURRAY: We are pleased to get a lot of visitors because we can tell them that this is an early intervention centre.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

(The Committee adjourned at 12.00 p.m.)

Corrected copy

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

At Griffith on Tuesday 5 August 2008

The Committee met at 2.15 p.m. at Griffith Council Chambers

PRESENT

The Hon. I. W. West (Chair)

The Hon. G. J. Donnelly
Dr J. Kaye
The Hon. T. J. Khan
The Hon. M. S. Veitch

GAIL BRYDON, Senior Counter Clerk, Griffith Local Court,

ALICE WATTS, Aboriginal Student Support Officer, Aboriginal Education and Training Unit, TAFE,

CRAIG CROMELIN, Councillor for Wiradjuri, New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council,

CAROLYN WHITE, Koori Outreach Options for Learning, TAFE,

MARIA WILLIAMS, Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, Griffith Local Area Command,

STEVE MEREDITH, Chairperson, Griffith Aboriginal Medical Service and Aboriginal Programs Coordinator, Aboriginal Education and Training Unit, TAFE,

LISA O'HARA, Practice Manager, Griffith Aboriginal Medical Service,

CAROLYN WEBB, Griffith Office of Department of Juvenile Justice,

MARGARET MacGREGOR, President, Griffith Ratepayers and Residents Association,

ALOMA SIMPSON, Chairperson, Gurribungu Elders Group, and

GLORIA GOOLAGONG, Wiradjuri Elder.

CHAIR: Ian West is my name. I am the Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Issues, an upper House committee of the New South Wales Parliament. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to be here in Griffith. Firstly, I will ask Aunty Gloria to welcome us to country before proceeding any further.

Ms GOOLAGONG: Ladies and gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I welcome you all here today to Wiradjuri country on behalf of Wiradjuri and Torres Strait people past and present. Welcome to you all here today across country. As an elder I know how important it is for our children to know their history and their culture. This way they will know who they are to make sure their future is bright and happy. We all have to work together and this way our children and our grandchildren work together. I would like to encourage you all here today to work hard and make our grandchildren's dreams come true. Thank you. I welcome you all here today. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Aunty Gloria, for that welcome. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Issues I acknowledge that we are meeting on Wiradjuri land and pay our respects to elders past and present. This particular inquiry into overcoming indigenous disadvantage, closing the gap, was first given to the social issues committee by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Paul Lynch, late last year. The particular reference given to the committee enabled it to seek submissions. We received some 78 submissions. We have conducted hearings and forums in February, March and April this year visiting Kempsey, Dubbo and Nowra in regional New South Wales, and Bidwill and Redfern in metropolitan Sydney

The interim report of some 300-odd pages raised approximately 45 issues that fell basically into four or five important themes: measuring program outcomes and success of various programs; coordinating service delivery to ensure services meet the needs of the

Aboriginal community; delivering services in partnership with the Aboriginal community; and how insufficient short- and long-term funding for programs across Australia affects more than one-third of the national Aboriginal community who live in New South Wales and how funding is effected across urban, regional and remote communities. As we know, most of the people of New South Wales live in urban areas and major regional towns and that issue needed to be addressed. Today we are asking you for your expertise, knowledge and input into the committee's deliberations to deal with these four important themes. We are asking for your help because the task is daunting and you are the experts: you are the people who are on the ground and the ones able to give us your experience. Without that we really will fail not only in our deliberations, but also in any recommendations we put to the Government.

We have to prepare a final report by 28 November, which will be presented to the New South Wales Parliament for consideration by the Minister, the Cabinet and the New South Wales government of the day. Thank you again, Aunty Gloria. We ask the participants to be frank today. We advise that *Hansard* is the official recording of these proceedings this will enable the committee to revisit the knowledge we receive from you by reading the transcript. I declare the meeting formally open for discussion. Feel free to discuss the themes I have mentioned or anything else you wish to raise. However, we basically want to focus on those four important themes I have mentioned. Perhaps we can commence by going around the table.

Ms MacGREGOR: Welcome. It is wonderful to have you here in Griffith. It is my understanding that we have not had a parliamentary standing committee here before. I think this is the first time. So, that is wonderful. I came today because I probably want to listen more than talk, which is fairly unusual for me. I did read the committee's report that is currently on the internet. I read the recommendations. In Griffith it is a fairly unique type of scenario. People say we are multicultural; I say we are not so much multicultural as we are challenged culturally in integrating. I think multiculturalism identifies what we do not have in common and can often cause confusion, whereas cultural integration brings us together with what we have in common. I think the indigenous community we have in Griffith is wonderful and there are some terrific leaders and very passionate people there. I think with the changes in Australia of the last 18months with the new Federal Government and the apology, which was a wonderful apology, it is time for our indigenous people to shine. I am going to do everything I can in Griffith to see that happen.

I have just started a job at the lands council, which is wonderful. I am very excited about that. I have a little indigenous grandson and another one on the way. So, I am very keen on seeing Wiradjuri people really do well. As I said, Griffith is a difficult town. Recently I spoke to a family who just moved here from South Africa. The father said he has never come across such racism in his whole life, and he has lived in quite a lot of different places. So, I see that as a challenge for Griffith people to truly understand what the hardships are for indigenous people and understand that they are disadvantaged: to recognise that and acknowledge it I think would be a wonderful step.

CHAIR: In regard to the interim report that you read—

Ms MacGREGOR: I did not read the whole report but I read the recommendations. I just think it is marvellous. I think there is a big gap between what you are trying to achieve and what gets achieved on a ground level. I am not sure what causes that gap, but that is one of the reasons I wanted to be here today. I want to learn from our indigenous community how we can close that gap. I just think it is wonderful. In 10 years' time I hope things are completely

different; that there is such a turnaround that every aspect of the disadvantaged will be almost gone.

CHAIR: That is a great start. Feel free to make further contributions during the discussions.

Ms WATTS: I am Alice Watts. I am the Aboriginal Student Support Officer at TAFE New South Wales. I would like just to pass and wait for other comments.

Mr CROMELIN: My name is Greg Cromelin. I am the elected representative for the region on the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council. Basically I know many of my fellow councillors have been involved in the discussions that have taken place in some of the towns you mentioned earlier. So, there has been quite an amount of input from them. Certainly again it is a matter of me sitting and observing, and there will be something that will trigger my need to make a comment during the course of the day. One thing that was made aware to me recently was a quote that something like 93 per cent of non-Aboriginal Australians have not met Aboriginal people, yet it is probably that 93 per cent that make decisions that affect Aboriginal people. How is that so if they have not met, do not know or understand the needs of Aboriginal people? How is it in this day and age that we still allow that to happen? We talk about the ability to make decisions for and on behalf of ourselves, yet still there is 93 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population that makes decisions for us and they have not even met an Aboriginal person. Like I said, I will make comment during the course of this meeting.

Ms WHITE: My name is Carolyn White. I am a teacher at TAFE New South Wales Riverina Institute Griffith campus. I coordinate the KOOL program—Koori Outreach Options for Learning—which is for young Aboriginal people who have left school before completing year 10 aged between 15 and 18 years. I will probably have some contributions to make towards education, but I am happy to do that as appropriate as the meeting takes place.

Ms WILLIAMS: My name is Maria Williams, or Madonna is my traditional name. I am from the Kalari clan people of the Wiradjuri nation. Kalari is on the Lachlan River, the dead centre of New South Wales. For those of you who know your geography, it is Condobolin. My family along with numerous families from the Condobolin community moved to Griffith in the early 1900s for seasonal work. I was born here and my family have maintained strong links in the Riverina Griffith community. I am the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer with the Griffith Local Area Command. I have just been here for close on 18 months, but I was in Wagga Wagga Local Area Command for seven years. Prior to that I spent about 32 years in health. I resigned from health but I needed new challenges and thought that policing most definitely was a challenge. I will not say any more but I will make further comments particularly relating to issues of crime and justice as we go through.

Ms YOUNG: I am originally from Cowra in New South Wales. I lived in Sydney for many years but I moved to Griffith over 10 years ago as I have older children who have lived here for some time and I have a lot of relations who have lived in Griffith all their lives. I represent the Griffith Local Aboriginal Land Council but I am also an Aboriginal community member. I would like to be here most of all as a community member. I agree with what Margaret said. This town is very racist. I have lived here and experienced it myself and so have my children.

Our people will not achieve a lot here until we overcome that racism, but I am not sure how to do that. It is such a difficult thing. Griffith is advertised as being a multicultural town but

we are certainly not invited to jump into that melting pot. We are still at the bottom of the food chain. Our statistics are still high in mortality rates as well as incarceration rates. I want to be a voice for our youth as I am concerned about our indigenous youth Australia-wide, but particularly here in Griffith. We want to keep our kids out of contact with the criminal justice system.

I worked at the Turkandi Inaburra Cultural Development Centre, which was designed to turn around young Aboriginal boys between the ages of 12 and 15 years. I worked there since its opening and I left there earlier this year to concentrate more on my own children because I had devoted so much of my life to my job that I was ignoring my own children. I have a young boy who is in serious trouble at the moment. We have a lot of issues in this town, in particular, our youth. If we do not help our youth we will not have a future.

Mrs SIMPSON: I am here as the chair of dhirri bungoon, which means grey-headed ones in Wiradjuri. I am also treasurer of our medical centre and I am also the Wirampa representative for health. I, my family and my brothers and sisters were born here in Griffith. At the last elections I ran for Griffith City Council. It took me quite a while to get up the courage, but I did it. They keep asking me, "Do you want to run again?" but I have already had one go. I am debating whether or not to run again. I just talked about it with Neville downstairs. We had a little yarn. I was born here and I have roots in this area. I used to walk home from school and we used to live in tin huts. We go back a long way.

It is good to see a lot of improvements but there could be a lot more. While ever there are people in the community they will try to have a go. I will not say what I have done but we are trying anyway. It is excellent that you have come here to meet with us. I hope that something positive comes out of it. I have a meeting in Sydney on 26 August with Riverina Health and I will be talking there. We do need a lot of funding in this area. Steve Meredith is our chair and Lisa O'Hara is a worker up there at the medical centre. We need a lot of funding. We have the ideas so we just need the money to set them in motion. I hope that the ball starts rolling soon via meetings and that it keeps on keeping on.

Mr MEREDITH: I am the chairperson of the Griffith Aboriginal Medical Service. Today, from my point of view, I will be listening. I would like to get the Committee's interpretation of a number of catch-phrase type terms that generally pop up in reports, such as self-determination and self-management. I would like to explore a lot more on partnerships. As Aloma just mentioned, we are one of the fastest growing Aboriginal medical services in the State. We have a number of programs up and running at the moment and we are looking to move into larger facilities.

It seems to me that during the course of my lifetime we have been the most reported on and planned for race of people on Earth. Hopefully, from today, one of the outcomes is that I will get an opportunity to gauge the Government's commitment to implementing some of the programs about which we have ideas. I think it is important for Aboriginal people to own their problems. That is the only way we will solve those problems.

Ms O'HARA: I am the Practice Manager at the Griffith Aboriginal Medical Service. I have been in health for 18 years—13 years as a nurse and health worker, and the last five years at the Aboriginal Medical Service. The first thing that I would like to acknowledge is that the gap is closing. In my 18 years we have gone from a 20-year lifespan difference down to 17 years. That is due to the hard work of our health workers. That gap, which is still big, needs to be closed. The only way we will close it is by having viable programs and more funding.

Mrs GOOLAGONG: I came here today only to listen. I would just like to say welcome. Thank you for coming and listening to us and taking our problems back to where you came from. I would like to speak about some of the things that are going on in Griffith. Getting our youth off the street is one thing we as a community and everybody around town are trying to work towards. We are all trying to pull together and organise some situations so we can try to get them off the streets. As Margaret said, we do have trouble with our youth. We want to look after our youth because they are the kids of tomorrow. We, as a community, are all trying to help. This is a multicultural town but we are all trying to pull together.

As was said earlier, there is one family that is not working properly but they also have to pull together and come with us. We all have to pull together and try to help one another. I know that this is a racist town. Some people say that it is not, but it is. We had working party here in Griffith. It is just a shame that it folded up after we lost a bit of funding for 12 months. But that was coming from the grass roots and all the community was pulling together. At the time we had somebody on the council to talk for our people. This is our opportunity today to talk for our people. We should speak up for them because we need help in these areas. That is all I can say today.

CHAIR: We have been around the table but we have not heard from Desmond.

Ms BRYDON: That is all right.

CHAIR: But we need your expert input. We have been around the table but we will now ask someone to state in more depth how he or she thinks we should proceed.

Ms MacGREGOR: Could we touch on a few of the things that Steve mentioned—the partnerships and a few of those things?

CHAIR: Margaret, would you like to start?

Ms MacGREGOR: Steve knows what is needed.

Mr MEREDITH: To put it in a simple way—which is the only way that I know how to put it—if you go to Japan and you do business with Japanese people, you do business their way. Everybody knows that. Large American corporations go to Japan and they do business the Japanese way. If they want to do business their way the Japanese will just get up and leave them. The Japanese obviously have a good handle on the way they want to go about doing things. They obviously identify problems, they come to some agreement on how to resolve those issues, they get together and that is how they deal with things.

When the Government or any agency comes to Aboriginal communities and it wants to implement collaborative programs we always have to mould the way we do things to a non-Aboriginal way. Hierarchical structure is one of them. Earlier Aunty Gloria talked about the community working party. The first thing we were told about the community working party was that, with the demise of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC], the Government wanted an avenue to speak to community. The community working party model was put up as being the way that they were going to do business with Aboriginal people. That is how it was sold to us and we were to deal through indigenous coordination centres.

Those indigenous coordination centres said, "You have to have a structure, you have to have chair people, you have to have this, and you have to have that." Most Aboriginal people sitting around the table here today know that business was not done that way. We go to our elders, we take advice from them and, basically, the whole community is involved in programs and in resolving matters and issues. Straightaway, from the word go, we were dealing in a way that we were not used to dealing with our issues. Lisa mentioned earlier that the gap had closed from 20 to 17, but in reality we will still bury people aged 25 and 35. They will not get to be old people. In this community I can think offhand of two senior men over the age of 70.

In my lifetime, when I went to schools we were taught about Captain Cook and the educational programs in schools are still teaching us about Captain Cook, which is ridiculous, given the knowledge that we have now. Aboriginal people have a right to country. It is enshrined in State legislation in the Land Rights Act, so we have recognised that at a State level. There is also the national Native Title Act, so we have identified it at a national level. The Government has given Aboriginal people an apology for past injustices and policies. I see this as a real opportunity for us to move on. But in every piece of literature that I pick up I still see the words "self-determination" and "self management" in those reports. Nobody has ever been able to give me an adequate working definition of those expressions. The bottom line is that self-determination and self-management have strings attached so long as we do it in the non-Aboriginal way. That is where I am at today. Looking at the way we report and the way things have been reported in my life, I do not think there is any issue with the way we report. The issue is the Government's commitment to implementation and to deal with Aboriginal people in a way Aboriginal people are comfortable dealing with the issues. Unless we own the problems we will never solve them. That is still going to be dragging the chain for the wider community. We have a real opportunity to listen to people around the table and find out some better ways to implement programs. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Can you elaborate on that in terms of your thoughts about how this implementation could be done better? If what you are observing has not worked as well you as you think it should have—and many would agree—what is being missed in the implementation? What is not being done that should be done to make it more effective? Try to be more specific.

Mr MEREDITH: I will try to give a couple of examples. Under schedule 14 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act certain sites around New South Wales were targeted to hand back to Aboriginal communities—Aboriginal owners or people with cultural association and direct descendants from those communities. They could have a say in management of country. That was a great initiative. There were five initial parks: Mutawintji, Mount Grenfell, Yarrowyck, Lake Mungo and Biamanga/Gulga on the South Coast earmarked for hand back.

I belong to Ngiyampaa people north of the Lachlan River. One of our special places was Mount Grenfell. We put together a negotiating panel and negotiated a lease with the New South Wales Government and it successfully handed back the site in 2004. We have had a board of management since then. We have a 30-year lease and it is up for review every five years, so it will be reviewed next year. What has happened is that the agency responsible for holding the register of Aboriginal land is the Office of the Registrar. It has fallen down a bit in its commitment to that process. We want to do certain things and create employment programs and to get community in touch more with their old culture. We always seem to be hitting stumbling blocks with regard to National Parks and Wildlife policy. Whenever I talk to community people there

seems to be a feeling of "they are doing it to us again". They want us to be part of the society but then they put the up all the barricades.

Another example was the Schools in Partnerships Program. I used to sit on the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. Funding was provided to target indigenous students through special programs where community people would be in partnership with the schools. That was another great initiative. But the problem is the way it is delivered. The Griffith public school was the recipient here. The school then set up its committee and did not engage with the community very well at all. Many people on the steering committee were employees at the school and the principal was the chair. If you are sitting in a meeting and you want to have a say but your boss is sitting there, are you free to speak what is on your mind? Yes, they are great initiatives, but it is how they are delivered. We still seem to have this level of non-Aboriginal bureaucracy in between as a middleman. All I can see is that we have created an Aboriginal bureaucracy with bodies like ATSIC.

There are Aboriginal workers attached to agencies. I know this for a fact because I was six-and-a-half years with National Parks and Wildlife as an Aboriginal sites officer. You wear the uniform five days week but your skin is on you all the time; you are a black fella all the time. We were discouraged from speaking our minds and told to toe the line with policy and procedure. I have no problem with that, but how can you truly represent them? You feel compromised all the time. At the end of the day, after nearly seven years I felt like a hypocrite. I though it was wrong; we are not achieving self management and self determination.

In my role with TAFE as Aboriginal programs coordinator I cover Narrandera, Lake Cargelligo, Leeton and Griffith campuses trying to put together training programs. I get 15 hours a week to do that. That equates to about three hours for each campus. Lake Cargelligo is 120 kilometres away, which is a good hour's drive to Narrandera. Just to get to those places and back takes two and a half hours. Where is the opportunity to get real outcomes? I hope I have answered your question.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you.

Ms YOUNG: Steve is right. I have been in the same position in working with schools and different bodies. You have to act like they act, dress like they dress, talk like they talk, walk like they walk. That is particularly true in schools. If you advocate on behalf of Aboriginal children they ostracise you if they do not like what you have to say. You are then intimidated to leave. The whole staff will ostracize you, which makes you feel you are there as a token gesture. Why be there at all? That happens to Aboriginal adults in many areas, not just schools.

You have to understand that when Aboriginal people finally get the opportunity to seek and obtain employment, it changes lifestyles for them and their families. Many of them want to a hang on to it because there is more tucker on the table; they can dress their kids better and buy this and that. It is very difficult. You have to go to bed at night and think about what you are doing or not doing. Like Steve, you then ask yourself whether that is what you are really about and whether you are representing your kids or your community. It is a conscious thing. A lot of Aboriginal people will hang in for as long as they can. Sometimes even when you do get a job your own community can turn on you.

Ms WILLIAMS: I will continue on from Steve because he raised so many very relevant points this afternoon. Like Steve, every meeting we go to and every report we read is about self-determination and self-management. What is self-determination? The only people who have true

self-determination, whether they be Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, are those who own their own property. I have self-determination on two acres of land at Darlington Point because I own it. I do not have self-determination as a Wiradjuri woman when we come to the table talking about self-determination of Aboriginal people. The very reason we do not have self-determination is that we do not have an economic base. Our economic base was taken away; we have been dispossessed of it. If you do not have an economic base you do not have self-determination; if you do not have an economic base you are not in control of your destiny and you do not have self-management.

We have to be honest and start at the very core. You talk about wanting to do business with Aboriginal people. I say stop trying to do business with Aboriginal people and start doing business with traditional peoples. The only people who have the right to determine when it comes to culture and heritage are the traditional people of countries, not the Aboriginal people of Australia, of that community or of that region if they are not from country. The business has to be done with the traditional peoples.

Am I being exclusive to Aboriginal people? Not at all, because of past policies and legislation in Australia where Aboriginal people—or "peoples", to be correct—have been removed from country and from families and are now living in other people's traditional countries. The very principle of our culture is to share with each other and to care for each other. Let's work together—Maldungalanna. We need to work together even as Aboriginal people within our own communities if we come from different country. But let us practise Yingamarra and respect each other—the people of country—and work together to develop programs that are going to meet the needs of the community that we are living in.

We talk about coordination of services. Steve hit on it earlier. ATSIC was abolished and then they came up with the ICC and community working parties. It sounds great. When they came out selling community working parties at the first meeting I thought, "Thank God. For the first time the Government is really going to be listening to us and letting us determine and identify the priorities and key focus areas for our communities." Then it established them with no resources expecting the community to do all the hard slog for nothing. People sit back. I attend so many meetings and, with great respect to government agencies, they sit back and the poor old black fella is to blame again. We have no idea of the structures being imposed on us over and again.

The coordination of service delivery is a joke. I was at a meeting this morning. We invite senior managers of State Government agencies to the table with Aboriginal people and you get two government agencies turn up and there is not even an apology from the others. Then they will sit there saying they have no idea about the principles or philosophies behind community working parties despite the fact that the Premier's Department has sent out correspondence and there have been regional meetings and coordination management committees, which all the senior managers attend, and they know nothing about how to do business with the Aboriginal communities. I do not accept that.

There lies the problem: Commonwealth or State Government agencies do not want to sit at the table as equals with Aboriginal people and listen to them determine what are the priority areas for their communities and hold government agencies accountable for the services they deliver to our communities.

They all get *x* amount of dollars. We are everybody's target group. They get *x* amount of dollars to deliver the service. They do not deliver the service to the people and they do not like

being accountable back to the people. So, if we are going to talk about improving service delivery for Aboriginal people in Aboriginal communities, then I am like Steve, let us get the framework right. It is not right and there is a long way to getting it right. It is about really working with traditional peoples. Give us the opportunity to work that out at the local basis of how we do business with each other, then as Aboriginal peoples and how we then do business with the wider community.

Mrs SIMPSON: I agree with all that. I have been around a while: I was an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC] councillor in the nineties, I was with the Aboriginal Housing Office [AHO] housing for three years. One thing we have got to get back into our communities is self-respect, self-determination. I find one of the things, you can see the difference, is with people who own their homes. I really would like to see it made easier for Kooris to buy their homes. I know people who have lived in Department of Housing for almost 50 years and the money they have paid, but you still cannot buy them. I represented Binaal Billa, that is Aboriginal Housing with the New South Wales mob. A lot of our people, when they get into these positions—I am not talking about Craig because he is State lands council—they forget where they come from and what they are put there to do. I hope you blokes are not like that. I have talked about it all the time.

For example, here my granddaughter wanted to try her wings. We wanted a Department of Housing house in the suburb here Pioneer. They move the good ones out. I lived there for 12 years and they wanted to give her a home there. I said, "No way in the world." She would open the door to anyone: "Come in." I said, "I don't want her living there." I did mention some streets around Griffith. I said, "What about them streets?" They said, "Oh, no-one will move there. The tenants have been there for about 50 years." I said, "Fifty years? We weren't allowed in a white man's house, remember?" I said, "But we are now. How about putting them in a good suburb?" There are very few people do not know about Gordon estate in Dubbo. The worst in Australia it was called. I said, "You turn Pioneer and Parkinson Crescent into that; the mission days are over. People do their own thing." We have people here, we are all trying to do the right thing.

I would like to see it made easier for people to buy their houses. The New South Wales housing body is not doing what it is supposed to do. I know they are doing wrong because I am on so many committees. I go to these big land councils, housing, whatever, and the majority of them own their homes, but when it comes to the grassroots people, we do not get a hope of raising the money to buy. Kooris have not got much but we have got one another, big families, extended families. You have some families say, "Oh, we only live there on the weekend" and they are here about three years after. They are not going to put down that they are living there. And then there are kids making $500 a week. The parents cannot afford to have them in the home because the rent goes up. I know parents and grandparents that even charge their kids because they are having them there to keep them together. Why not give them a chance to have a go at owning their homes.

When you talk to these people from New South Wales Housing or whoever—we have Rob Carroll here, chairperson of Binaal Billa housing—it is always "It's the Commonwealth Government, they're the ones that makes the rules." I said, "Well, why don't they come to the communities and talk to the people?" That is only one elder you are hearing today finally. I am glad to see you. My mum and dad started off in a tent. I am the eldest of nine. They moved into town. They used to live in a place called Condo Lane. My dad built a tin hut for his kids. I was 27 before they were offered a housing commission house in town. Why? He worked hard all his life out in the paddocks. We never went hungry. But it was a stigma I suppose of being Aboriginal. I

know you have not got time, but walk around the shops in Griffith and see how many Aboriginal people are serving.

Ms WHITE: Very few.

Mrs SIMPSON: Yes. That is one of my dreams, to have Kooris to be self-determined to do that. When I was ATSIC we all sat around the table like this. Excellent ideas came up, but they still had to go past the white bureaucrats. They made the final decisions, yet we got the blame: "Where did all the billions go?" Like it was said in Bourke. Steve and myself, we are two founding members of the medical centre here, and we went to Bourke. They said they get so many millions but by the time it gets down to the people there is nothing left because it goes to the bureaucrats and whatever. So, you are there with your hand out all the time. When I was in Sydney in January representing Riverina, ATSIC was there. I did not like their attitude. Their attitude was, "Do what we tell you or you get nothing" because they hold the money strings. Like we said here, people are dying in their thirties and forties from heart disease, liver disease, everything, which is so simple to fix. I always say prevention is better than a cure. You prevent it from happening in the first place, or our kids going into jail.

The council puts things in place here, they would rather block a through road where you park in the middle of the street than spend money on the police boys club. I grew up with the police boys club. But now because the majority of the population is Italian, they are trying to make it more cosmopolitan like overseas with cafés on the footpath and all this type of thing, which is a waste of money. I am not biased on that or nothing; I am just telling the truth. When I questioned these people, the big shots I call them because they sit up there with their mobiles ringing up and whatever, they say, "Oh, it's not us. It's Commonwealth. They put these rules and regulations in." But I know for a fact because I have been there that there are a lot of decisions that do get made around them tables. It is sad but the people are elected, most of the time. I know the New South Wales Housing mob are not elected, they are selected. The only time you see them is election time: "I'm so and so running for this position and that position." I said, "Typical. Only time I see you is at election times." These people come from the South Coast and all. You never ever see them again. I hope that you are not like them.

I remember Col Markham came here. Oh my God. He said, "Take me down the street, give me a bit of background." So I said, "We have got a problem with wineries everywhere in Griffith with drinking." We own a property out of town, a beautiful property. I would like to get a rehab centre set up out there. He said, "We've got a mission here, 15 houses. Take me down." I introduced him to a couple of blokes who were sober that day, thank goodness. He said, "The thing that gets you back on the grog is when you're sitting around doing nothing." They are all dead now. This is not that long ago. Col said, "Oh. Give me your number. I'll this and that. I'll be getting in touch." The next time I seen him was about 10 years after at a lands council. He was big-noting himself there. I thought, will I walk up to him and ask him if he remembers me and remind him of what he said in Griffith? I said, no, better not. I will get too angry. As I said before—and I will always say it—prevention is the best medicine. We can prevent these things happening.

CHAIR: Perhaps Craig might like to make some comments?

Mr CROMELIN: I would like to add to some of the comments that have already been made. In my position as an elected representative I am not that dissimilar to some of the fellas around the table. I have to be a good listener as well as being able to make decisions that will affect community policies. We do that by listening to the community. One of the things that I

will never forget is where I come from. I choose to live in an Aboriginal community and that keeps me pretty well grounded. In a lot of these positions that we get in we can start to forget quite easily where we come from. Thankfully, that will never happen in my lifetime as an elected representative of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council.

CHAIR: That is not limited to the Aboriginal community.

Mr CROMELIN: No, certainly not, but it is one of the things that we can do amongst ourselves. However, it needs to be reinforced. I think it is refreshing if we can do that. Earlier this year I was fortunate enough to attend an Australian Council of Social Service [ACOSS] meeting in Melbourne where certain members of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council had a chance to talk about and discuss indigenous issues, or Aboriginal issues. One of the main things that we wanted to put out—people do not like mentioning it—was that racism does exist, and it exists in all forms. People need to own up to it and recognise that it is there. They should not try to sweep it under the carpet as it is there in all forms. We need to recognise it and that is the only way we will ever address it.

The more that we try to sweep it under the carpet and say that it does not exist, the more issues we will face on a regular basis. People talked earlier in this inquiry about closing the gap. Drawing on my own life experiences, as a young guy I grew up in the community of Murrum Bridge. For those of you who do not know, Murrum Bridge is a community that is 160 kilometres north-east of here. It is 20 kilometres on the Lachlan River from Lake Cargelligo. The community was set up in 1949 as a resettlement community. Many of the people who were brought to the community were people of Nyampa descent, which is what I am. My grandfather was born, bred and raised at Darlington Point, so he is Wiradjuri, but I have had more exposure to the Nyampa people and their culture.

If we follow our grandmother, I am of Aboriginal descent, but I am also proud of my grandfather's heritage. I have a lot of relatives in the township of Griffith. As a young person growing up in Murrum Bridge I remember that not too many people in my community had work at that time. It was not because they did not want to work; it was that it did not exist. When I was going to school, the young kids that were going to school woke up every morning and saw that their mum and dad, or both of them, had either gone off to work on the farm or in some sort of shop. People were experienced in going into employment after they had finished school and that became a familiar part of their upbringing.

When I was growing up that was something that I did not experience on a regular basis. That is something with which a lot of people would be only too familiar. I saw a lot of my people drinking alcohol and that was because they had nothing else to do. We heard mentioned earlier that a lot of programs were started and finished, but they were designed to achieve only a small objective; they were never designed to find ongoing employment. As a young person growing up I was fortunate enough to go as far as year 11. I wanted to become a carpenter. In 1982 I did a carpentry course in Dubbo and I continued with that for a bit.

At the age of 19 I got involved in community politics and I have been involved in community politics until the present day—a period of 25 years. I have to say that that is probably the most rewarding experience that I have had. Sure, there have been many times when a number of things have been placed on me as an individual. A lot of people question your capacity when you are making decisions, either as a chairperson or as a board member of a particular organisation. I got involved in it because I wanted to make a difference. I can say for certain that I put up my hand to sit on the board to be elected. Thankfully, I was elected to the

New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, but that is exactly what I wanted to do to make a difference.

Throughout my life I have been fortunate to be involved in the community development employment program [CDEP] at Murrum Bridge. I am proud to say that Murrum Bridge is one of the most successful CDEPs in this region. About 70 people were employed at the CDEP. I know what it was like prior to the CDEP; we had nothing. As a chairperson I did not even want to be involved in certain aspects in the community. It took a non-Aboriginal person to come into the community for a period of six months. He gave us life skills, he taught us how to react at meetings such as this, how to ask certain questions, how to run our board meetings, and he gave us simple things like self-esteem and self-confidence in our own ability. In six months we went from being a group of people with no self-esteem to the point where we decided that we could run the organisation ourselves, and we did.

We took on an organisation of the magnitude of the CDEP, which brought in about $800,000 a year, and we managed and ran that program. We employed people. We used to work out where the activities would go and we ran it for 18 successful years. I must admit that some of the businesses in Lake Cargelligo used to say that we were the lifeblood of the community. We kept a lot of those businesses alive. A lot of negatives came out of that CDEP, but I am not one who would knock the CDEP. People had the ability to get up every morning and to go and do something in their community that made them proud. That is something for which you cannot give enough money. It was not a job for them; it was a joy. The fact that they got paid to do it was a reward in itself.

The Government then thought, "This is not going anywhere and it is not doing anything." They wanted us to leave our community, but they did not know where my community was. I am not taking the focus away from this community, but people think that working in your community has no value. I am talking about government departments. They think that working in the community has no value. It has all the value in the world. When it came to looking after and doing simple things like maintaining the elders' yards, mowing them and looking after them at any given time—I imagine that it would be no different here—if their yards were not maintained by people on the CDEP more than likely they were not maintained at all.

It never got the kudos that it deserved. I think it was wrongfully and forcefully accused and abused and, ultimately, the Government brought it down. Ninety-three per cent of non-Aboriginal people have never met an Aboriginal person, but they make the decisions and, unfortunately, that is done through the media. Earlier, when I was down in the lobby, many members of the Legislative Council were asking me about Murrum Bridge wine. That is an initiative that came from an idea that the community ran itself. It was supported by the CDEP and by the TAFE of Griffith campus, and it had the support of some other key people around the place, in particular, a local grape grower based here in Griffith.

That program did not work because the TAFE program wanted it to work one way. People in the community saw something that suited their needs and then they made it work. It did not work because the Government was sitting behind us and telling us, "You have to do this, that or the other"; it worked because we did what Steve said—we owned it and took responsibility for it. We said, "This is our program. If it is going to work it is going to work because we will make it work. If it fails it will fail because we have allowed it to fail." But it became a success in every sense of the word.

I would like to summarise by saying that, whenever you try to work with Aboriginal people, you have to stop using a broad-brush approach. The broad-brush approach does not work. This community is separate. If you go to Narrandera you will find that it is a different community altogether. If you go to Leeton you will find that the Aboriginal community is different again in its demographics and its dynamics. The issues are the same. We all face the same issues but it is how you address them. The size of those issues are different. You have to be able to address the needs of each individual community and there must be flexibility from the Government to allow people to do that.

If anything is going to work it is going to work because the people take it on. It will not work because some bureaucrats sitting in an office in Canberra, in Sydney or wherever, go around making decisions because 93 per cent of the population seem to think it is the best thing for Aboriginal people. If you want to know what is the best thing for Aboriginal people ask us. It is very interesting to listen to the discussion that is going on. I would like to refer to one other thing that was mentioned earlier relating to housing. We would like to have ownership of things in Australia. We are excluded from a lot of things, not because we choose to be excluded or we want to be excluded, but because we do not have the financial capacity to do it.

I note that the Prime Minister mentioned he is looking at producing 50,000 jobs over the next two years. Good on him if that ever comes off. I would like to think that Aboriginal people could play a huge part in helping to contribute to that.

I will go back to the point I made earlier. Many of our people have not been exposed to what is required in the job but they are expected to turn up and know what is required automatically. They try to put a non-Aboriginal in there to support Aboriginal people, but they do not know anything about their background and why people may not necessarily turn up to work. It is not always because they are drunk or lazy and all the other stereotypical reasons. We have legitimate reasons; it is because we do not have a car and cannot get one because we do not have a licence and we cannot get a licence because of fines or lack of education. People want to do well for themselves, but they are held back because of a number of issues. I think I will sit back and listen to a few other people now.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Would you like to make some comment about the documents that have been circulated and tell us whether anything is missing that we should have included in those themes and questions, or issues that we should be trying find answers for? Is there anything glaringly missing?

Ms MacGREGOR: Are submissions open until 15 August?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms WHITE: I would like to share my experiences of working in Griffith with Aboriginal communities. I have spent 15 years in health and in the past 10 years in education. I have learnt that there is a strong connection between good health and being able to read and write and have self-confidence in accessing services. I still get surprised by people making comments and I have witnessed many incidents of racism in working with my students. I recently spoke to someone who was at university with a person who did not know there were still Aboriginal people alive in Australia today. One of the important things I see is that learning about Aboriginal history needs to begin when our children are very young—in primary school. Everyone needs to know about the importance of country and language. Currently there is a huge gap. Through this we can reduce racism and also have a greater understanding.

I have heard many comments in relation to all Aboriginal people being the same. There is very little recognition of country and language. That is evident at different meetings. Sometimes there is a lack of understanding about why we do welcome to country. I see education as the key to making those changes and gaining understanding and connection.

I have also noted that language has a real impact on how people interact between different cultural groups. I have noticed in the media that our language has changed in the past 10 years. We have gone from headings mentioning "Aboriginal people" to "Aborigines" and now to "blacks". Our media has a huge influence on how people respond, think and interact. It needs to be a whole approach to changing attitudes, making a difference and reducing the gap.

I will address some of the issues in chapter 10. In regard to measuring outcomes, Alice, Steve and I work on the Koori Outreach Options for Learning Program or KOOL, which was developed in 1999 in consultation with communities. This program was initiated with a group of women sitting in the Aboriginal community centre and talking about the issues in education. The initial goal was to provide a program for young Aboriginal people to access year 10. Once we talked for several hours we worked out that actually many young people had left school earlier than year 10, and some probably at year 7. Days were skipped and sometimes that grew into weeks and then months. People were coming to TAFE and saying they left school at year 9, the real connection with education had finished at the end of year 6. There was a crucial gap.

The KOOL program recognises that you cannot leave your problems at the door when you walk in to learn. You do not necessarily miss school just because you do not want to go; sometimes it is because you are responsible for looking after your siblings or you need to take your nan to the doctor. The importance of family values and other reasons need to be accepted in our formal education system. Sometimes there are real reasons that young Aboriginal kids are not able to attend school.

TAFE attempts to provide a program that is able to meet the needs of the students. We have an approach that works with young people not only with literacy and numeracy but also with self-esteem, self-confidence and vocational and computer skills, and also in looking at the big picture of where they want to go. We use the term "case management" and some people use "life education plans". It is all about helping young people to achieve their personal, social, educational and vocational goals.

This program is run over a 12-month timeframe. Students usually commence in February and go through to December. The aim is to achieve development in their literacy and numeracy levels and self-confidence so that they can move on to mainstream programs.

Funding needs to be reapplied for every six months and it is not guaranteed. For the past 10 years we have written submissions, reports and applications to access this funding. We are always very positive and we plan ahead, but we are never sure. That influences our delivery and the way that we can work. How do we measure the outcomes?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: That means you have made 20 submissions or thereabouts.

Ms WHITE: A lot more because I can never depend on the funding. I research and just keep applying.

Mr MEREDITH: We dip into a number of different buckets. Carolyn is a very astute submission writer.

Ms WHITE: I have developed many skills in submission writing and reporting.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: So your source of funding is not the same pot each time; you have to cast the net around.

Ms WHITE: Yes, in particular because the program needs to be flexible and engaging. Some funding buckets will provide funds for hours for teaching and some for coordination. We also need money for meals, excursions and providing activities. This weekend we are participating in the Now Showing exhibition. To do that we need to get canvasses and paint. We also have mentors working with students. That will not necessarily come out of the one bucket, so I use other funds.

Ms WATTS: This is mainly funded by the Aboriginal program in our campus and any extra money we need we get from somewhere else. The Aboriginal program unit funding is only supposed to be seed funding for that year or maybe next year. But we have been funding every year because Carolyn is unable to get funding from anywhere else.

Ms WHITE: We have hours allocated from our Griffith campus and hours from the Aboriginal Education and Training Unit. Last semester I was also able to access funding under youth initiatives. The amounts vary from semester to semester. We certainly have a wide range of reports available if members would like to look at them.

One of the things that Alice, Steve and I considered was how we measure outcomes. They can be very different for everyone. I will share some of the things we looked at: the number of enrolments; the course completion rate; the unit completion rate; the retention rate; the pathways to further education; the employment outcomes; the significant increase in improved literacy and numeracy; class learning skills; community participation; and lifestyle. That is the way we can measure and report to government and community agencies.

Sometimes the important thing is when you see students or their children accessing community services or their children going to preschool. Sometimes the outcomes are not immediate. Some of our students are now undertaking teacher training, but that has been a journey of eight years. Outcomes are not always there at the end of six months or so. However, we were able to monitor the measurement outcomes I have discussed over six months, 12 months and two years.

In working with the community the things that have been very important are doing lots of talking and having face-to-face contact. Government agencies engaging with community must present a real person who is here to talk, to understand and to experience.

We have been really lucky with the KOOL program in that we have a strong partnership with the Griffith Aboriginal Medical Service. Probably because of my background in health I know that if you want to learn to the best of your ability you need to be healthy and well. It is a real focus in our program. We provide food for a healthy breakfast and lunch and we also have ready access to the Aboriginal Medical Service, which has great doctors, nurses and support staff. They support our students to be able to see a doctor and to be bulk billed. They provide support for immunisation and other injections. It is a welcoming environment and it runs great programs that make a real difference in the community. I acknowledge that.

We have looked at and discussed some of the other areas that we think may have some impact in education and assisting with retaining young Aboriginal students at school. School is probably the best place for learning school-type things. They are probably things they have not been able to get off the ground properly because they require lots of human resources and funding. Some of those are vocational programs commencing in the school at year 8 or year 9 rather than leaving it to year 11 or year 12. Sometimes it is not all about academia. Students need practical experience and to physically do things, whether it be carpentry or hairdressing. Again, it is about the approach of different agencies. That requires schools and TAFE to work out the funding arrangements. Those internal systems and structures can prevent great ideas from happening.

I would like to develop mentoring with the KOOL program. Often great people are already employed but are very busy and working on five committees already. It is about finding mentors and providing programs. There is a great reliance within the system on volunteers—be they program coordinators or Aboriginal education support officers—and they are in part-time positions. They work for 15 hours and they are expected to cover great regions. It is frustrating also for other agencies if they ring and make contact and that person is only there on this day. So, sometimes the momentum is lost in supporting the students because of these 15-hour positions. Often people are very committed to their positions and there is a great deal of volunteerism.

Providing training and Aboriginal cultural awareness is probably essential to coordinated service delivery. I have been in a very fortunate position: I have worked with lots of great people who have helped me along the way, but often people are in positions where they may not have contact with Aboriginal people and they may have no understanding. It is certainly not something they have done during their schooling years. It is really important for people to know about country and language and how to work with young Aboriginal people—that is the area I work in—and to be able to ensure that their service delivery is in a culturally appropriate manner. It is really important to know our history from way back, not just the last 200 years. I just encourage the inquiry to reflect on our history and try to make a better future. I would like the approach to run further.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: There has been a good deal of talk about education and it is an area that interests me. Steve and Maureen commented about the SIPs—schools in partnerships—program. I preface my remarks by saying that my impression from what we have heard about SIPs to this point has been almost universally positive. I am a member of The Nationals, not part of the Government, so it would be great to find something to criticise. However, it seems to me that SIPs is being very positive. I am interested in if you would like to expand on whether you think SIPs has worked at Griffith public or any other schools here. I know you have said some things about it, but I am interested to hear more.

Ms YOUNG: I do not know about just recently, like over the last couple of years, but my experience is in working in Griffith public school. I suddenly realised that there were so many kids being put on detention and suspension, and very young children being put on 21-day suspensions. So, I brought it up to the teachers and the school principal, "Do you know that by putting young Aboriginal children out on the streets for such a long period of time that all you're achieving is teaching that child to become a street kid?" I also noticed that it was only happening mainly to indigenous kids. So I went to the district inspector through our local AECG—Aboriginal Education Consultative Group—and asked for the stats on that. It took well over four months for the stats to come back and then they did come back they amalgamated the

indigenous rates with the islander rates. We said, "No, no, you're not doing that." We said, "The only reason why you've done that is because our stats on the indigenous side were extremely high."

Our kids are really struggling in this area and I believe in most areas of Australia, particularly indigenous kids. When I worked out at Tirkandi there were school boys out there from the age of 12 to 15; 14-year-olds were coming in there with the academic rate of a six year old—appalling numeracy and literacy skills. I have a 13½ year old that would probably have the ability of a six year old too with his numeracy and literacy mainly because of a lot of suspensions. I believe that outside school suspensions for indigenous kids in particular should be abolished. There has got to be a consequence. I do not disagree with that, but it has got to be in school. Our kids still have to learn. And also I will say this: can you please listen.

Some years ago I went up to the Northern Territory and I met a traditional elder up there from the Kakadu mob or Gagudju mob. I have always been involved in education. I worked for the State AECG for quite some time. I asked him about what he thought of education. He did not call non-Aboriginal people non-Aboriginal people; he called non-Aboriginal people Europeans. He said, "They've got no idea." I said, "Why?" He said, "The Europeans expect everybody to be equal," you know, in the mainstream of education. Not everyone is good at being an academic. In Aboriginal society if someone could not dance well, then they were not made to go and dance. If someone could not hunt well or throw a spear well, they were not made and forced to go into that area. The elders would look at what the people were skilled at and introduce them to following that path. What I am trying to say is that we cannot get out kids to go out and throw boomerangs and that, but if someone is good at art, there are trades in sign writing. That is what we need to learn. I think that we should learn that from our traditional Aboriginal people. We are not all academics and why are we expected and conditioned to expect that of our children?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Because if you cannot read, it is very hard to cope in this community.

Ms YOUNG: Yes, but the Department of Education and Training puts a lot of funding into a lot of our State schools to run programs to upgrade our literacy and numeracy, but it is not happening well enough for our Aboriginal kids; and it has to happen at a much younger age. We cannot wait for our kids to get to high school. They have to learn it in primary and in infants. Also, our kids should be learning about their own traditional Aboriginal language too. We have the Wiradjuri language in book form now. It should be taught in schools. Aboriginal history should be taught in schools too, but it should be taught by Aboriginal people.

Ms O'HARA: We were talking earlier about self-determination and self-management. I think that is what Aboriginal Medical Services [AMS] do. We are a community-controlled health organisation. We are controlled by the community. We are run by the Aboriginal community. First of all, Carolyn, thank you for your comments. It is really appreciated. It is good for feedback. AMS work on the primary health care model, which is holistic. It deals with everything: social, emotional, cultural, not just the body and the illness. The thing we find hard here is providing these services with the limited resources that we have. Because we are a rural area, we cover 1,200 to 1,400 Aboriginal clients with three health workers. We have the capacity to bring in more health workers. Maybe we could take some of your students and teach then enrolled nursing, teach them how to become health workers, but we are blocked because we do not have the building. We cannot bring in anymore workers or anything. We are just at a stalemate now. We have no room to bring them in. What I am looking for here is help from the

Government maybe in coming to the party for some sort of funding for a building. We have the capacity to be bigger and better and provide specialist services to this community; we just do not have the building or the resources at the moment.

The second thing, pour more money into AMS. It is cheaper to run the primary health care model than it is the tertiary health care model. It is cheaper for prevention than cure. The third issue is dentists. In the rural areas there is lack of dental care. This can be overcome simply: the Government can make New South Wales an area of need for dentists. At the moment I was told Queensland is the only area of need for dentists. I do not know if you have the capacity to do it, but New South Wales is an area of need for dental. If it can be classed as area of need for dental, we can get dentists. We can get overseas-trained dentists, but the Government just needs to make that move.

CHAIR: That is what we want to hear, recommendations that we can put forward.

Mr MEREDITH: Just to qualify what Lisa was saying, we have a private dentist in town. That dentist is not interested in the voucher system whatsoever. So, he is making his money. We have no dentist attached to the hospital. So, that is for the entire community. When Lisa mentioned before about AMS, we are the only bulk-billing service in town and we cater to the entire community. We do have a priority for Aboriginal clients.

Ms O'HARA: We have eight appointments per general practitioner [GP] each day that are specifically for indigenous clients who do not make appointments. We have a lot of walk-ins.

Mr MEREDITH: Aboriginal walk-ins.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You talk about health workers. Does that mean GPs or GPs and nurses?

Ms O'HARA: No. We have two GPs.

Mr MEREDITH: We have the opportunity for a third, but we do not have the room.

Ms O'HARA: We are working in partnership now with Wollongong university. They actually want to send us one of their last year's students to train up and work in our AMS. We do not have the capacity for that. We need another room. We have been offered other health workers through New South Wales Health. We have had to knock them back because we have nowhere to put them. The capacity is there for us to have these workers, we just do not have the infrastructure.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You have one dentist in Griffith; you have none in the public hospital system?

Ms YOUNG: No. We have to travel to Sydney.

Ms O'HARA: We actually have negotiated with Wagga AMS . We have nine appointments per month for 1,400 clients.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: In Wagga Wagga?

Mr MEREDITH: Yes.

Ms O'HARA: Which is two hours one way and two hours back.

Mr MEREDITH: It is a 400-kilometre return trip.

Ms O'HARA: Most of our clients need at least five to six visits.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: What about kids?

Mr MEREDITH: The nine appointments are for the entire community. If we have an emergency situation where a young person has to go to the dentist, we have to use one of those appointment times. So, we actually lose by addressing important issues like our kids' teeth.

Ms O'HARA: The hospital has a dental technician who can see minor problems, that is it. Most of our kids are not minor problems.

Ms WATTS: I just want to reflect on what Carolyn said earlier about funding. That is probably the only gripe I have with the six-month funding with Carolyn having to resubmit her submissions for programs. It is a pretty successful program and it is disappointing to know that she has to do that every six months. The other thing is employment in education. I know one of our local high schools at the moment, Wade High School, does not have an Aboriginal aide over there. One of the biggest reasons that does not happen over there is that it is not a permanent position and people do not want to deal with part-time positions when they can gain full-time positions. Usually all Aboriginal workers look for full-time positions. So I would like some recommendations coming out of those sorts of things. Maybe full-time employment could be addressed.

Mr MEREDITH: It does not give us the opportunity to think strategically about educational outcomes for students if we put in for funding every six months. We should be able to develop a three-year program where you address literacy and numeracy skills in the first year, and you start looking at vocational options in the second year. Hopefully those kids are going into apprenticeships or IT or further education in the third year. It should be viewed a lot more strategically.

Ms YOUNG: They have to have a brighter future. I have had children go through KOOL. I have two up there at the moment and to me it is a godsend for them. Two of the older ones have gone on to Brighter and Better Futures from going to KOOL. You know, it is building up their self-esteem and academic levels. They have built up their self-esteem and their academic levels. Hopefully my two younger ones and my youngest one will end up there too. If they have to depend on writing submissions every six months it does not give them anything to hope for.

Ms WEBB: I know that health is no better than anything else here, but to bridge the gap you need to improve a community's health status.

Ms NEWMAN: I want to add to what everyone else is saying. It is ideal mapping out what this community already has, building on that and looking at the gaps. We already know in our communities what the issues are but we have to talk about filling the gaps, for example, in health. It is about getting more resources. Obviously there are workers but we need the resources to go and do it. We need to work together in partnership. It seems as though it is always the same sorts of people. We all know our community's issues or our people's issues. How many

years have we been sitting around in forums, or sitting together in community working parties? How long have service providers been sitting around discussing issues that impact on our people? It seems to me that we sit around and talk but we have not got the things to go and do it.

Ms YOUNG: Give us a mandate.

Ms NEWMAN: We have all sat around. It is probably the same people all the time sitting around and talking about the same issues. We are people with issues and they are getting worse and worse; they are not getting better. Health keeps statistics. They have all the statistics to show that. These statistics show all the funding but we have only a limited amount of money to use to service our people. There are gaps in health, in counselling and in rehabilitation centres. A large number of our young people are on drugs and alcohol and it is getting worse. We have to send them way from the communities to get help. How many people come back? They do not want to travel for hours and go to a different community to get healed.

Everyone else is saying this. I think it would be good to map out what we already have and look at all the issues such as health and education. How many of us here are from government departments? Usually every government department has an identified position. Why are they not here speaking up for their clients who they see every day? Issues are impacting them and not so much the service providers.

Ms YOUNG: The main focus of the Aboriginal Medical Service [AMS] is on the Aboriginal people of this community, but they also cater for the poorer people in this community who are not Aborigines. They are doing a wonderful service and I fully support them having their own structural base.

Ms WEBB: I say to all the staff who come to me, "If you come to me with problems have a solution." They say, "We have come to you with our problems and we have some solutions for you."

CHAIR: We have only a few minutes left.

Ms MacGREGOR: I am aware that 37.5 per cent of people who work in Griffith get under $400 a week. A large number of people in this city are living on the poverty line, but a lot of people have very wealthy lifestyles. There is a huge gap between them. The Aboriginal Medical Service is very valuable to the whole community. I would just like to throw in a couple of things. Maria Williams made a comment about having no economic base. I would like to find out more about that and better understand it. Comments were made about addressing the needs for each community, as each individual community's needs are different.

Someone talked about young indigenous children at school. My little grandson, who is two, is indigenous. He has different educational needs from my other grandchildren who are being brought up as Muslims in a Turkish household. At the ages of two and three their needs are completely different because of their different environments and the way that they are. So the challenge is there to teach all these children to read, not just those who are real easy and who sit there and listen. My grandson loves to run. It is difficult to get him to sit down and listen, so you have to run with him and talk with him when he is running. In Griffith there is no presence of our indigenous people in the main central business district.

The history of our indigenous community here is similar to other places. Slowly but surely they were pushed out of the town. As development occurred they were pushed out a little further. We have no Aboriginal presence in the main street. I think it would be a great thing for indigenous people in Griffith to be able to say, "We are part of the community" and expect others to understand them. We owe it to our indigenous people to attempt to understand them and to assist them. We must understand that they are disadvantaged.

Services should be delivered in a culturally suitable manner. Balancing the books means measuring things and being accountable for spending taxpayers' money, as opposed to wasting money on projects that will not work. That is a real balancing act. I hope that you are able to find some common ground. We cannot give up; we have to go forward. The benefits will far outweigh any costs involved for the community.

Mrs SIMPSON: I just want to say some things before it is time to go. Steve referred earlier to the medical service running out of space. We have a group here in Griffith and a lot of things have been going on, as Margaret knows. There is an excellent block of land in the middle of town. Before it became public one of the partners was my friend. I talked to Azio at West Point Motors and he said, "We bought this land." He went to school with a lot of Kooris. He said, "What we would like to do is work with Aboriginals." I go over there and we are friends and I talk about things and read the papers. He said, "Whatever you want we are building." I said, "We are running out of space at our medical centre." He said, "We will even build units for elders."

We have some young people who are no good. He said that he would build the units close to the hospital and to the doctors. I said that that was excellent. The group even met with him and he came up there and put forward his case. When I went to Sydney in January, ATSIC was there but it sort of passed the buck. When you mention money it passes it on to someone else. As I said before, the communities have ideas but we have to be helped up the ladder.

We are now looking at a Mitre 10 building but there is no money. We want to buy it and have a permanent face. Once you get that permanent face it brings pride into the community. Kooris do not have much self-confidence, but ownership would give them self-confidence. If we had $1 million it would help us in Griffith, in the districts and in some small towns. We have a doctor there now who is paying for his own wages, through his patients. How about it boys?

Mr MEREDITH: I want to say one thing about the recommendations in the review of Aboriginal education in this State. One of them was about acknowledging country and its past and prior history. What triggered this inquiry is negative, but one positive first step that this standing committee could take is to ensure that Aboriginal studies, as a separate subject, are put into the main school curriculum. We have been talking all afternoon about country and culture. Kids need to know it; they do not need to learn about American presidents.

Ms YOUNG: Aboriginal studies were compulsory. However, when I worked at the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group [AECG] no principal was ever made to implement it and there were no consequences for not teaching it.

CHAIR: Among our terms of reference are cultural resilience and educational issues. I am sure that those are areas about which we can make a recommendation. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to be here and to hear your comments. It is extremely valuable to us in drafting our final report, which is due on 28 November. The Government then has a few months within which to respond to our report. We will table our report in the Parliament and

the Government is then obliged to respond to our report and to our recommendations, either positively or negatively. Thank you very much for giving us your expertise. I declare the meeting closed.

The Committee adjourned at 4.17 p.m.