

UNCORRECTED

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

**INQUIRY INTO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRENDS AND ISSUES IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

UNCORRECTED

At Sydney on Monday 26 March 2012

The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. N. Blair (Chair)

The Hon. H. M. Westwood (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. C. Cusack

The Hon. G. J. Donnelly

The Hon. N. Maclaren-Jones

CHAIR: Welcome to the fifth public hearing of the Standing Committee on Social Issues inquiry into domestic violence trends and issues in New South Wales. Today's hearing will focus on prevention and early intervention. We will hear evidence from the White Ribbon Foundation, the Victims of Crime Assistance League, the New South Wales Women's Refuge Movement, LOVE BiTES, and the Fairfield Domestic Violence Committee. Recently our Committee conducted a site visit to Victoria where we visited the Neighbourhood Justice Centre, the Heidelberg Magistrates Court, the Melbourne Magistrates Court, VicHealth, and met with the Hon. Mary Wooldridge, who is the Victorian Minister for Women's Affairs, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Mental Health. We also visited the Sutherland Local Court to observe how it manages its domestic violence list. The Committee gained from those visits a very valuable insight into the models that have been recommended to us by participants in this inquiry. Future hearings will focus on victims' perspectives, specific population groups and direct service provision.

The Committee previously resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of its public proceedings. Copies of the guidelines governing broadcast of the proceedings are available from the table by the door. In accordance with the Legislative Council *Guidelines for the Broadcast of Proceedings*, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee the media must take responsibility for what they publish or for the interpretation that is placed on anything that is said before the Committee. Witnesses, members and their staff are advised that any messages should be delivered through the attendants or the Committee clerks. I also advise under the standing orders of the Legislative Council that any documents presented to the Committee, which have not yet been tabled in Parliament, may not, except with the permission of the Committee, be disclosed or published by any member of such Committee or by any other person.

If witnesses should consider at any stage during their evidence that certain evidence or documents they may wish to present should be heard or seen in private by the Committee, the Committee will consider that request. However, the Committee or the Legislative Council itself may subsequently publish evidence if they decide it is in the public interest to do so. I ask everybody to turn off all mobile phones for the duration of the hearing.

ELIZABETH (LIBBY) MARIA DAVIES, Chief Executive Officer, White Ribbon Foundation, sworn and examined:

KATE ELIZABETH ALEXANDER, National Marketing and Communications Manager and New South Wales Executive Officer, White Ribbon Foundation, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Thank you for attending, and welcome. Would you like to give a short opening statement? If you would, please try to keep it to no more than five minutes. You do not need to go over anything that is in your previous submissions.

Ms DAVIES: Thank you, Chair. Chair and members of the Committee: White Ribbon appreciates this opportunity to present to the Standing Committee on Social Issues in relation to this inquiry into domestic violence trends in New South Wales. We stand before the Committee to respond in particular to number two in the terms of reference—"Early intervention strategies to prevent domestic violence". This focus on prevention is both timely and critical: It has been 40 years in the making. We are delighted to see New South Wales focus on the way in which the prevention can assist to change the domestic violence trends in this State.

Violence against women is one of the least visible, and most widespread, forms of violence around the world. The majority of violence against women takes place in the home and, in most cases, the perpetrator is a current or previous partner, male family friend, or member. This fact is of significance in the rationale of the unique male-led White Ribbon campaign as it is the White Ribbon male ambassador who is the critical resource to focus attention on changing behaviours and attitudes that allow this violence to occur in the first place.

The majority of this violence is violence against women. We use this term because it encompasses a wide variety of forms of violence directed at women, as women, and for its clear identification of its concern with violence experienced by women. White Ribbon's most preferred phrase is "men's violence against women", as this also names the perpetrators of the vast majority of violence against women. Given the vast and insidious nature of domestic violence, and as identified in the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children, this is an issue that requires a whole-of-government response to make real and sustained reduction in the levels of domestic violence and violence against women more generally. Not only is the national plan the first to coordinate action across jurisdictions, it also is the first to focus strongly on prevention. Significantly the national plan notes the importance of raising awareness and building respectful relationships in the next generation.

White Ribbon is a primary prevention campaign that delivers a range of prevention strategies and measures of the national plan through initiatives with schools, universities, workplaces, and through the national awareness campaign that, most importantly, is conducted through our social media. The statistics surrounding the incidence and spread of domestic violence tell only part of the story. We know that reporting of such forms of violence against women has increased. We also know that the incidence of violence has decreased as per that reporting; yet others, such as sexual violence, have increased. Many domestic violence incidents are not reported. However, the increase in reporting can be attributed to heightened awareness about the issue and the available support systems. We know that the total estimated cost of intimate partner violence in Australia in 2002-03 was estimated at \$8.1 billion, and that, without appropriate action to address violence against women and their children, it will cost the Australian economy an estimated \$15.6 billion by the year 2021. Beyond the economic costs, domestic violence takes a very, very serious toll on the women themselves who experience this violence and the children who witness or experience it.

The effects of domestic and family violence have a cumulative impact on the mental health of the victim. Many women describe the long-term psychological impacts of emotional, verbal, social and economic abuse as being more devastating than just the physical abuse. Women who experience partner violence are also more likely to suffer mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, self-harm tendencies and suicidal thoughts and actions. According to the Australian Institute of Criminology, one in four young people has witnessed violence against their mother or stepmother.

Research indicates that young men who have experienced domestic violence are more likely to perpetrate violence in their own relationships. Domestic and family violence is the principal cause of homelessness amongst women; 55 per cent of women with children who are homeless are escaping violence. Perhaps most shockingly of all, one of the most at-risk groups of domestic violence is pregnant women.

If we are ever going to make a positive change to the incidence of domestic violence, we must focus on preventing that violence before it occurs. Prevention is everybody's responsibility and we urge all of government to take ownership and responsibility for changing attitudes and behaviours that allow violence to occur. White Ribbon's vision is that one day women will live in safety free from violence and abuse. Our mission is to prevent men's violence against women in Australia through a male-led campaign. White Ribbon works across the entire spectrum of prevention, which is identified as strengthening individual knowledge and skills, promoting community education, educating providers, fostering coalitions and networks, changing organisational practices and influencing policies and legislation.

What makes White Ribbon unique is that the organisation's prevention work focuses on men's engagement with and participation in prevention strategies. This is very much a men's issue, not only because men are most likely the perpetrators but because it is their wives, their mothers, sisters, daughters and friends whose lives are being harmed by violence and abuse. It is a men's issue because as community leaders and decision-makers men can play a key role in helping to stop violence against women. It is a men's issue because they can speak out and step in when male friends and relatives insult or attack women. White Ribbon provides communities and individuals with strategies and tools to address the cultural and behavioural norms that perpetrate men's violence against women. However, there is still a need for a more integrated, co-ordinated and collaborative approach between and across the Government, communities and individuals to address the contributors and determinants of violence.

White Ribbon urges this inquiry to recommend that the New South Wales Government focus attention and appropriate resourcing on enhanced support for primary prevention and the White Ribbon campaign; support and fund the role of the White Ribbon Breaking the Silence schools program across all school regions in New South Wales; and, as part of that, to support the national conference which will be held here in Sydney in October; engage with the White Ribbon workplace program whereby government departments and institutions become White Ribbon workplaces of excellence; and commit New South Wales to becoming a White Ribbon State. White Ribbon will be showcasing Australia's leading commitment to prevention in an international conference we are organising for 2013. We urge the New South Wales Government to support this initiative as well.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Thank you both for attending this morning. I am looking forward to hearing your evidence and perhaps some guidance from you as well as to the way the Committee will take this inquiry. As the Chair has said, we have been to a number of sites and we have visited Victoria to see their approach to domestic violence. It has been recommended to us as one of the better models in Australia. Are either of you familiar with the approach in Victoria, and can you advise the Committee whether elements of it are working or others that perhaps are not?

Ms DAVIES: It is very important to understand that the Victorian initiatives, both previous Government's and the current Government's, have led the way in Australia for some time around the involvement of prevention as a critical tool and strategy in turning around the incidence of violence against women. We commend the work of this Committee in investigating the work they have done. We also note they have a new framework which is currently for consultation and which we have made a submission to as of last Friday. In that area we have identified the nature of types of prevention that are critical to be captured by the framework. We have also acknowledged the work of intervention and ongoing support for victims of domestic violence. So, in the continuum of violence it is really important to note that we have urged the Victorian Government in this consultation framework—and we note the work of the previous Government in Victoria—to provide a spectrum of strategies to deal with this problem. There is no one easy-fix solution. As I said in my opening address, prevention is everyone's responsibility. It has to be whole of government.

I make the point at this stage that I do not think it is just the purview of the Social Issues Committee. It is also the work of the other committees in New South Wales—the Law and Justice Committee and the State Development Committee—to be conscious of the way in which we all have a responsibility to influence and change the trends around this critical issue. So, as to the work that has been done in Victoria, I am very conscious of the evidence that the previous Government's work is beginning to give us that interventions do work. There are some exemplary pilot programs down there. I am not going to comment individually on those evaluations but to say that evaluations of primary prevention are rare and that also applies in the Victorian case. We are talking about longitudinal studies and normative change takes place over time and it is very difficult to fit in an analysis within a three- or four-year election cycle.

So, we are urging all of governments to look at the long-term effect of introducing strategies, but we do know from the existing evidence, which is limited, that some strategies and interventions do work for three reasons: One, they have a theoretical rationale; there are good reasons for doing it. Two, it has been tried and the evidence is indicating that it is beginning to work—for example, looking at the type of implementation programs around prevention that are active within a school setting, working with young people. And the evidence of effectiveness, it has been shown to work. There is some evidence and we are beginning to see that with the Victorian example. I might refer to that later with the Linfox example around introducing primary prevention activities within the workplace.

I refer the Committee to an important spectrum that we use of prevention, which I think is critical for any government response to capture, and this is what the Victorian model captures. You start with the individual about strengthening their skills, knowledge and understanding of how they can take responsibility to turn these trends around and break the culture of violence that is often intergenerational. Much of the early prevention work sits in that space, and we are beginning to see the evidence that that works. The Breaking the Silence program is an example of that here in the Sydney region. Promoting community education, reaching groups of people with information and resources about how they can prevent violence and turn violence around. That can occur across a whole spectrum of groups and community organisations.

Educating providers, who can transmit skills and knowledge; fostering coalitions and networks: White Ribbon does not work alone. We work as part of a very strong and informed network and we work with tertiary providers, the Rape Crisis Centre, for example, who are critical in picking up the pieces in people's lives exposed to domestic violence. Changing organisational practices; and a workplace program about changing the practice of a workplace, how you break this new ground, not just about policy and procedures around respectful relationships and anti-bullying but what goes on beyond that workplace affects and impact on the productivity, the culture and the responsiveness of that workplace; and influencing policies and legislation, working with committees such as yours to bring about change, working with the Federal Government around looking at consolidating anti-discrimination laws so that the issue of domestic violence is appropriately recognised.

I am not sure if I have completely given you an evidence trail in Victoria. I would like to add one more thing. When funding is made available by governments, it has been remiss in various elements that evaluation strategies and frameworks have not been actively embedded within that funding agreement and arrangement. I do not think we have been good in Australia at gathering the evidence. Part of our work, I suppose, outside of government is to say that every amount of funding must have embedded within it an evaluation strategy from the very inception of the project and is built upon over the years and captured even though that funding may be a three- or four-year cycle.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Ms Alexander, did you want to add anything?

Ms ALEXANDER: No, I think it has been covered.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Your organisation talks about the difference between prevention and early intervention programs.

Ms DAVIES: Your question is looking at what is the difference between those two?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Yes. We have received much evidence and sometimes it seems as though those terms are interchangeable and sometimes not. What is your perspective on those two strategies?

Ms DAVIES: I guess White Ribbon is very conscious of saying publicly that we note that prevention, early intervention and response—that is, response of services—should never be in competition with each other and that they are in support. It is a continuum. The tertiary end is picking up the pieces and providing support, and enabling people to move beyond the incidence and issues of violence that surround them is really important. At the other end primary prevention is stopping this from happening down here. We are putting the safety net up right at the top of the cliff. A lot of money, I guess for politically expedient reasons as much as to meet the needs of people who are victims of violence, goes into this tertiary end because it is easier to show the outcomes.

Much of government funding is driven around the outcomes that can be delivered. White Ribbon is saying that in order to reduce the costs of those issues, prevention needs to be up here. So money needs to be up right at the top of the cliff, and that is the safety net to turn around the attitudes and behaviours that are so

institutionalised, genderised and endemic across our society that have allowed this violence to occur. Our focus is primary prevention, that is, focussing on preventing men's violence before it occurs. We do so by engaging men to be the spokespeople, the interveners, hold up the light and say, "Stop, this is what's happening, this is what we're doing to our society. Why are we doing this? How can we turn that around?" We recognise that prevention work has really only become possible because of years of hard work by survivors, advocates, prevention educators and many other professionals, and White Ribbon acknowledges that history. We acknowledge the international history as well. Primary prevention efforts complement but do not replace or take priority over work with victims and survivors.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Ms Alexander, do you want to add anything?

Ms ALEXANDER: I just wanted to add that secondary prevention or early intervention also aims to work with the perpetrators for that violence not to occur again.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you for attending today. I acknowledge and congratulate White Ribbon on its leadership role and continuing excellent work to tackle this terrible thing that happens not just in New South Wales but around Australia. You spoke about the increased incidence of sexual violence?

Ms DAVIES: Yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Could you elucidate on that and explain the understanding of that increase and trend?

Ms DAVIES: I will answer briefly and get Kate to also answer that. The Victorian Women's Trust funded research looking at the role of pornography and social media and relating it to the incidence of sexual violence. Its research has identified that the pornographic material young people are exposed to and easily access through social media increasingly has shown sexual violence as part of the sexual act and that that is a deliberate strategy by the producers of pornography because that is what the market is asking for. As you know, it is a huge multibillion dollar industry. In talking to the producers, directors and actors involved in this pornographic material, the directive has been to increase the violence of the act that young people then access—or older people, but increasingly young people—on the internet. The statistics being captured through the Australian data sets quite clearly indicate that the level of sexual violence against young women is increasing in its intensity of violence.

The women's trust was looking at the correlation between what is a genre of pornographic material and the response of the community to that. That insidiousness makes it a very difficult issue to combat. The most effective way to combat it is to work with those young people who are witnessing that violence and look at what are the supposedly normal behaviours that are being transmitted through that. How do they feel about that? This research worked with them and asked them those questions, and they do not feel comfortable. But there is an expectation in the media that a message is being sold and young people's response to that message has to be an educated response.

Ms ALEXANDER: I also think it is about the constructions of masculinity that are presented in the media. It all comes back to that power: coercive control of men over women. The issue of online sexualisation of women, particularly pornography, is borne out in the increase in sexting amongst young people and cyberbullying as well.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Would we be able to get from you the reference to the Victorian research?

Ms DAVIES: Yes, most definitely.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Could you provide us with more information about the work being progressed in schools and universities? Are we talking about high schools?

Ms DAVIES: High schools and primary.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Could you provide some more information about what is happening in that regard?

Ms DAVIES: In 2010 the Breaking the Silence program was introduced by White Ribbon in conjunction with the Sydney region of schools. Since then over 60 schools have come through the program. We have another 25 schools about to start in 2012. It is still within the Sydney region. The funding to make this a possibility has come through White Ribbon's corporate partnership with Suzanne Grae. One of the imperatives of that partnership is to progress the work of White Ribbon as a prevention campaign with young people. The pilot program in 2010 was evaluated and quite clearly indicated the success of the program to work with the leadership of the school, to embed the White Ribbon prevention strategy as part of the scaffolding that the school uses to enhance school community attitudes to prevent violence against young women. Its particular essence is that it works with the principals of the schools. Over a period of three workshops during the school year, principals or the executive of the school are engaged in considering the way this issue impacts on their school community and how they as a school community can respond and become a White Ribbon school giving a very overt symbolism expression to the school to the way it wants to change any inherent attitudes within the school community that violence against women is not accepted.

They take that and embed it alongside the other activities that are going on in the curriculum. It is not about adding another layer to the curriculum, it is about embedding it in scaffolding and platforms within which you can attach the ongoing respectful relationship and anti-bullying programs—they all mesh together. White Ribbon becomes an overt symbol of the way the school can take it forward successfully. Schools within the Sydney region have evidenced turning playground culture over the three year period has happened. We are taking it national and seeking funding to do so. We are taking it into Victoria. We only have enough funding to take it into metropolitan region but we are working to enhance that funding through State governments and through the national Government because turning around young people's attitudes is an imperative under the national action plan and this is a proven tool to do that.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Something that has been exercising my mind as we have travelled around the State—I am not sure whether it creates an inconsistency or it needs to operate concurrently—obviously the majority of perpetrators, as the statistics bear out, is male towards female. That is generally accepted. In the context of dealing with students in primary school and high school the issue of violent behaviour per se, in other words resolving issues in an aggressive, physical or emotionally threatening way between boys and girls, is less around the notion of gender than perhaps just that is what people do. There is this background notion in society that you have to be pushy and aggressive to resolve your issues. It does not matter whether you are male or female, pushing through and getting your way is the way we prevail in society. Do you think there is any potential downside of dealing with the gender notion in primary and high school when in fact there is a broader milieu of violence and aggressiveness which sits in the background of the way in which people behave? It is more that I have been wondering whether or not we need to gender orient the notion at that level or we need to talk more broadly of male-female or female-male interaction and not behaving in that aggressive way?

Ms DAVIES: I will refer that question to my colleague but I will premise it by saying that the whole issue of an individual's response relative to the norms and pressures of the broader community is well understood by the prevention strategies and prevention campaign and key researchers such as Dr Michael Kaufman in Canberra, Dr Jackson Katz in the United States and Dr Michael Flood and Dr Stephen Fisher in Australia. They are all very conscious of identifying prevention strategies that focus the individual to be able to respond and resist and turn around that external pressure from communities. That is what the White Ribbon campaign has as its key tools and other prevention initiatives have as key tools. Working with young people in school settings, whether it is primary or in high school, is about giving them a greater sense of resilience as to how they deal with this.

Ms ALEXANDER: The success of the Breaking the Silence program is that teachers can adapt the program to their school context and the age of the children who are participating. The kids in primary school receive more messages about respectful relationships in general and how to live and enact respectful relationships amongst themselves and within the wider community. We see them taking those messages out to the broader community beyond the school yard and to their family and friends outside of that community. The primary schools do not focus on the gender as much as respectful relationships.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: While we have been talking about prevention programs you mentioned earlier about your workplace programs. Could you expand on that and give us a bit more information?

Ms DAVIES: This is cutting edge in terms of the way this work place program will work. We have spent a lot of time understanding and scoping what initiatives have been underway in the Australian community over several years leading to a more responsive approach by workplaces to the issue of violence not only within the workplace but the impact of external violence impacting on the workplace and their workers.

In 2011 White Ribbon was funded under a national Australian Government grant to initiate the workplace accreditation program. Over the last 12 months we have scoped what has been going on in this space, including from the pointy end, which is about embedding entitlements into agreements under the Fair Work Act. That is to change the elements of entitlements that accommodate the impact that violence has on women and how workplaces respond through leave requirements as well as policies and procedures in the workplace. It extends right down to our area, which is creating in the workplace accreditation scheme a fertile ground for the way in which a workplace responds to this issue in a holistic way.

We have identified, through our reference advisory group, which has members from the academic community right through to key organisations in Government and non-government, large state corporations, smaller organisations and sporting codes. That advisory group has been working over the 12 months to establish what we think is the best process and model for accreditation. That accreditation model was ratified by the White Ribbon board last week and we will take that accreditation model into developing the instruments and to piloting it in the second half of 2012 with a range of small, medium and large organisations.

There are three tiers to the accreditation model. What you will end up with is a White Ribbon accredited workplace. I note to the Committee that we looked at the implications that have come out of a review of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999 [EOWWA], we have looked at the breast feeding workplace accreditation model, we have looked at other workplace accreditation models around violence that have been introduced and piloted in Victoria such as the Linfox example and we have come up with a three-tiered approach that allows different entry points for workplaces.

Tier one is awareness and commitment. A workplace would have an acknowledgment of White Ribbon, they would have some White Ribbon ambassadors within their workplace, and they would run a White Ribbon event to raise awareness and funds. A workplace would appoint senior decision-makers as champions—we refer to the women as champions and the males are the ambassadors in the organisation—and they might identify one area for action that they will take on board to implement across the workplace. Then a workplace will submit documentation under the assessment process that they have done that tier one.

Tier two takes much more holistic action. The workplace meets the conditions for tier one, they will use standards to self-assess, identify gaps and implement standards that may be within their policies and procedures—most importantly—and they will document that and how they are taking White Ribbon into to second stage of engagement.

Tier three is a leading organisation who has done tier one and tier two and who takes broad leadership to this issue in an external public way as well as within their own organisation. They continue to demonstrate a high level of staff awareness, engagement and confidence in this initiative. They will submit evidence and they will be subject to peer review. There are some organisations that we think are already at tier three.

CHAIR: Could you clarify for the *Hansard* record the acronym EOWWA?

Ms DAVIES: Equal Opportunity for Women—I cannot remember the exact name. An organisation self-assesses that they provide opportunities and support women in the workplace. They are identified as a leading employer of choice for women.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Could you outline briefly the Linfox workplace program?

Ms DAVIES: I have not got the exact details in front of me, but it was instituted through an initiative supported by VicHealth during 2010-11. It was a pilot program looking at ways in which VicHealth would address the issue of violence from the points of view of not only perpetration of any violence within the workplace but also the support of women who are subject to domestic violence. They introduced within the workplace a series of tools that raised the level of awareness that this issue impacts productivity and impacts the longevity of women within that workplace, that is, women wanting to remain in the workplace. One of the

issues that drive women out of the workplace is their incapacity to deal with violence and how they are supported to deal with it.

If an employer is unable to support them, many of these women have to leave because they are dealing with so much violence outside the workplace. Of course, we know that the incidence of violence in the workplace also can drive women out of the workplace, and that leads to lost productivity and a serious loss of agility within the workplace. Linfox quite clearly demonstrated that one can not only change cultures in a male-dominated workplace that accepted or allowed violence to be perpetrated from employee to employee but also get a better understanding of the impact of external violence on the capacity of employees to work in an everyday setting. I do not have with me the key recommendations; they are in our scoping paper. I am happy to provide that to the Committee and to send you the scoping research.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In looking at preventative programs and community awareness campaigns, we have been told by the Victorian Government that it feels there is better value for money spent on preventative programs, as opposed to awareness campaigns. Do you have a particular view on that?

Ms DAVIES: That is a difficult question. We believe it is easier for a government to deliver the results of prevention activity that is in the secondary and tertiary space, because of the nature of the metrics that measure the outcomes of that prevention. I think it is much harder to measure interventions in early prevention campaigns, such as something like White Ribbon, because it is a longitudinal process and you do not begin to see the evidence of longitudinal processes until 10 years out. Look at the Australian Institute of Family Studies longitudinal research around families dynamics in Australia and you are looking at a period of 10 or 20 years. So that is a very difficult space for governments to attach funding to because of the nature of the political cycle.

But this is such an insidious issue, and so endemic in society, that it requires a whole-of-government approach to turn around the mentality of funding in early prevention. We will not start changing young people's attitudes and responses unless we commit to doing this in a very deliberative way over a period of time. As I said earlier, it is everyone's responsibility. So changing entrenched gender roles and views of masculinity that are being escalated by inappropriate social media is going to take a full-on effort. We would encourage every government of every persuasion—that is, all of us—to commit to this. It should not be politicised if we want to try to turn this around. It should be an ongoing expression of social responsibility across every government.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Does the workplace program focus on just violence or harassment generally?

Ms DAVIES: It captures all types of violence, including harassment.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How do you define violence in the workplace and harassment at the workplace?

Ms DAVIES: We have been grappling with this issue. The definition of violence within the National Action Plan has been translated into our workplace program as perhaps the most concrete way of describing the type of violence that is affecting people within the workplace. You refer to harassment and violence, so physical violence, but mental, emotional and psychological violence within the workplace are just the same as violence outside the workplace but particularly looking at coercive control as exhibited through employer-employee relations within the workplace.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That is a natural relationship though. An employee must take direction from the employer, so there is a control relationship there in the first place. I am very interested to get to the nub of a credible definition of psychological violence in the workplace.

Ms DAVIES: The advisory committee grappled with this at our last face-to-face meeting, because it is really critical as to how we identify the parameters around the nature of the workplace violence. I am very happy to send you the work that we have done around this issue and the capture that we have identified as to the way in which violence is described in our accreditation process.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Have you actually pinned it down in a way that personnel managers in companies trying to implement policies and comply can understand and implement?

Ms DAVIES: That is what the tools of the accreditation process are designed to do: expose and identify ways to ensure that the relationship that exists between manager and employee, for example, is expressed in a respectful way, is conducted in a respectful way, and is embedded in the policy and procedures that govern that workplace operation. The accreditation specialist is at this point in time developing the instruments and the tools.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: So they are not available yet, and those things are yet to be pinned down?

Ms DAVIES: Definitely.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: At the airport there are signs telling me not to make jokes about security, obviously because Australians love to make jokes about it, and everybody has learnt to comply and not to make jokes. That does not mean that people are not standing in queues thinking, "This is ridiculous." Do you see the analogy that I am drawing? People comply, but is that really changing the culture, particularly if men do not regard the rules as credible? If a joke at a social function lands you in hot water, it is not necessarily a learning experience; it just incites resentment, not only from that man but from all of his male colleagues. This is a risk that we run particularly if it is not quite clear upfront and people have to guess what side of the line they fall on. If some workplaces say that is harassment, and some say it is not, the whole thing ceases to have credibility.

Ms ALEXANDER: You raise an interesting point about the culture change, and particularly men just going through the motions rather than believing in it. That is where I think the social marketing campaign really comes into its own in building those cultures. Particularly on line, we see a lot of negative and derogatory behaviour towards women. I think men can play a pivotal role in stepping forward and speaking out on line when they do not feel comfortable with behaviours that are displayed. Often, people in forums, on Facebook pages or online do not agree with what is happening, but they do not have the tools to speak out. That is what we are trying to enable communities on line to do: to start changing the cultures in a social sense, so that it is not accepted when they take it to their workplace or to a social function.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Would you agree that men do not feel able to have a frank conversation on this topic?

Ms ALEXANDER: I think it is very difficult and confronting.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: To me, that is a real hurdle.

Ms ALEXANDER: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: We are happy to hear from men on one side of the argument, but it is taboo to express any contrary view or to even voice a constructive contribution that could be helpful; fear of misinterpretation causes them to sit there and shut up.

Ms ALEXANDER: And peer pressure I think plays a very big role in that, and that is why we are trying to change that culture in a very social sense rather than in so much of an academic way. While our programs and our prevention strategies are informed by academic rigour we do try to give men the language and the tools that they can use in their everyday lives, and that is where the ambassadors play such an important role; because they are leaders and respected in their community they can take that role to step in and to say when they are not comfortable with certain behaviours but do it in a way that they are still respected by their peers. We have seen that particularly in the football codes.

Ms DAVIES: And in one of the major unions in Australia—a very, very blokey culture. I would have to say they are almost at tier 3 in our workplace accreditation model if we were to apply the instruments and assess, and they are working across the whole spectrum of male-dominated elements of their industry, and the leadership of that union has said, "This is not on", and they live and breathe the White Ribbon message at every possible opportunity.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Could I suggest to you that the young men in that college would also be benefiting because it is not only women who can be victims, young men can be victims as well.

Ms DAVIES: Definitely, and White Ribbon is against all forms of violence. But our particular intent and our reason for being is to change attitudes and behaviours that allow men's violence against women to occur.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: As I say, I am very interested in working out that threshold between what is just being rude—because, frankly, we have some socially dysfunctional people who make inappropriate comments—and there is that tipping point where suddenly you are in the realm of sexual harassment and that triggers a whole range of things. It concerns me if all those triggers are fired off on something that seems minor that that can bring the whole system into disrepute. Drawing that line, to me, I fear at times that the line might be too low and it becomes counterproductive if it is too low.

Ms DAVIES: We share your concern, and I think that the work that is continuous and ongoing in terms of developing the strategies and tools of our ambassadors is very conscious of the social pressures and the way in which young people are in particular responses and how they deal with that. Our work with the universities, in the colleges, this is a particular focus that we initiated in 2011 that is giving greater strategic focus in 2012, and recent incidents highlight the need for it. Very much is about creating an understanding of what is the common denominator and what is too low a line and how you then respond appropriately. Leaders in those residential settings, the college principals for example, have a really key role in the system to drive that, but also leaders of the student body themselves and their engagement. So the student of a particular college, for example, they have a really important role and we would hope they would become a White Ribbon ambassador and be given more tools. As bystanders what do they do? How do they turn something around? What is appropriate and what is not appropriate, and what is not appropriate from the woman's perspective? That is where those key messages are really important.

Ms ALEXANDER: The White Ribbon campaign in Canada has developed those tools for university students and it is in a very university-speak language so that they can understand, particularly in relationships, where is the line, how do you know if you are crossing it and how to avoid getting yourself in hot water as well. So we are looking to adapt those resources to an Australian context to make them readily available, particularly to the university committees which we are establishing on campuses—they are White Ribbon committees but they work with the women's committees on campus as well so that there is a unified approach that they can get the women's understanding in everything that they do. We have seen at Sydney University that a committee on campus is working really well at the moment.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Whereabouts at Sydney University?

Ms ALEXANDER: We work with St Andrew's College and we have seen, particularly during O-Week celebrations that the committees set up their stalls and they talk to students, distribute pamphlets and they have made their own T-shirts. They are really leading the charge on campus themselves and they have anecdotally said that the message is well received because it is being delivered by other students.

CHAIR: It probably needs to go to some of the other colleges.

Ms ALEXANDER: Exactly.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: My eldest son has just started at St John's College this year and in my conversations with him he has no understanding of what is and is not harassment; he just would not know. He is a good kid, he is a sensitive kid, but I am just saying that you cannot expect these people to work it out themselves. It is a very complex situation.

Ms ALEXANDER: That is right.

Ms DAVIES: The National Union of Students is very much behind White Ribbon and has been working closely with us, so it is a national push that we are embarking on and supporting the universities to take forward, and Universities Australia is a member of our national advisory group, so we work very closely with them to continue to pursue how we effectively advance this prevention campaign on campuses.

Ms ALEXANDER: And at the O-Week that has just been we distributed thousands of pamphlets to all of the universities nationally for the O-Week celebrations, and they were student committees set up on campus that were delivering those for us.

Ms DAVIES: May I also refer the Committee to one of our research publications from last year, which is titled "Men Speak Up: A toolkit for action in men's daily lives", and there is both the fuller academic version and an abridged version that our ambassadors download and we work through with them about ways in which they can act—as a bystander what do you do and how do you actually respond to a whole range of situations? When you are in the pub talking with a group of blokes and someone is bragging about a particular element of what is perceived by you to be a violent interface with their partner, what do you do? What do you say?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I had lunch with my son on the weekend and his head has been shaved as a result of O-Week. What do you think of that?

Ms DAVIES: It depends on his response to it, I think, and how he handles it and internalises it and responds. Initiation ceremonies and, I guess, practices have been part of college and university life and they have come under scrutiny for a very long time. I think the individual's response is if they are not comfortable how they take it further and make a formal complaint that "this is a process in which my own personal space has been violated; I feel compromised by that, what is the response of the university or of the college?"

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: He was fine with it, by the way, but it concerns me others might not be.

CHAIR: Because we are getting close to the end of time and there are a few other questions I might ask you to take this question on notice. I have recently watched your *Change Your Ways* DVD that I know was done in conjunction with the Let's Tackle Domestic Violence program. Could I ask you to provide to the Committee who was the intended target of the DVD and why, what research formed the actual initiative and how the DVD is going to be rolled out? Is it okay if you provide information on those?

Ms ALEXANDER: Can I just make a quick note to the Committee that that DVD was developed by the NRL. White Ribbon did not have any involvement in the development of that DVD.

CHAIR: The Let's Tackle Domestic Violence program, was that your involvement with it there?

Ms ALEXANDER: That is the NRL's initiative. Kevin Maher, who is an ambassador, participated in that program, but it was embarked upon and initiated by the NRL. We have it as a resource on our website, but it was developed by the NRL. We can talk to them and get that information to you through the NRL if you like.

CHAIR: So they did not work with you to work out those target audiences and the content?

Ms DAVIES: No. However, they have received funding, Australian Government funding, to develop further community action kits and we are engaged with them actively in developing those kits. I think the recognition of the White Ribbon campaign, the message, the role of ambassadors, the work that we are doing in the prevention space, has been recognised by NRL and we work very closely with them in other ways, but not in the production of that video.

CHAIR: But with the amount of money and effort and the launch that has gone into a DVD resource like that and if they are committed to prevention and they are receiving Federal Government money and so are you, surely it would have been considered to be appropriate to have involved White Ribbon in the development and research and the rollout of such a DVD, would you agree?

Ms DAVIES: We encourage all our partners to actively engage with the campaign and the research that we have that drives the campaign and to use our informed input into all the resources that they produce. To coordinate prevention across Australia is critical. To not duplicate resources, to ensure that we get connectivity and we are speaking the same message we can only urge our partners and NRL to more actively engage, yes.

CHAIR: I found the message in the DVD confusing as it went on. I think that there should be greater involvement with organisations such as White Ribbon. That is just an observation that I had from watching the DVD. Any further collaboration with organisations would be welcome and the confusing message that I got from the DVD potentially adds to some of the myriad confusing messages and problems that we are seeing the further we delve into this topic.

Ms DAVIES: Thank you, Chair. You have highlighted a very big issue.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: My question is quite an appropriate follow-on from that, not having known that the Chair was going to ask that question. I wanted to refer to the recent cases that have been both in the mainstream media and social media relating to two National Rugby League [NRL] players who have been recently convicted of assaulting their partners. In one case the victim was pregnant and was kicked. The NRL, to my knowledge, has not made a statement. There was a \$2,000 fine and there has been a lot of discussion about how manifestly inadequate that response was in terms of the sentence. I would not mind your comment on that and two things out of it: Do you have a view about the NRL's response to those cases or incidents where its high-profile players, or its players generally, are involved in violent assaults upon women?

Second, the other element of that case that concerned me was that in their coverage the media pursued the victim down the street. I am aware of cases where either the perpetrator or the victim are high-profile people, sometimes they can both be high-profile people, and the media then seems to pursue the victim and treat the thing like it is salacious gossip rather than the crime that it is. I just wonder whether you also have a view about that. I note that in Victorian legislation the magistrate can suppress the names if it is in the interests of the victim—it is not about protecting the perpetrator. Do you have a comment on any of those areas that I have raised?

Ms DAVIES: Just on that latter point, the magistrate can also issue an order that asks that the perpetrator understands that changing attitudes and behaviours are what are critical to actually turn the perpetration around and as part of that pay a fine to White Ribbon—a contribution to the prevention campaign—to assist other young people understand that these are inappropriate behaviours, as well as participate in perpetrator programs. So the increasing response of the judiciary to this issue is very interesting and how we can as individuals take more responsibility for changing those behaviours.

I will let Kate answer your question but I might just preface that answer: The media is a reflection of society, unfortunately. The institutional elements that contribute to violence against women are expressed by the media in many inappropriate ways and so changing their attitudes and behaviours is critical as well. That media pursuit of the victim, we understand that and we hear the victim's response to those types of sensationalising rather than actually understanding how it places them in respect of this issue. Of course clubs deal with this issue of perpetration by a high-profile player in a very complex way, not the least of which is to understand—and I am not in any way exonerating any of their responsibilities in this—the way they can actively turn around perpetrators' behaviours and not just wash their hands of it and transfer the problem somewhere else. So that forms a very complex mix in terms of the way they respond and that is not often captured by the media.

Ms ALEXANDER: It is concerning that football players in particular are such big role models for young people and that they are presented in this way in the media and that they are perpetrating such acts, because young people in particular are receiving messages through the media that this sort of behaviour does not have severe consequences. I think the media has a very real responsibility to report in an ethical way on these issues. The issue of the victim being chased down the street is one example of how the media turns it into a social commentary rather than looking at the issues that are behind the act.

The *Age* has been running a series of articles on the issue of violence against women—men's violence against women—and they have been reporting on it in a very robust way, looking at all facets of the issue. There have been a couple of articles that have come out recently. They have done a whole series of features on the issue and I would like to see more of that in the media in the future.

CHAIR: Unfortunately we have run out of time this morning. We have still got a lot of questions that we would have liked to have asked so we will pose those to you in writing on notice if you are happy to answer those. I note there also were some answers that you did take on notice today and some links and other information that you would like to return. The Committee has resolved that the answers to those questions be returned within 21 days. The secretariat will be in touch with you to facilitate the response to those questions. On behalf of the Committee I thank you for your time this morning, your submission and your evidence and also for the good work that you are doing.

(The witnesses withdrew)

HOWARD WILLIAM BROWN, Vice-President, Victims of Crime Assistance League, and

ROBYN COTTERELL-JONES, Executive Director, Victims of Crime Assistance League, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Would you like to give an opening statement before we move into questions?

Mr BROWN: Yes, Chair, just a very brief statement, in the light of our initial submission made to the Committee and bearing in mind the responses and questions you have indicated that you may care to ask. As an organisation we do not wish to infer that the entire situation in relation to domestic violence is fraught with difficulties. The problem that we have as an organisation is that we deal with that group of people for whom the system does not work. We have no doubt that for a percentage of people, this is a system that appears to work, and appears to work quite well: but it is those areas where it does not work and fails miserably.

They are the client base that we deal with, and they are often, obviously, the partners—predominantly female—who are affected by the assaults. But we also deal a lot with the children—the children in these relationships who are highly traumatised by this process. And we tend to forget that it is not just the beaten partner and their children, but it is often the grandparents who then take on a caring role and who feel quite impotent before the law and a system that appears to abandon them. We do not want to say that the entire system is broken, but there are clearly areas where it needs to be improved, and vastly improved. We just want to put that on the record.

CHAIR: Thank you. Are you happy to now move on to questions?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: Yes.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Thank you for coming along today to give evidence to our inquiry. In your submission you are critical of a lack of a strategic response to domestic violence by government, non-government organisations and accords. How do you reckon the New South Wales Government could address this, in your belief?

Mr BROWN: I think the easiest way to respond to that is to quote the Commissioner of Police, Mr Andrew Scipione, who quite recently spoke of the fact that 75 per cent of the core work undertaken by police relates to domestic violence and child abuse. The New South Wales Commissioner of Police prides himself on the fact that in every local area command there is a domestic violence liaison officer [DVLO], and that is quite true. But what he does not tell you is that that domestic violence liaison officer is often also the ALO, the Aboriginal liaison officer. They often are also the GLLO, the gay and lesbian liaison officer, and they are often following roles of other liaison officers in concert with their role as a domestic violence liaison officer.

It also ignores the elephant in the room. There are 14 shifts per week at a police station. The domestic violence liaison officer generally works Monday to Friday within the hours of the operating times of our courts. The difficulty is that the majority of domestic violence is perpetrated on Thursday night, Friday night and Saturday night when there is no access to a domestic violence liaison officer. To be perfectly frank, if one is going to be serious about recognising core activity, and if 75 per cent of your core activity is surrounding domestic violence, you need to have a situation where the officers who are domestic violence liaison officers cover each and every shift within that local area command. In essence, what we would really require for this to be an efficient system and for government to recognise it—and this is expensive—is domestic violence liaison officers to cover every shift. That means, as a bare minimum, you are going to require three people minimum as domestic violence liaison officers. And I think that is something that is probably unpalatable as far as budgets are concerned.

But we do not just to solve the problem with domestic violence liaison officers—because domestic violence liaison officers, in essence, basically just administer and ensure that police officers are doing the right thing—what we really need to do is have a core group within each local area command who are trained to a much greater level in relation to the dynamics of domestic violence. That, unfortunately, does not occur. I am sure that the Committee has experienced some comments from other people who have participated before the inquiry when we speak about Ladies Day, or what is sometimes known as Cattle Call, when up to 60 or 70 matters may be being brought before the court on any given day in relation to people seeking apprehended violence orders [AVOs].

When you look at the police prosecution branch and the amount of time they get to prepare for these cases, often it is on the day of the hearing. They receive 65 briefs at seven o'clock in the morning. They are expected to be fully across all those issues by 10 o'clock when court convenes, and then it just turns into a bunfight because you have within the court environment victims and perpetrators. Fortunately the Downing Centre has a separate room, which keeps those people secure, but at some point they have to leave the room and traverse the court area to enter the courtroom in front of the perpetrator. Police prosecutors are not aware of what is going on outside. They are not aware of the dynamics of it. Under those circumstances, unless we find police prosecutors—because in the main 90 per cent of apprehended violence orders work is done by police prosecutors and only 10 per cent is handled by the Director of Public Prosecutions—it is quite clear that the resources we are making available in apprehended violence order matters is well and truly below the needs that we have.

If we are going to take a strategic response to this, we are going to have to train our police officers far better in the dynamics. We are going to have to make more resources available for the appointment of domestic violence liaison officers, and we are going to have to make more resources available to prosecutors to ensure that these matters are prosecuted properly.

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: If I can add to that just a very quick line—you will notice in my original submission that I mentioned the lack of interface between victims' services and domestic violence. My role is to find services for people where they exist and where victims' services can provide counselling and so forth very quickly for domestic violence victims who need it. I believe there should be a better interface there. I have also prepared a supplementary submission based on the questions because I know there are too many to get through. I have eight copies of that that I would like to hand up. Some of the issues have been addressed in there, and I am very open for further comment, if you need it.

CHAIR: You would like to table those documents?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: Yes, please.

Documents tabled.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you for attending today, and thank you for providing us with the chance to ask you some additional questions. In what you describe as your opening statement, Mr Brown, you really have touched on a theme that has come up time and time again, not just in the context of our deliberations in New South Wales but also when we had an opportunity last week to visit Victoria. Let us assume that your argument is taken as the correct argument—that there is this dissonance between the nature of the matter, the size of the matter, how we are dealing with it, and what needs to be brought to bear to commence making some serious inroads with it. Do you have any thoughts about what the progress would be to start to address it? In other words, how could a government really start to deal with this? Obviously it is a huge matter. It is societal in its nature, but of course it interfaces with criminal activity in its extreme. What are your thoughts about how a government could start to tackle this in a meaningful way, which means that it will be progressed and dealt with more effectively over time? What would be those early steps that a government would take?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: I think I have addressed this particular question in my submission in more detail, but basically we have to identify what we mean by "domestic violence". Do we mean a person who comes to me at the age of 13 and says, "I lived in domestic violence when I was younger", or when that person is 30? Do we only want to talk about the direct violence against a partner? Where does it start? My strategy would include, since we know because the evidence tells us, it increases at the point of marriage, pregnancy, the birth of a child and the early months afterwards. What are we doing in the health area to make sure that these subjects are raised?

What I say in my submission is that the majority of your domestic violence victims—and, I suspect, the majority of your perpetrators, at least at the low-level stuff—do not get it. They do not understand that what they are doing and what they are involved in is called "domestic violence". That is a really important aspect to comprehend. In my own situation, I lived in it for many years. I could have walked into a room decorated with the words "domestic violence" and it would not have occurred to me that I was a victim or that in fact I was a victim of domestic violence. It was not until it was a very severe attack on me, that included torture for many hours and several injuries in different places, and it was not until the police officer standing beside me as I was being taken into theatre who said, "This is escalating domestic violence, and he's going to kill you next time."

and I said, "No, it's not. He's just got a bad temper." But having said that, in that environment, it opened my mind to the idea that I needed to learn more about this issue. Up until then, it had not occurred to me that that is what it was. In my work I find that day in day out, people do not get it. So, if the victims do not get it neither are the perpetrators going to get it.

So, the education has to start very early. It has to start in the literature that is given to women who are pregnant. For them it might be already too late but you have to start somewhere. It is a continuum. If we had something at school, through preschools and so forth, where you identify a child who was already acting out. Why is he acting out? What is happening at home? It is not a private matter anymore, once that starts to impact on other children in that environment. So, our teachers need to be educated to understand what are the signs. I used to go to the doctor and say that I could not sleep, I am agitated, I am feeling very anxious. I am very busy, I am running a very large business, but he and I never got to the conversation about what is going on in the relationship. So, it is the education. It has to go through all levels and it needs to be a core subject at school. It has to be in every faculty. Imagine if every faculty had a compulsory component which taught about trauma and domestic violence. It would mean all your business owners would understand it and would perhaps understand what is going on with their staff and be able to support them better.

It would be your doctors, who do not necessarily study domestic violence; it would be your nurses. I know this is a hole because we lecture at different courses. Mr Brown and I speak at various universities about law. They do not study it, they do not get it. And so this missing piece of information that is so crucial to all of us to understand, I believe, is a societal issue that needs to be taught right through our educational system as a core subject. It does not matter how good you are at maths or English or science, if you cannot have decent relationships you are in trouble and you are going to cause trouble. And that is what I have really addressed in my submission.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I guess that is what I was getting at, because it seems almost paradoxical that governments of either complexion have produced laws over time that deal with domestic/family violence. Embedded in that are definitions of what domestic or family violence is. In some cases that has been done some years ago yet there seems to be this disconnect with parliaments having done this and put it into place yet out there in society there seems to be in many instances this lack of understanding?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: Absolutely.

Mr BROWN: We take an approach, though, and this is one of the things that we hope might be borne out by this Committee, that each particular organisation, say the Department of Health, FACS, Community Services, Police, they all have their own different strategic approaches. Governments have introduced legislation to increase penalties for people who are guilty of particular crimes, but that is closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. What Ms Cotterell-Jones is talking about here is early intervention. The earlier we intervene in this schism that develops the less chance there is of an escalation in the levels of violence. What we have not done and what governments have not done is take a whole-of-government approach and sat down and said what is this bottom line costing our budget? That is where the problem is because our budgets are diversified in such areas.

We spend so much on police, we spend so much on health, we spend so much on education, and we have classes for dysfunctional children, and the question is why are these children dysfunctional? Is it that they have ADHD or are they watching their mother having the living daylight beaten out of her every night? We are not taking the whole-of-government approach to say this is the problem. It is too late once the person has committed the offence. We have these penalties in place, but that is too late. We need to get them here. That is why we need kids to understand at preschool that it is not right for mummy to be beaten up by daddy. Mums need to understand, as Ms Cotterell-Jones did not when she was the victim of domestic violence, that what her husband was doing to her was domestic violence. She just saw it as a case of someone having a bad temper. If we had a dollar for every victim who came to us and we identified that at an early strategy being adopted we could have prevented that escalation. Again, by the time they get to us they are so dysfunctional.

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: As a feedback on that, my four children are raised by a mother who did not believe in smacking. They would often say, "Can't you just hit us and get it over and done with?" But I used language like, "When you push your sister it is physical assault. That is part of domestic violence and we are not having it in this house." They said they hated it but they learnt. They got it. They understood. It is really quite simple to use the right language to explain this huge hidden problem. This Committee has already heard many people talking about 40 per cent of this and that is the workload. Then we say about two-thirds of people do not

report, and of course that is an estimate. I suggest in that two-thirds of people, there are people who have not got it yet, have not comprehended it. That is what we are talking about when we are using this term, domestic violence.

It happens every day in my work and it happens from people who are themselves caught in the domestic violence situation who work in the field, who are working with other women in the field. They do not get it about themselves. It is very hard to see yourself when you are the one in the picture. Other people might be able to see. By the strategy I am talking about you would have friends who would be able to talk about this subject, about what the impacts are, to be able to identify and to have the courage to speak out about things we all tend to say I had better not say anything about that. Such as the drunk who has been at the football and his team has lost. He says to the wife, "Get into the car" and he is angry because his team has lost and his mates are giving him a hard time. Who tells him he has been drinking and cannot get into the car? So the woman is then subjected to the anger that has been created by somebody else and she is the whipping boy in that situation with children in the car. How do we identify that as domestic violence? How do we make people see what they are doing by not speaking up? I can talk about this for four days under wet cement.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: The early intervention programs we have heard about from other witnesses—we also have examples of some that are operating in other jurisdictions—I wonder whether you have a view about those early intervention programs, whether you think some are working better than others or whether you have developed some ideas yourself?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: I do not know that I am in a position to analyse what other people are doing in this field. We are pretty busy working at the grass roots level. Our process is to say who are you? All you people are here doing the same job, you are not the same. If you came to me I would want to know who you are, where you are up to, or what do you need and how do I help you? How do I help you prevent what could go wrong next. It is too late for what has already happened, how can I educate you and bring you to the point where you have to deal with the next area. I like that model but it is not a model that can be applied en mass.

Mr BROWN: I think one of the big problems is that a lot of the programs designed or defined as being early intervention are not in our view what you would call early intervention. Some people refer to the trials being conducted in Campbelltown and Wagga Wagga as being early intervention programs, but they are not in essence early intervention programs because they are all being instituted after there has been an act of violence. As I have made perfectly clear, we believe early intervention needs to be early intervention before it escalates to the point of violence, and there is very little in that area that would satisfy that definition.

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: However, it is a loop and it does not matter where you cut it, if that is where you need to put services in to teach somebody about something, that can be useful. Some of the people who use domestic violence and suffer domestic violence will benefit from that. We are not saying nothing works; many things work, it depends where they are being applied to the problem.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: In your submission you spoke of mediation as a way of responding to domestic violence. And you acknowledge in your submission that many other organisations do not support mediation. Can you elaborate on that?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: I will start and Mr Brown will finish. I think a lot of other agencies do not really understand the way the court process works. They do not understand that the victim does not have anyone on their side. The prosecutor is not on their side. The Director of Public Prosecutions is not on their side. The police are not on their side against the opposition which can have some pretty powerful barristers. So the opportunity for the victim to be re-traumatised by the process is really high. I found it to be a completely powerless situation when it was me, and it is often told to me by other victims of fairly serious crime. It was very disempowering. The outcome of having the criminal system dismiss charges at the end of the day or come up with a minimised version of what had happened is disempowering.

Mr BROWN: When I leave here this morning I will be travelling to Bowral to participate in what is known as a forum sentence. That is a process whereby a magistrate decides that the person who has committed a crime has committed such a crime that one of the options available to His or Her Honour is jail. We go into what is known as a forum. It is not dissimilar to circle sentencing—something I imagine you are all familiar with. The way it operates is that the victims of the crime turn up, the perpetrator turns up, there is a facilitator obviously and the arresting officer. Generally, for these forums to work properly, apart from the perpetrator having support around him, so does the victim. In this case that I am dealing with today, this is the second co-accused. The first

accused was dealt with. This case is an assault occasioning grievous bodily harm involving four people being quite violently assaulted after an alcohol-related act of violence.

When we conducted the very first forum and we went through the process with the two victims of that crime, whom I had met prior and sat down and explained the process to them, who I was and what I would do for them and how I would assist them in empowering them, because they felt they had been empowered, they went into that forum with a really positive attitude and there was no imbalance of power. This is what Robyn talks about, this imbalance because everything is skewed in favour of the perpetrator. Forum sentencing is an ideal venue in which we can ensure that the victims of domestic violence can be appropriately supported. We could use a model based on that provided, and again here I go about funding, we actually are training up people to be that support mechanism for those victims and empower the victims of that crime to have greater control over the situation than the court situation.

As Robyn says, when a person is charged and brought before the court in relation to an AVO matter or breach of an AVO matter, they often will be represented by senior counsel. The victim has no-one acting on their behalf. It may in fact be a situation where we will get to the point where they are looking at in Western Australia that there in fact will be a victims' solicitor to ensure that the rights of that victim are not trampled on during the process. I would urge the Committee to give some consideration and even perhaps observe some forums in operation to get an idea as to how we could modify that to a system that would involve a fair bit of mediation but I think where we would get far better outcomes. For example, in that last forum it was clear that the young man involved in this crime had a huge problem with alcohol. Instead of sending him to jail, the forum gained an outcome that he will now spend the next nine months whilst on a good behaviour bond in a drug and alcohol live-in residential program so that he can actually deal with his alcohol abuse. Unfortunately, alcohol and drugs are one of the big contributing factors in domestic violence. There are runs on the board but when the former Attorney General John Hatzistergos introduced forum sentencing he probably did so at the wrong time because it was introduced just in time to deal with the Macquarie Fields riots. It probably was not the right venue; domestic violence was specifically excluded and remains specifically excluded for forums.

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: It will not suit everyone, but a lot of negotiation is necessary. I did not want this man to go to jail; I was a snob. I did not want to have a husband in jail. I did not want my kids to suffer the impact of having a jailbird for a father. Besides, he said he was going to kill me if he went to jail and I believed him after what he had already done. So it needed to be negotiated, but the negotiations, which were available to me at the time, were to reduce the severity of the crime—attempted murder and grievous bodily harm, according to the analysis the police put on part of the process, and that is an issue for another day. I agreed to the charges being lowered. It did nothing for me. I still had to give evidence in court. It just simply took out the facts of the experience that I had had.

Mr BROWN: And the extreme violence.

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: But we had children. We had a business. We had a whole life tied up in this situation and in a mediated process where this stuff is known, rather than doing a bit in this court and then going off to Family Court, it could have been resolved in a way that would have made his life better in the future and our lives much better in the future. There are a number of other women in similar situations who would agree with what I am saying. It is not for everyone, not as a routine, but as an option. Obviously, it has to be like the forums: if you do not do what you are supposed to do or you commit further crimes, you end up back before the court. It is a sort of one bite at the cherry.

CHAIR: Following up on your response to an earlier question from the Hon. Greg Donnelly about looking at how money is spent across all government divisions in this area, are you aware that the Victorian Government recently conducted that exercise and examined what money departments were spending on this area, around \$70 million a year I believe?

Mr BROWN: Yes.

CHAIR: Prior to that review taking place they worked out that domestic violence covers 12 portfolio areas and falls under the responsibility of five or six different Ministers who then come together for a coordinated approach. Is that the basis for what you were saying would be a solution? Are you looking at that Victorian model?

Mr BROWN: I am and that is actually why I raised it. I was not aware or was not sure that the Committee was aware of that, but I think it was a great eye opener for the Victorian Government to see how it was spread across so many departments. That is where I spoke about requiring a whole-of-government approach because the cost to this community is enormous and really still is not being measured adequately. That is why we need to adopt that whole-of-government approach. We can actually save money and use that money far more efficiently, but before you can save money and before you can deal with the problem you actually have to know what is the problem. The issue has been diluted by the fact that it has been spread across so many departments.

CHAIR: The Committee spent two days last week in Melbourne and met with the Minister who has carriage for the group of Ministers on this issue.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Could you outline how you find members or reach out to victims about your organisation?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: We are a very small organisation. We have a fabulous website. We have contacts via the Victims' Services strategy. So its website and counsellors are supposed to refer to us. We do a lot of work locally. We actually are funded to look after victims of crime in the Hunter region. Our charity says to look after anyone who needs it anywhere in New South Wales. We do a lot of work outside the Hunter region. Howard works as a victim support specialist in Sydney in addition to his role on various government committees and so forth looking at the political side of lobbying. We are associated with all sorts of interagencies. We attend, for example, the Victims of Crime interagency committee in Sydney where once every three months people from all different government agencies and some non-government come together to talk about current issues. But there does not seem to be the place where you argue about the issues. You do not talk about cases, but if we do not look at cases to understand the process, we are not really going to understand the problems. That has been the call. Twenty years ago I received a letter from Faye Lo' Po, who was the Minister at the time, which said, "I get letters like yours from women like you all the time. It's terrible, it's terrible, it's terrible." My reaction was, "If you had done something about those other women, perhaps I wouldn't have been treated in the way that I was."

Someone spoke about Nanette's DVD that the police are using. Nanette is one of our clients who found us because she could not get answers to what she wanted in her local areas using their more traditional domestic violence and other services because she was not being treated well by the system in various parts. We were able to get involved with her at that stage and work with her to help her. A lot of it is by word of mouth. We have brochures. There is one in the pack I sent down today. We could do with a marketing manager and more people to try to do it. We would love to set up in Sydney, but have not got around to doing that yet because you need a committee in Sydney that is willing to do a lot of years of hard work to put it together. So it is a bit fragmented but we get a very good grassroots view of what is going on and what is going wrong. All those women have tried to get their story told. As Howard was saying in these siloed responses, this agency will deal with only that part of the problem but not the whole picture. That really needs to be looked at.

We could learn so much by listening to the voices of the people who have tried to use the system because one of the things they want, irrespective of justice, is to try to stop this happening to another person. It is so awful to go through a serious matter and be treated as many are within the serious end of the system. There are issues to be learnt. The only way we will learn them is by not having the approach of covering up and saying, "No, we didn't." It is about, "Come talk to me. Tell me about this", because you cannot get it across in writing; you need to speak to the people.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In your submission you made some comments about children as the victims and you also refer to the impact it has on grandparents and other carers. Could you outline some of the recommendations you would like to put to the Committee in relation to children and to carers?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: Once again it is who is affected and when and what is happening in their life that needs to be resolved. It would be a mistake to think that once a person has been through the court system, even sent to jail, that the issue is over. While ever the children have an association with the parent that is abuser the potential for further harm is great and ongoing—irrespective of a response. When you are talking about carers, if the carers are people who are looking after children who have been affected by domestic violence, then they need strategies to be able to do it, they need to understand the issues, they need to understand how a child is affected and how to remedy the situation and what resources are available out there.

I do not put people in boxes. It is the person. It is, "Where are you up to?" A person might come to me because their daughter has been murdered and they themselves might have suffered domestic violence; how do I respond to that person if I say, "In the homicide victims box please, I am not dealing with the other issues." Clearly those other issues are affecting the way they are responding in these sets of circumstances. It is about where an individual is up to. Our service is about people and the law abiding community that is affected by any crime, particularly violent crime. If somebody who is 23 years old calls me and says, "I am having trouble. I do not know what to do. I do not seem to be able to get anything right."

I can talk to that young person about what I am identifying in what she is saying. Sometimes it takes half a dozen conversations before they give up on the hope that somehow they will be able to love them into wellness. It is a big issue. The more we go back to the education—where people understand the idea of a hole in the soul that you cannot fix no matter how much you love the person, when we identify people who are overly empathetic and teach them to have better boundaries in place—there are structured responses that we could have if we accepted that this issue, relationships, call it whatever you like, the yin and yang of it, is something that we would benefit from as a society if we could incorporate it into our educational strategies. It would cut down on all that. It is a big problem.

Mr BROWN: I am currently dealing with a situation which I find quite unpalatable. I have a 32-year-old woman who, four and a half years ago, was stabbed 27 times by her partner. He did so in full view of the public and in front of his three-year-old daughter. The mother, I suppose for want of a better expression, fortunately survived. But for the period of her hospitalisation, which was something like three months, her parents had to take full custody of that three-year-old child and care for her. We had to fight victim services to recognise the grandparents as victims of domestic violence because they said there was no direct link between them. It is fortunate that I have been involved with the Victims of Crime Assistance League Inc NSW [VOCAL] since its inception 24 years ago and I am known by government agencies to be a pain in the "whatsamacallit". The only reason they provided assistance in relation to that matter is because they thought if they did not I would go to the media. They thought it was easier to provide counselling.

The difficulty is that now that person is out. The person responsible for that crime, despite the fact it attracted a maximum penalty of 25 years, was sentenced to six years jail: four years to be served and two and a half to be served on parole. He has not done the violent offender therapy program [VOTP]. He has not done any substantial programs within the prison system. I advocated before the New South Wales State Parole Authority on behalf of the woman to try and ensure that this person would not be released. I was unsuccessful. I was successful in having him fitted with a GPS tracker so we know where he is at any given time. Now the grandparents are back in the same situation they were; their granddaughter is older but they see her as being at risk and if anything goes wrong they know that they will have to take responsibility. Yet people fail to recognise how stressed they are by that situation. The type of support we are providing the family is very time intensive and it is normal process for both Robyn and myself to work in the vicinity of 14 to 16 hours a day because we do not have the resources but we see the issues that these people have and we are a bit soft. When we see people in need we try and fill that need.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How could that offender possibly have been granted parole when he would not cooperate with those programs whilst in custody?

Mr BROWN: One of the situations that the parole authority finds themselves in, and I understand this—we had this situation not long ago with the Bulli rapist—when a sentence is clearly inadequate and a person is going to become eligible for release to parole and when we have a limited time to supervise them, it is often best to take them from the prison system and put them back in the community with these electronic safeguards in the hope of integrating them back into the community as opposed to waiting until their term expires and then releasing them without any supervision at all. That was the approach that the authority took. I was opposed to them on that particular view. I said, "Even if we keep him in for 12 months, in that time we can make him do the violent offender therapy program. You have an 18 month period in which to supervise him." They rejected my submission. I was up against a QC.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Who had the QC? The offender had engaged a QC?

Mr BROWN: Yes, had engaged Queen's Counsel.

CHAIR: One of the terms of reference is electronic monitoring, GPS bracelets and their use for offenders in domestic violence. Can I have your opinion on GPS monitoring in relation to that?

Mr BROWN: I see it as being an essential tool to ensure that the victims and children are kept safe. This is a particularly good process, the GPS process. When it was first intended to be rolled out we found that there were substantial glitches with the system.

CHAIR: We are hearing that those glitches still exist: For example, ability to maintain an adequate signal, the monitoring issue, and there are exorbitant costs around the monitoring. We are still hearing there are issues.

Mr BROWN: There is no question there are issues. For example, one of the things you raised is the disparity between Sydney communities and rural communities. That is one of the big areas where we have a difficulty with GPS tracking. The availability of it in rural communities is limited because of the range of signal. Whether the big roll-out by the Federal Government of this great new electronic network is going to assist I do not know. These glitches are slowly being resolved. I was down in Goulburn recently and was surprised to find they had 4G in Goulburn. I suspect that is because the police academy and super-max jail are there and they need good communication. Once we get the 4G network rolled out those glitches will be taken out of the system and the cost will come down.

One cost accelerant in this process is if you make a person available for GPS tracking and you discover that his location is going to be in an area with a poor signal receptor they have to pay for the cost of boosting the signal in that area. The principles are excellent and the anti-tampering processes are brilliant. We had a sex offender 18 months ago who was fitted with a GPS bracelet. He went to the beach at Stanmore Park and at the top of the beach overlooking an area where there were 50 children on a school excursion he cut the tracker off. By the time he got down to the beach and was approaching children he was crash-tackled by police officers who had been triggered by corrections that he had cut the bracelet off.

CHAIR: Where do you draw the line? We had one area command tell us that in his area alone he could name 180 offenders that would be suitable for such a tracking device. The monitoring costs for that would be huge.

Mr BROWN: In New South Wales, we currently have 9,500 prisoners. Of those, only 1,385 are classified as serious offender. For mine, in relation to the use of GPS trackers for recalcitrant prisoners, my definition would be those who fall within the serious offender category. However, in relation to domestic violence, GPS trackers should be used for those who come before the courts on multiple occasions for multiple breaches. We can identify those as being high risk, and I would be targeting those people.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Robyn, thank you very much for your evidence; it was very compelling. We have heard about the need to have a cross-portfolio or whole-of-government approach. In your supplementary submission you talk about the need for one official place to report systemic issues. Where would you like that located?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: In the office of the victims commissioner, please. We do not have a victims commissioner yet. But we need a place—not like the Ombudsman, who has restrictions on matters he can deal with—where people can look at the systems, one place where people can go to, and with enough staff to be able to catalogue complaints. Complaints that go to Police are handled by police; they are not looked at systemically; they look only at that part. If it is a complaint about the health of a domestic violence victim who is also with Police and also with the courts, the victim is trying to tell the government: This is what happened to me, make it stop. It has to be some place that has a helicopter view, not one at ground level.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: What you are envisaging would not necessarily be dealing with case-based complaints; it would be reviewing systemic issues?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Perhaps identified by people working in the field who could collaborate through this one central and official place. Is that the vision you have?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: That is half the problem. But I think you also need a victim specialist environment to be able to comprehend the whole range of things that victims can go through, and even do complaints handling. If I could go back a hundred million years when I was a public servant with Veterans

Affairs. We had a boss who thought every complaint that came into that department of 3,000 people—and was entered in books in those days, not in computers—could be dealt within two or three days in which to do the research and find out what the problem was. We had a benevolent attitude: it was not necessarily about giving the person what they wanted, but about making sure we were very respectful in the terminology that we used and in the way that we explained things. We had a fairly good reputation for doing that. I have missed that. What I get now if I write to a politician or Minister or the head of a government department is a bit of waffle about, "Did you know we have changed the law on this," and, "Did you know we have got a survey going about that?" That does not address the issues being raised.

Mr BROWN: When, for example, we identify a person from an area health service as having been perhaps not as diligent as they should have been and make a formal approach to the health service they say, "The difficulty is that we are working in concert with Police, and so we have no control over what the police do, and we have no control over what information police give us." As a result, your complaint goes nowhere. We say, "We are not trying to target this particular person in Health and say, 'Sack that person.' Clearly, this person doesn't get it. Can you give them some assistance so that they do get it, so that the next person who comes to you does not have this problem?" We are not looking at punitive measures against these people: we are saying: Identify these people and say, "Hey, you need more training."

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: To me, the issue is the system learning from mistakes.

Mr BROWN: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: So you do not need to convince me that there are problems; I think the evidence before the Committee is overwhelming. But what is the solution? How can we assist those in the system to learn and for the system to improve its response? That is why I am very interested in your idea of having one official place where that learning could take place.

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: Where it could be fed down. If I work in Health and I am helping a client, and they get fed into a system that does not look after them, maybe my work has not been good enough. Perhaps that person would think, "Why is this happening?" There could be strategies filtering down to deal with the big picture. Imagine a dart board. The victim is in the middle, and all the divisions on a dart board are different—as are agencies and the different processes that victims have to go through. The victim has to become the specialist. The victim has to be the one who knows how all these processes work. We really need to turn that around, so that we are providing for victims' needs.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: In relation to the case where the grandparents were looking after the three-year-old, what assistance were you seeking, from which agency were you seeking it, and what assistance was obtained?

Mr BROWN: We were seeking counselling for the grandparents. The grandparents all of a sudden were confronted with raising a three-year-old whose mother was in a critical condition in hospital. There was the trauma of losing her daughter, and the possibility of the mother dying. But there was also the trauma associated with the fact that the grandparents were not particularly well themselves, and they had to care for a three-year-old. It became overwhelming. We wanted to get counselling for them.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: From which agency?

Mr BROWN: It was done through the approved counselling scheme of Victim Services. Obviously, there was no cost to the grandparents, and that was a really important part about the process. We did not want any form of financial compensation; we were able to access that for them through the Commonwealth Government because they became the official carers while Susan was in hospital; and even when first released from hospital Susan actually stayed with her parents because she was still quite unwell.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I imagine that for these elderly people in shock, never having had to think about what is available, significant guidance would be required.

Mr BROWN: Yes. And they were totally unprepared for the court process as well. One question asked by the Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones was how we get our referrals. Regrettably, sometimes our referrals come directly to us from the State Parole Authority, saying, "We have this victim who is being completely uncooperative." So we go out and meet the victim, and find that the reason she is being completely

uncooperative is that no-one is telling her anything. She has had the living daylights beaten out of her, the person responsible for that is about to be released, and she has no idea how to deal with that. We provide a free advocacy service before the State Parole Authority. But, again, this is well and truly after the horse has bolted. So, often, we have to recover these persons before we can help them.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: What assistance were you able to provide to your children? Are you confident that it was successful?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: I had two choices. I was either going to kill myself, and problem them because I did not at that stage believe there was anyone out there to look after them. I never thought of it as "murder" or "kill"; it was just that there was no other solution. Remember, I had been in a wheelchair for quite a long time, could not walk, had lost my family business, and I had not even my children's shoes and toys. My elderly mother was alive at the time. I went for domestic violence counselling at a refuge, and they started to teach me about domestic violence, and I was able to use what I learnt to find better ways of handling the children.

I was given the advice at that point in time, "You don't say anything to put this man down; he's their father, and they will in time have to do their own negotiating with him to find out whether they want to have a relationship with him or not." That was very difficult. But, with other people, I started a group called Women for Social Justice, because the way I was treated in the court system was bloody awful; it was outrageous the way I was treated by a judge. I will not go into it now, but there is a story on the web if you want to read it. I found that nobody could do anything about it: government cannot do anything about what went on in the court. I could talk about that for four days. But the thing was that I needed to pick myself up; I needed to learn how to do that; and I needed to resource things.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: And the children needed to see that?

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: Yes. I had no money. I would ring people. I would ring government offices, I would ring the Department of Women and I would ring the Premier's Department, to try to find someone to tell me what I knew I did not know—what to do. There was no-one who would sit down and talk with me about it. I did not know that my case was unusual, because the media is full of really serious sorts of matters. I did not know how the court system worked. As an expert, I just trusted it. So what works is to search for the right answer, and I am fascinated by this topic, and have been for 18 years now. Why is it that Howard and I have been in this game for so long without being burnt out?

We are still very enthusiastic about trying to do the right thing. It is because we are working on what we can do for the individual person. We cannot give them everything they want, but we can help the person feel more human and be able to cope. So there are many strategies. Interestingly, just this year I started a group for women; it was about empowerment, education and friendship and I ran it through VOCAL and it is still going. There were six women there who had been through either long-lasting or severe domestic violence and they had children. What I am finding is that when we are talking about these different issues, the domestic violence issues, they are still so present in the women that they are finding it quite challenging to deal with these issues when they have suppressed them and pushed them down in order to get a job, to be educated and then they are dealing with children who are traumatised.

I suppose what generated by comments about our school system needing to be better prepared for these kids is because one of my girls was very upset the other day. She is a beautiful woman and she said her little girl had got into strife at school; she was being bullied but she was not game to talk about how she was being bullied and the principal stood them up and roused on them and she just melted and refused school—she thought he was going to start yelling and throwing things like daddy had done. So mum had not identified that that was a real problem. She is a good mum and she went to the school and talked to the principal, who was receptive—and that is not always the case; sometimes the mums do not get a good reception at the school, which is why I say the education system needs to be better at what they are doing. She was so terribly upset that she had done the wrong thing, that by opening her mouth to talk to the school system she might put those children in jeopardy via the Family Court for reporting violence that the Family Court had decided had never existed. This is an area for a whole new day.

CHAIR: I will not harp back to your circumstances, Ms Cotterell-Jones, but you mentioned that questions being asked by your local general practitioner would have been a good way to short-circuit early intervention. I would just like to hear your views on our health system—and maybe it is too late by the time it

gets to our emergency departments—and having proper assessment tools and screening of people that enter through the emergency department to identify maybe victims of domestic violence.

Ms COTTERELL-JONES: I think that there is much more need for education of doctors and nurses and all the other associated people. There also should be things that are available that do not say, "Are you suffering from domestic violence?" I will give an example of a brochure that we put together that is different from our normal VOCAL brochure and it is attracting people by asking, "Is there abuse or whatever in your life?" rather than, "Are you a victim of crime?" People have such trouble identifying where they fit. If my husband hits me I think, "Oh my God, what have I done to deserve that? How am I going to fix it? I need to get up and go to work tomorrow to run this business". If someone said, "You are a victim of crime" I would not have seen my husband as a criminal; criminals are not people like us. It is very hard for people to find where they fit in the definitional stuff, and that needs to be addressed.

Mr BROWN: I think one of the difficulties is that at the triage stage it is generally identified that the person has been admitted to hospital through an act of domestic violence. The social work department is then notified and then what happens is that the social worker will attend upon the victim and say, "If there is anything you need to assist you with this domestic violence here is my card; these are my details", and we know that the majority of people do not recognise that they are in domestic violence and they certainly do not want to admit that they are in domestic violence so they take the card and say, "Thank you very much" and then they walk out of the hospital and that is the end of it. I have exactly the same view in relation to police. Police are offered counselling after a critical incident. My view is that they should be made to go to counselling after a critical incident because they become dysfunctional and that is why officers eat their guns. It is exactly the same thing.

What we should be doing within our hospital network is when a person is identified as having been a victim of domestic violence the social worker says, "Right, as part of your treatment you are going to see this particular person", and it will be a trained counsellor in domestic violence. They will not recognise that but then that counsellor will work them through the process. That is where the system fails at the moment.

CHAIR: We have run out of time. On behalf of the Committee I thank you for your submission, your supplementary information and also your evidence this morning. The Committee may want to pose other questions to you on notice and those questions and any other questions taken on notice the Committee has resolved should be answered within 21 days. The secretariat will liaise with you to facilitate that response. Thank you for your frank and open evidence this morning. I think it has been a great contribution to the inquiry.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

CATHERINE ANNE GANDER, Executive Officer, New South Wales Women's Refuge Movement, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Would you like to give an opening statement, acknowledging that we already have your submission and you do not need to repeat anything in that?

Ms GANDER: Yes, I would. Firstly I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects. Secondly I thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute further to the inquiry. I would like to just take a few minutes of your time to outline the work undertaken by women's refuges. I have read the transcripts from previous hearings and I think we could add a little bit of value around that. I would also like to expand more on the interconnectedness between domestic and family violence and homelessness.

Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness and the most commonly cited reason for women accessing specialist homelessness services, including women's refuges. Approximately a quarter of the 350 specialist homelessness services in New South Wales specifically target women and children experiencing or escaping family violence. The data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicated that in 2010 and 2011 around 65,400 people received support from specialist homelessness services in New South Wales. Of those 44,100 were adults or unaccompanied children or young people and 21,300 were children accompanying their parent, usually their mother or guardian, to a service. Women accounted for 59 per cent of those clients in 2010 and 2011.

Unfortunately the most recent data reports do not provide a breakdown on the number of clients across the different service target groups—for example, youth or women and kids escaping domestic violence. However, the number of women supported that do target women and children escaping domestic violence in 2008 and 2009 in New South Wales was 15,500. We suspect this number would have increased in 2010 and 2011 but there is no data breakdown in this report. The figure does not include children that accompany the mother or the guardian to a service. However, a survey undertaken in 2010 by us found that around half of our member refuges support around 5,000 children a year, so from this we could roughly estimate that our members support around 10,000 children a year. This figure does not just include children that are accommodated. The work that the Women's Refuge Movement undertakes with children is also very important but it is often not recognised more broadly. I will hopefully have the opportunity to talk about that later in question time.

I wanted to give you also a breakdown of the turn-away figures. Official data indicates that the majority—54 per cent—of women and children are turned away from homelessness services including those seeking accommodation from women's refuges targeted at women and children specifically escaping domestic and family violence. In addition the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data, a snapshot survey undertaken by the New South Wales Women's Refuge Movement between 22 August and 4 September last year found that 17 refuges were forced to turn away 165 women and 229 children. Only one refuge from the sample of 18 was actually able to accommodate all of the requests to accommodate women.

Maybe if there is a moment I could just give you a very brief overview of the Women's Refuge Movement and how it is structured. The Women's Refuge Movement, as many of you are probably aware, has been around since the 1970s and it was part of the establishment of the first refuges in Australia and across New South Wales. We also were very instrumental in fighting for laws, legislation and a whole lot of programs and funding to improve responses to domestic violence. We divide the State up into eight areas. We have a delegate that is elected from that region and we also have specialist delegates that represent the issues for children, for culturally and linguistically diverse women, for older women, for Aboriginal women and for lesbian women. That group of delegates meets once a month in Sydney and bring forward the issues from their region. We then prioritise what those concerns are to actively advocate for improvement.

I thought that it might be helpful just to give you a view that we are a very connected organisation. We meet four times a year. We have two State conferences a year where all our members come and we have two conferences a year that are specifically for child support workers to build up their practice and knowledge around working with children who have been affected by domestic violence.

CHAIR: I believe you have just won an international award for some of the work that you do in this area. Could you give us a very brief outline about what that was for?

Ms GANDER: The award is called the Global Believe Fund. It has been established by the National Network to End Domestic Violence in America in partnership with the Avon Foundation. Avon has just moved very strongly into the area of stopping violence against women and girls globally. They chose 10 countries throughout the world. Australia was one of them. They did a desktop audit and reviews, spoke to people, looked at work and achievements, structures, et cetera. The office of the New South Wales Women's Refuge Movement received that award for Australia. With that award came a \$60,000 grant. It was presented in Washington last month by Reese Witherspoon who is a patron for that Avon fund. So we have got three things that we are going to use that money for. But, yes, it was an honour to have our work acknowledged internationally. The acknowledgment as well was very strongly around the prevention work that the Women's Refuge Movement does.

CHAIR: Do you wish to expand on that prevention work?

Ms GANDER: I think that we all have different views around the definitions of intervention and prevention work. A lot of the prevention work that women's refuges do is often very much part of a community and very connected in that community. If you were to even go back historically, we were part of establishing court support services for women and housing for women that were leaving domestic violence. Originally, women could not even get housing through public housing if they did not have a partner. It is a range of historical things that go back.

But for the prevention around violence continuing to occur for women, women's refuges have a range of checkpoints in our communities to monitor the safety of women and children, such as safety planning. But once again, I think it is that refuges cannot actually support a woman and her children effectively unless they are incredibly connected to that community through the police, the courts, health services, Centrelink, housing, schools, preschools and doctors. Unless they have a good working relationship with all of those services, it is not possible for them to provide the holistic response that women require and to prevent ongoing violence.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Thank you very much for coming in and for the work that you do. Could you outline the Start Safely program and the Importance of it?

Ms GANDER: I think we are all very supportive of Start Safely. One of the things is that we think the program has been under-resourced. The number of people they thought might use the program actually has not occurred. As part of that, I think there needs to be some tinkering around the edges of the criteria for using that program and the length of time that the subsidy is available. For example, now it is currently three to 12 months and we have been advocating that that be extended to a two-year period. That is often the time it takes women—particularly if they have family law court issues, and most women do these days if they have children—to stabilise, to get an independent life, to be able to return to work or to increase work. It usually takes at least a two-year period.

I think one of the weaknesses of the program is that it has been too short. We think there are a lot of women who could benefit from Start Safely but who currently, because of the criteria around being able to afford that rent within 12 months time, are being cut out. I think that that could be reviewed and looked at. We have given some advice to Housing NSW on that program.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are there other programs that you have found work well, and others that you found are not working well?

Ms GANDER: In relation to housing?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Housing in relation to domestic violence, as well as more generally.

Ms GANDER: I think that housing is an extremely difficult issue for most of the women who come to our services. Probably something to take into account is that of the women who come into refuges, approximately 80 per cent of them do not have an independent income when they enter into the service. Coming to a refuge is often also because they did not have any other economic choices. The likelihood of them being able to afford private rental is low, without some level of subsidy, and then of course the amount of social housing that is available is low. The waiting lists are poor. Housing is one of the major issues in why some women return to violence. It is because they actually can at least be accommodated if they remain with the perpetrator. We know anecdotally that women give that reason for returning.

Having said that, I think there has been a huge amount—we have seen an unprecedented amount—of social housing through the Commonwealth stimulus packages coming to New South Wales. I think it is 9,000 units of housing or something that has come to New South Wales through that. At this point I think it would be important to look at where we are targeting that housing in relation to other bottlenecks in the service system. Certainly I think that women and children escaping domestic violence and who are trying to live a life free from violence would be certainly important to look at. I guess the other point about this is that we do not seem to have another strategy from the Commonwealth or at a State level for how we are going to maintain investment in social housing into the future. That is also an issue that we need to be thinking about, such as what other products might be available, like Start Safely, that could bridge that gap because housing is probably not going to be there in the numbers for the demand that is required.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you think the Staying Home Leaving Violence program works?

Ms GANDER: We fully support the Staying Home Leaving Violence program. I think it is something that women's refuges have been doing for many years. As part of our intake, we ask women whether it is a possibility to return to their home. For some women, it is, but once again it does require money to do the upgrades for security on properties. We certainly think that a bucket of brokerage funds for refuges to be able to provide for upgrading security and changing phones—some of the things that you just have to do to make those practical safety measures for women to remain. I think also sometimes refuges are a good fit around women coming in that while those safety measures are put in place. They might have two or three days in a refuge while an exclusion order is put in place or apprehended violence orders are put in place and security upgrades are made to the home.

I think that the programs are very, very, very poorly funded. If you were to look at some programs that we have done, basically that is the main thing that has come out of the Federal Government's response to homelessness. One of the biggest areas is what they are calling the Safe at Home projects, yet each one of those programs is funded at \$150,000. They say it will support around 30 families in a year to remain in their home. That is absolutely inadequate. I think there are a number of services that have had to look at actually closing their books.

The other issue with Staying Home Leaving Violence is where they have been placed. Rather than it being a collaborative approach of building integration and saying, "Okay, in this region, who is best placed to provide the Staying Home Leaving Violence project?", for such a small amount of money, it went to public tender. In some cases without those regions having the opportunity to have conversations about who might provide the backup support, often in regional areas the only 24-hour service is the women's refuge that provides that on call. This is not to put any negativity whatsoever on those services that are currently running the Staying Home Leaving Violence projects; it is about how we might think about this in the future, if we are to roll the projects out further.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I have a number of questions I would like to ask. Could I ask you for some briefer responses, if that is possible?

Ms GANDER: Sure.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Thank you. What is the average length of stay in women's refuges in New South Wales?

Ms GANDER: It varies—and I would have to take that question on notice—but I can say, just briefly, that one of the things we talk about in best practice is women staying more than 12 weeks, around the three-month period. We often find that when women do stay that long, they have a lot more of their needs met prior to leaving. Having said that, a lot of women are in our services because there is nowhere else to go.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I understand there is data collection across the women's refuge system about numbers. Is it possible to get that data provided to our Committee? Just the most recent available?

Ms GANDER: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: And are any trends emerging in that?

Ms GANDER: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The issue of turning people away is access block to medium- and long-term housing, as I understand it? You have women in refuges who cannot access it and therefore the refuges are full and other women requiring emergency accommodation cannot access it. There are a number of obstacles, some of which you have highlighted. Many of these women do not have rental histories, which are essential when you want to apply, you need to get a reference from a previous landlord. Can you run through what some of those obstacles are? Documentation?

Ms GANDER: I think you have covered that. They do not have a rental history. For private rental that is problematic. For social housing, it is not. It is particularly more problematic for Aboriginal women seeking private rental.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: In addition, would you say that competing on the private rental market, where the market is tight, many of these women cannot get the opportunity to inspect a property and be considered as a tenant because we are competing with, say, double income couples?

Ms GANDER: That is correct. Also, if it is a small community and it is known that the family is in domestic violence, they would be discriminated against.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: In relation to accessing public housing, I have had complaints from women in refuges they are not eligible to go onto the waiting list. Being victims of domestic violence is not enough. They need to be developmentally delayed as well or Aboriginal. They need a second factor and they do not have a second factor. They have children and they have nowhere to go and they have no options.

Ms GANDER: That is right. For a number of years domestic violence used to be a priority area for housing and then that got dropped off and there was a range of things you had to satisfy, which you just raised. So, we have been working very closely with Housing NSW and Community Services on this and there is, supposedly, going to be some changes in those areas so that it will no longer be the case.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can you perhaps take that on notice. It would be valuable to have some more details about what changes are required to relieve that problem. It staggers me that a family in a women's refuge cannot even qualify to apply?

Ms GANDER: I am just wondering how long ago this information came, because I think the changes have been quite recent in this area. The strong argument we have, which I am sure you will support, is that mental health, a whole range of things, are implicit in experiencing domestic violence, and then having to provide doctors certificates, et cetera, shows a lack of understanding of domestic violence on women and kids. I will take that on notice.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: If any further changes are required, it would be good to know. Does the Women's Refuge Association have a policy on boys in refuges?

Ms GANDER: We do. Our policy is that every refuge should do an intake not based on gender or age but it should be done on individual assessment on intake. As part of that we developed a tool in 2007 that is now part of our broader policy that we recommend for refuges. If, for example, they were taking in a boy of the age of 12 with a mum and other children, they would look at a whole range of things. One of the main things that gets considered in that is what other residents they have in their service at the time. Using the tool, a lot of services reported back to us. One service was accommodating a son who was 18 because they were looking much more individually rather than having a blanket exclusion practice around boys accessing services.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: But it is still the case that women are being excluded because their children include boys?

Ms GANDER: Not to my knowledge, but I am very happy to hear about that, if that is the case. It is something we advocate against. The main thing our refuges take into account is what residents they currently have in the refuge if they were taking in a boy and what that boy might be like to fit in. For example, if there were children who had been sexually assaulted, who were young children, we do not have staff in most refuges

sleeping overnight, and if the boy was particularly acting out around domestic violence and had behaviours, that might not be conducive to being in a group house.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Which is a common problem?

Ms GANDER: That decision would be to protect the clients who are currently there with their children.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: What do you recommend should happen to that family that cannot be admitted because one of the children is a boy and the refuge believes that is not an appropriate admission?

Ms GANDER: One of the options is to get temporary accommodation under Housing and then have support from the refuge to that accommodation, which is something I would like to talk further about, the temporary accommodation program.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It is a bit of a gap, though, is it not?

Ms GANDER: I would be interested to know how often that is occurring now. It is obviously an issue of regular discussions and it is something refuges do their best to deal with in houses. I do not know what the perfect option for that is. It is absolutely heartbreaking for a mother not to have her son with her in those circumstances.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am also concerned about the impact on the boy as well.

Ms GANDER: That is right.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Are there any programs in refuges where there are boys that seek to intervene to give them special support so, in terms of breaking the cycle of violence, boys can be particularly supported in a way that prevents them developing poor behaviours as they grow older?

Ms GANDER: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: If you have any information about those and which ones work, that would be great.

Ms GANDER: We can forward some information to you. Most of our refuges run projects for children and there is a specific focus on boys. They tailor their programs depending on the children they might have in the service but they also receive a lot of referrals externally. Some of those are from Community Services or through the Brighter Futures program. I know some programs now have been developed specifically by refuges that are very geared for working with boys on those issues.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I also understand is some refuges are engaging outside brokering services as well? I would be interested in hearing positive news on that front if you have any programs you can recommend to us.

Ms GANDER: Thank you.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Thanks for being with us today. You mentioned the temporary accommodation program that you wanted to speak a little more about it. Do you want to elaborate on that now?

Ms GANDER: I do not know if you are aware that in Housing they have a temporary accommodation program. If people cannot be accommodated they can have it for a period of time and it is reviewed. It is often in a motel or a caravan park. We find that the temporary accommodation types that are used and locations are often very unsuitable. For example, it is not safe for a woman and kids to live often in a caravan park having left a violent relationship. We all know that in those early stages that is the most dangerous time for women and kids and they do not feel safe. We have had examples of those temporary accommodation places being in hotels which might be above the hotel where the perpetrator drinks. So, finding ways that we can work more—and even though we have raised this issue—we would prefer to see that brokerage go to specialist homelessness services, who often have a good working relationship with local accommodation providers.

Sometimes they have a little bit of brokerage money for when their refuges are full and they might have a motel or something that they work with and they have usually spent a long time building that relationship with. That motel would be supportive. We would prefer that there be better linkages when temporary accommodation is given in areas and the appropriate service provider be contacted. In this case a women's refuge would be contacted to let them know that there is a woman staying in a caravan park. Preferably, I cannot see why it would not be better to have that program administered as a brokerage fund that was based on target groups that refuges could use. It would make much more sense and achieve better outcomes.

CHAIR: You are saying that in the example posed earlier you would then refer those people on to the TA program. Has your organisation been involved in any consultation on what would constitute the suitable areas for that TA program? Has anyone consulted you about the fact that they are using caravan parks or certain hotels in certain areas?

Ms GANDER: We have consulted on it a number of times. We do not seem to get anywhere. It raises another issue. On that, the answer is no. But we have raised the issue and the suitability of accommodation for a number of years and we have tried to look at ways of getting better outcomes. We do not think it is an ideal situation anyway if we cannot accommodate people who are looking for safe accommodation in a caravan or a hotel. I think we could improve it somewhat.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Continuing with the same theme, you also raised the issue in response to the question of the Hon. Catherine Cusack regarding the changing criteria for priority housing to exclude domestic violence as an eligible criterion. Was there any consultation with either your organisation or the New South Wales domestic violence liaison groups about that decision?

Ms GANDER: That decision came in around four or five years ago and there was no consultation at the time. There was minimal consultation but we certainly did not know that was going to be the outcome. I guess it was a way of trying to deal with very long priority housing lists. Now there are changes with Housing NSW to address this issue called a pathway, which is meant to not necessarily be a priority list in the same way. You can go on a priority list but once again it depends on the availability of social housing in your area. Many women who come from suburbs in Sydney to remain in Sydney would have to be housed in Campbelltown or a long way from their children's schools. On that issue, regardless of the priority housing, we also need some other housing products that allow women and children to remain in their areas where their networks, schools and work are.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I sense from your answers that Housing NSW under its various names and structures over the years has not consulted with organisations like yours before making policy decisions about resource allocation, priority areas or eligibility criteria for its services?

Ms GANDER: There has been quite a strong disconnect between our sector and housing. There probably have been attempts to improve that in recent times, particularly since we have had a Homelessness Action Plan and there has been a Federal homelessness plan, the Road Home report, and the white paper. That certainly brought the NGO and housing sectors together. Having said that, it is one of the issues around integration more broadly across New South Wales, the different service system areas required to work together. We have a very disconnected service system. When you are a peak organisation trying to advocate and are aware of the issues and you are not consulted, that seems like policy and programs are being made without really testing how they might work on the ground. The issue that often happens with women's refuges is that we get subsumed into a homelessness issue, yet it is very difficult for us to get the players we need at the table. I have worked in this position for over eight years and we sit around with action plans et cetera, but we do not have police sit at the table and we do not have Attorney Generals sit at the table.

Very likely there will be a huge amount of discussion around mental health, prisoner relief programs and rough sleepers, but the major cause of homelessness in New South Wales is domestic violence and we are turning away over half of the people. One of the big outcomes also for Housing NSW is to maintain tenancies. One of its targets is to reduce homelessness by half by 2020. This is about maintaining tenancies whereas it is not about safety or looking at a range of complexities of domestic violence in relation to housing. Of grave concern to our organisation is that our policy unit is about to be transferred to housing. It has just been announced. While we have been under Community Services for a number of years, I am not saying refuges are a perfect fit anywhere. There has been a lot of discussion around that. If we thought there was one perfect place to go, we would advocate for it. One of the things about being under Community Services is that there is a huge

amount of issues around child protection and domestic violence that are shared issues, particularly in setting policy directions.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Time does not allow me particularly to ask too many more questions, but is there any jurisdiction, here or overseas, that you think has got it right or at least is addressing the housing needs of women and children who are victims of domestic violence?

Ms GANDER: We would all be aware that Victoria is leading the country. A lot of that has been the huge ministerial and bureaucratic leadership, not just leadership but also a strong and ongoing commitment that we have not seen in New South Wales. We have had the odd Minister who has been committed and we have a lot of changes in the bureaucracy. We have not had that leadership or investment. We also do not have the governance structure in place. One of the things about Victoria is that accountability is linked to targets and actual outcomes. Even though I am a member of the Premier's Council, unfortunately that has no targets attached to the plan, which is an issue for government to look at if we are serious about making any inroads.

Recently at the UN there was a presentation on the Victorian model. It talked about the last 10 years of reform. One of the interesting things is that it actually has had a 75 per cent increase in demand for services. It is not actually about domestic violence increasing; it is about increasing a system where people can get access to it. New South Wales has such a lack of services for domestic violence victims that we would face very similar things if we were to start on to a road. We need to plan for that. As well, in its consultative and government structures Victoria has very strong planning and monitoring processes with the NGO sector and I think that has been part of the success. Speaking to organisations in Victoria involved in that process, they say that has been pivotal to its success. Similarly, that has been the response bureaucratically.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you for all the work the refuge movement does in New South Wales. Would you give us some particular reflections on the difficulties in regional, rural and remote New South Wales as distinguished from what is dealt with and managed within the population centres?

Ms GANDER: There are a lot of issues in rural and remote New South Wales. For example, if you look at where refuges and services are throughout the State the majority are on the eastern seaboard. As you go inland services become less and less and distances between services become greater. There are not other strong organisations for some of those services to lean against and work with. I think that in some of those communities there are high levels of domestic violence, particularly in some of the remote Aboriginal communities. For some women being able to remain in a community is not an option because it is so small and their safety is at risk while ever she remains there. We have a lot of services that work together to move women around the State and we are fully aware that getting housing is difficult or there is not any social housing in some of those communities.

Another issue is that there has been a trend of lots of settlement of people migrating to Australia. There are some resettlement services. Those resettlement services might have a huge catchment area. For those services there has been a huge increase in the number of women coming out on bride visas that are ending up in our services and not having any support in those communities other than the refuge. I would be happy to send the Committee a case study of a recent case in Griffith that would outline some of the issues clearly.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Yes, that would be appreciated. The bridal visa arrangement, can you explain what that is about or what it has led to?

Ms GANDER: For example, somebody coming out from the Philippines to marry somebody in the outback—they have not married yet but they have come out on a spousal visa. It may be that violence occurs quite quickly. The woman may not speak English, does not have family or connections and does not have her own income. The sponsor, or the man that has brought her out to marry her, may not marry her and gives her a whole lot of misinformation about how our system works in Australia. We have many examples of this. It has been such an issue for women's refuges for so many years that there are provisions in the migration Act that when there is domestic violence a woman can apply for residency in Australia. Women's refuges can fill in the forms that are part of that process. It is a huge amount of work. I would say at this particular point in time they are one of the reasons that our services are also blocked. Once upon a time it would be unusual for us to have women in our services without an income. Now it would be uncommon for a service not to have one or two families in their service without an income. It may mean providing medical, schooling, food and support to that family for a 12 month period.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Another organisation that has given some evidence to the Committee has spoken about the level or incidence of violence towards women who are pregnant. Would you comment about that? In the experience of the refuge members, in terms of people coming to you for support, is that a common matter or uncommon? What is your experience?

Ms GANDER: There is a lot of research that does support that. I am happy to take the question on notice and provide more information. There is a large cohort of women who first experienced domestic violence when they were pregnant or when they first had a young baby—within the first couple of years of parenthood. I think the difference might be now that we are seeing more women get out early than remain in the marriage. That is part of the reason we have that data—because women are coming forward earlier and not remaining in the relationship.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Given that many couples these days cohabit in a de facto relationship as opposed to a married relationship, does that distinguish itself in any way in terms of domestic violence with the women and children that come to you for support? This is a generalised statement; is domestic violence higher amongst couples in a de facto relationship than those that are married or is there no particular difference?

Ms GANDER: We have not noticed anything like that. I am not sure.

CHAIR: Does your organisation participate in the yellow card or the DVPASS program with the New South Wales police?

Ms GANDER: Yes.

CHAIR: Could you comment on the consistency of that across your services?

Ms GANDER: The yellow card I think is an excellent initiative but one of the issues is around the consistency. It depends on the relationship between the police and the service and what communication happens around the use of that card. I think in the main it is very successful and many services are part of the yellow card system.

CHAIR: On our recent visit to Melbourne we were able to get an understanding about a 72 hour interim order that the police can issue. Many comments around that were that this had the ability to take the heat out of the argument or provide a bit of time out, and separate the perpetrator from the victims. In some cases they have a program where the perpetrators can be given emergency accommodation for up to two to three days in a hotel to stop them returning to the home which allows the victim, usually the mother and children, to stay in the home. From a refuge point of view do you have any views or comments about such an interim order being applied in New South Wales?

Ms GANDER: It is something that happens in Austria as well. It is how it is done and what other supports are put in place. If there are not good supports put in place in that 72 hour period it might be something that increases the perpetrator's resolve to get even about being removed for that period of time. I know that it is part of an apprehended violence order in Austria that you are removed from the house. The police take your keys to the house and then they work out when would be the time to return them. It is really quite a strong thing. You have to go back to the police station to get the keys to gain entry to the house. That is part of the order. They also have very good shared information systems so the police can see what the refuge or other intervention services have done. They are on the same system. They, under the Privacy Act, have decided that around issues of safety that overrides privacy.

It also makes the system much more accountable because it is not everyone being disconnected in the system. They can go in and view at any time what the police did in that matter and what they might need to do. I support any intervention that makes women safer and this may well be one. It is no good doing it in isolation. With the system that Victoria has, it is the supports that go in during that period of time that will make it successful.

CHAIR: You have mentioned the sharing of information, and we have heard that from other witnesses. What other supports are needed to enable that information to be shared within that 72-hour period?

Ms GANDER: Every case is different. The principles of the Victorian system is based on the Women's Agency choosing and directing, because that agency is often best placed to know what will be the safest

outcome for the person. I think it is about being able to connect victims to a support service that will work to put those measures in place to ensure that the support service is working with the police, to ensure that all the legalities and so on are in place, if the woman determines that is a long-term decision. Some women return to the relationship. I think it is about joining up the systems. There has been some fabulous work on safety auditing done in America by Praxis International, which was headed up by Ellen Pence until her recent passing. Western Australia had a good look at auditing the system and looking at how the information system works. That is something from which New South Wales could benefit greatly.

Basically, a family may have been in the system for a long time, been involved in a number of apprehended violence orders, where child protection has been involved, where refuge has been involved and police have attended the home a number of times—yet the woman and the children are no safer; nothing has changed for that family. The idea is to pick a typical family like that and for all relevant departments to meet and put their files together in one file, in chronological order. Everyone from those areas has a facilitator that is around that safety auditing expertise. They probably take a week of meetings to go through and look at who did what in the system. Often, it will be found that no person is taking responsibility for the safety of the women and children; everyone is doing what they see as their part in the system, but there is no accountability. More likely you will find the grass roots workers are the ones trying to facilitate coordination across the services. If you were to ask a women's refuge what is not working, the refuge will tell you what is not working in that area, region or town. I think there is a lot of value to be added to the system by understanding the failures in our system by undertaking an audit. The energy and cost invested in the system is not making women and children any safer.

CHAIR: Once you have determined that each department is dealing with a section, what would be your recommendation on who should have carriage of the safety of the woman and the children, to make sure they are able to cross those different agencies? Identifying the issue is one problem. Do you have a recommendation on how we should attempt to address that problem?

Ms GANDER: Where systems are more successful, that seems to be due to the sharing of information. There needs to be thought put into that. I do not think it is a simple thing to do, but other countries have achieved that. We cannot have accountability unless we have transparency, so we have to have a level of file sharing. There are probably some key things around communication. It is also about equality in relationships between the non-government organisation sector and the government sector. Sometimes I think there is a view that the non-government organisation sector is something of a poor relation; they can be advocating and so on, but they cannot get the same purchase at the table as do government departments. To shift that, we need to look at a system where the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of people are much better understood and defined.

CHAIR: Victoria has done a lot of work to engage the non-government sector at that high level of decision-making with government.

Ms GANDER: Yes.

CHAIR: And then rolled out the system. Would you be recommending that as a good example of how that can be achieved in Australia?

Ms GANDER: We might not want a wholesale shift. There are some things that might work in one jurisdiction but not in another, because we have different populations, distances and challenges. But it would be a very good starting point for us to look at.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: One matter that has come up quite a bit in evidence is the role of domestic violence liaison officers within police local area commands, and that the effectiveness of those positions seems to vary from command to command. Would you like to make any comment on that?

Ms GANDER: You have probably heard it all before, but I am very happy to comment on that. The domestic violence liaison officer's position is not properly remunerated. Though in many places domestic violence comprises the majority of police work, there are no career pathways in the Police Force for officers who specialise in domestic violence other than that of domestic violence liaison officer. Often it is seen as "doing your time as a domestic violence liaison officer". It has not got the required status of this very important position. I think some inexperienced police in those positions may not have the best of attitudes, particularly in some rural and remote areas. We need to look at overall pathways for police and the remuneration of domestic

violence liaison officers—but not just domestic violence liaison officers but specialised areas within the Police Force dealing with domestic violence generally. If you look at the training that Victorian police get and that provided to New South Wales police, it is just not comparable. That applies right across the judiciary, including magistrates and Family Law Court judges. We need more training. And we need agreed principles such as those that Victoria has on these issues.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Gander, for your submission and your time this morning and this afternoon. I note that you have taken a number of questions on notice. I am sure there will be further questions that Committee members will wish to ask you on notice. The Committee has resolved that the response to those questions be made within 21 days. The secretariat will liaise with you to facilitate that response. Your contribution has been very valuable to this inquiry and will assist in making some good recommendations.

Ms GANDER: I have some documents to table, if you wish.

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms GANDER: The first is titled "Evaluation of the NSW Women's Family Law Support Service", which was done in the registry in Goulburn Street. The second is a piece of work that we did titled "The Impact of Housing on the Lives of Women and Children post Domestic Violence Crisis Accommodation". The third is titled "Needs of Clients in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program: Report of the SAAP "High and complex needs Census", dated 2008. The next is the submission of the Women's Refuge Movement to the Australian Law Reform Commission's Family Violence inquiry of June 200. The last two are titled "Evaluation of the NSW Women's Refuge Movement: Women's Family Law Support Service" and the Women's Refuge Movement document titled "They should have this in every court". If the Committee is interested, I will include the Annual Report of the Women's Refuge Movement for 2010-11.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: These are excellent submission.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Documents tabled.

(The witness withdrew)

(Luncheon adjournment)

BONNIE SOUTER, Manager, Community Partnerships Growing Respect, National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect—LOVE BiTES, and

ANGELA WALSH, National Manager, Growing Respect/Research and Evaluation, National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect—LOVE BiTES, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I welcome our witnesses from the LOVE BiTES organisation. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms WALSH: We just wanted to say that the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect [NAPCAN] as an organisation believes that prevention is absolutely worth it. We believe in New South Wales there is a huge amount of momentum to start delivering prevention programs across the State. Perhaps five years ago I would not have said that, but our experience now from working in over 70 communities around New South Wales is there is such a readiness to start investing in prevention and a commitment from services and communities to do something about preventing domestic and family violence.

CHAIR: If you are happy we will open up to questions.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Thank you very much for being here this afternoon and being willing to give evidence to our inquiry. Could you begin by telling the Committee what the impetus was for establishing the LOVE BiTES program?

Ms WALSH: Prior to working for NAPCAN I used to work for the North Coast Area Health Service on the mid North Coast of New South Wales and we were funded by the Morris Iemma Government at the time under a Community Solutions strategy and we were given \$60,000 to end domestic violence in Kempsey, which of course was not enough money. We did a community consultation in Kempsey; we asked what the community wanted to do, and service providers, community members and schools all said they really wanted to develop a prevention program for young people to try and break the cycle of domestic and family violence, and that is exactly what we choose to do with that funding: to work together with the community of Kempsey to create a package where we could start educating young people around this very important issue. Once other communities heard what we were doing we started to get requests from all over the mid North Coast—Port Macquarie wanted the same program, so did Coffs Harbour. It kind of triggered something for people across the mid North Coast. That is exactly why that happened.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Could you describe the components of the program and what actually informed it, where you looked in terms of research and evidence of the success of such a program?

Ms WALSH: This was back in 2003. At that time we did a lot of research with the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse. Jane Mulrone worked for them at that point and I think that was the first paper that was ever written around the prevention of domestic and family violence. She provided a real framework for how we should be approaching our programming and had a strong focus on things being community led, working with children and young people so the programming was relevant for them. Also there had to be a strong component of campaign—allowing young people to create their own campaigns around the process as well. The other thing that Jane recommended too was to combine the issues of domestic and family violence together with sexual assault, because everything kind of fits under that violence against women framework as well. So for the first time it really united sexual assault and the domestic and family violence sector within this context as well.

The other issue that Jane brought up was having a focus on connecting young people with service providers as well because young people do not necessarily access mainstream services, there has to be a trust built there, and if you want to look at prevention and early intervention you then want to look at young people having a trust and a faith in the organisations that would be supporting them. We developed a program around the police, the sexual assault service, the women's shelter, the youth services and schools so everybody was on the same page and everyone was presenting the same prevention messages to young people as well, and young people were connecting with those services at a very early stage.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Is the program delivered in schools or in other settings?

Ms WALSH: LOVE BiTES started off in a school environment and it has also been delivered in an out-of-school environment as well. It is being run in the juvenile justice system, so it is currently running in all New South Wales juvenile detention centres around the State and also other youth services are running it as well. I think it is important to state though that something you would run for a mainstream year 10 age, you would actually look at an adapted model for young people who are disconnected and disengaged because it is a very different model for young people not engaged in a school environment. So we have done a lot of work on adapting that model to make sure that young people are safe within that context. If you look especially at something like juvenile justice, perhaps up to 85 per cent of those young people have either been sexually assaulted or lived in family violence so it is vital that you approach it from a very different angle. It runs in both.

Ms SOUTER: And I suppose utilising people in the community. The Police Citizens Youth Club [PCYC] officers and the domestic violence liaison officers [DVLOs] have been very good partners in this. So then running it through the young offenders program seems to just broaden the scope a bit but with that consideration of adaptation, but careful adaptation.

Ms WALSH: Absolutely. Also if you are working with high numbers of Aboriginal young people as well you would very much look at a very culturally safe model and you would look at how you would adapt the program in that context as well. I think that is what we have done very successfully. I think what has happened historically with these kind of programs is something is developed centrally and then imposed upon communities. We have very much an ethos that every community is different and you have to look at how you approach the community. And you want the community to own that program, so we do a lot of prior work.

I think there are a couple of parts to this question. If we were taking a program of LOVE BiTES to a community we would actually work with that community before we did training and find out more about what the context was there, what kind of rates there were of family violence and sexual assault and look at the cultural make-up of that particular community. We would actually do the training more as a consultation and say this is the program that has been successful elsewhere and we would like to work with you in the context of your community and make this relevant for you. So we are very careful in that context.

Ms SOUTER: Which is just interesting to link—a lot of people see community-led approaches and sustainability as isolated. I think the key to our sustainability has been that it is actually being owned by communities. I know the sustainability stuff comes up later, but it is a very big focus of ours. Not just the experts coming in, doing the program and then disappearing and then the whole thing falls over; it is actually owned truly by the communities that run it.

Ms WALSH: I think that is why we are in about 70 communities around New South Wales, because there is that strong sense of ownership of the program.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do you wait for a request from a community for the program, or have you been perhaps referred there by either bureaucracy such as the police or whoever who has seen an issue?

Ms WALSH: In the first place we actually receive international funding from Switzerland. Our core funding comes from UBS Optimus. We actually then were matched with funding from the New South Wales government which was fantastic. So we had 30 trainings that we initially did in New South Wales. The way we approached that was looking at—I think we probably took more of a targeted approach with that initial funding where we looked at the highest rates of domestic and family violence, the highest rates of sexual assault and Tony Vinson's report into disadvantage and then we came up with the magic 30, really. I think we made a commitment there that we wanted to go to those most disadvantaged communities. I think since then what has happened is communities actually come to us and they will say can you please come into our communities. So we are now in a process where we do a lot of fee for service work and we go into communities at their request.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you for coming along today. The LOVE BiTES program as I understand it is primarily directed at the youth cohort, young people?

Ms WALSH: Yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: How is that defined for the purpose of running your program? What are the age brackets?

Ms SOUTER: We are looking at 14 to 16-year-olds but that can be adapted. For disability groups we may go either side of that.

Ms WALSH: Juvenile Justice might go up to 18.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In terms of the drivers or some of the influences behind young people—and I presume in a number of instances but not exclusively, young males—they could be ambivalent about domestic violence or family violence or perhaps in some instances they do not see too much wrong with it. What are the influences you have detected behind the formation of this thinking and these ideas of young people that violence or domestic violence is okay? What is driving that?

Ms SOUTER: I think the boys—it is good to focus on them because their association with violence and masculinity is very tightly linked. But they are also constantly underestimated in how serious they find that issue. I came from a refuge background so for young men to be leaders on domestic violence and sexual assault, they really take on the chance to be leaders on this. So sometimes our premise on how they are going to respond to this is set quite low, and are given the chance to be advocates about these issues they can see it quite clearly and sometimes they are just not given the opportunity in other areas because they are so tightly held in with that sporting violence and being macho, and they want to be good guys. They want to be good boyfriends. So that nobility is sometimes overlooked.

Ms WALSH: The basis of the program is a violence against women prevention framework but we have made a strong decision that we are not there to blame young men either. So, we come from a very open perspective: This is what is happening in the community, how can we work together to end this? So I think we do a very good job of young men not feeling alienated by the process. There is a lot of work to do around that. I am not saying we are perfect but I think we have a very strong grounding in how we work with young men in that area. One of our ultimates is to have male facilitators. One of the hard things for our sector is—as you would know from this inquiry—it is dominated by women. There is a lot to be said about having men facilitators, and you can model respect for relationships together. Every time I have run the program over the years a young man will always look to the man in the group who is the facilitator because they want to hear from men that what they have constructed is not okay and they want to do things differently. There is a huge willingness for young men to develop healthier relationships and not go down this path.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: How do you in the first instance get the young males to agree to come along and participate? What is the lure or attraction you use to bring them in to participate?

Ms WALSH: It is matched to curriculum, the program. We were very particular. When we started the program I had a very good working relationship with Frank Shaw, who was the director of education on the mid-North Coast at the time. We worked together on the curriculums. If you look at the New South Wales curriculum, it talks about respectful relationships. We matched that program to fit the curriculum. It is a very engaging program. We accept it is a difficult issue to talk about so we like to keep a very open mind and to let young men feel at ease when they come in to the program. We are careful about not scaring them off. We also say right from the beginning: This is not your fault. We are not here to blame you as young men. We are here to work together on how we can change this issue in our community.

One thing also is, when we first started everyone wanted us to deal with general violence, the gender-based violence and sexual health. Everyone wanted to put everything into one package but we have kept it very specific. You cannot just throw lots of different things at young people at the same time. They cannot take on all those concepts. We have been very particular about just addressing this issue collectively. We come from a strength framework as well. We really believe that everyone can change their behaviours and their attitudes to create a better, more respectful society.

Ms SOUTER: The joy is asking people to talk about their own lives for a day, and they love that. They are deeply self-involved. So for them to be experts on their own lives and to have a bit of critical thought about what they are doing, they just jump at the chance.

Ms WALSH: Critical thought is the key. We very much say to them we do not want you to disclose your personal histories throughout the day. We are very careful about safety. We say to young men and young women this is a chance for you to sit together and discuss this issue. In the area of consent with young people, we work through the different ways they can negotiate consent in a respectful way when they may choose to have sexual relationships in the future. It is a carefully constructed program, so everyone feels welcome and on

board. I think the other thing too is we ask them to create a campaign so they become leaders in their communities to drive change. That is a very empowering thing for young people. Often we do not listen to young people. I come from Port Macquarie. There is a perception that young people are always up to no good so to have young people as leaders on these issues is very powerful for them so they have a voice on it.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Other than you and the people who work with you as presenters to the young people, do you bring in other service providers and other bodies like the police, for example, to participate in this engagement?

Ms SOUTER: Yes. That is the key to it. We are merely the centre of the wheel and each community takes on board—they will get the training and get a community council, I suppose, and it will be made up of—police have been well represented—

Ms WALSH: We have an excellent relationship with the police. We work with the school liaisons, the youth liaisons and the domestic violence liaisons. We have a fantastic relationship with them. They have driven this program. For example, I got a phone call from Ron Halliday this morning who is driving out west across New South Wales. They are so committed to leading prevention, is just fantastic.

Ms SOUTER: Then you will have a community consort of sexual health workers who otherwise do not get to collaborate on projects that are not referral based. Then they present a program to their communities, so there is no use us going in there we have never been seen before but they see the sexual health nurse they would get referred to or the local police officer and that is the community-led aspect that becomes sustainable. Because that is driven by the group or community sector in that area, be it Blayney or Normanhurst, it then takes off. It has got so big now communities are thriving that we do not hear about so much. So we really steer away from coming in and being the experts and saying we are going to deliver this because we are NAPCAN. We just deliver the training and best practice and hand it over and are here for support. But they are the faces in their communities.

Ms WALSH: When it was written at first there are multiple positions in every community that are meant to be focusing on prevention. That would include the police and there would be health services like sexual assault counsellors. The same with a lot of youth positions as well. So we wrote it to allow those positions to have a program to come together on and deliver in schools, and out-of-school environments.

Ms SOUTER: It is well that we follow the refuge movement, because of the impact prevention work can have, particularly on crisis. I formerly worked at the Bathurst refuge. To be engaged in prevention work in a crisis service and to have an interagency approach is really very beneficial. Sometimes that interagency approach is great and people want to work together but they have nothing to work together on. In the Australian Capital Territory the interagency office was saying we want to work together but we need a focus, and LOVE BiTES is our focus to hold us together. Otherwise you are taking one person's idea and then everyone else is on board. So that intersectorial approach is sometimes academic if you do not have something to bind it together.

Ms WALSH: I also think it is a great thing for workers who normally work in crisis for most of their job to have hope and to be able to facilitate prevention programming as well. We have a great relationship with Lakemba DOCS, where they utilise LOVE BiTES as a staff sustainability strategy because their workers are constantly working in crisis. To be able to have a day off and go into a school on a prevention program is such a sustaining thing to do. To have some hope that you can bring around some long-term behavioural change is a wonderful thing as well.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Given your example of Lakemba DOCS and talking about working in culturally diverse communities, do you involve community leaders? Lakemba has some really good organisations. One that comes to mind is, obviously, the Muslim Women Association. Do you go to those organisations and work with those communities to develop appropriate and well-received programs?

Ms WALSH: Definitely. There needs to be a strong connection to whatever cultural group you are working within community. We do a lot of work. Lakemba was one of our first areas from the North Coast Area Health Service. We actually were invited to come down and work there. We were very anxious about that because, obviously, it was developed on the mid North Coast. We spent a long time working with the service providers. I think the group you just mentioned was involved right from the beginning as a consultant. You do not want to go in and create more damage than good. So we are very particular about how we would adapt that within that context. Another example is that we are working with Bourke at the moment through the Safe

Families strategy. We have not got an old manual, but I can send you an old manual. We have done a lot of work on adapting our manual, which was particularly written for a mainstream year 10 group. We have now adapted a lot of the resources so they are much more visual and engaging and can actually go across cultural groups and levels of literacy as well, which is absolutely vital.

The other thing is that we spend a lot of time debunking myths. So that is part of the ecological framework where you discuss why violence occurs within society. Those myths have to be specific to that community. There is no point in debunking things that actually are not having an influence. That is why it is important to work with particular groups. For example, we found so much more work needs to be done around alcohol. If you look at some communities there is a correlation between the high levels of violence and alcohol use. You cannot step away from that. We are not saying that it causes domestic and family violence, but it certainly exacerbates it and makes it very difficult. If you took away alcohol, you would reduce the stats quite substantially. We have recognised that as a major issue and it is something that we need to start thinking of. Again, we work in silos. Drug and alcohol prevention is here, domestic violence prevention is here.

We need to start integrating some of those philosophies because we have found that sometimes what has been said in domestic violence prevention may actually end up conflicting with drug and alcohol prevention because drug and alcohol prevention can often, not deliberately, lead to victim blaming as well. It is about being responsible for your alcohol use. Then young people get confused: "She's not being responsible, therefore she deserved to be sexually assaulted." It gets very mixed up. There is a lot to be said about how do we bring the silos together. We are really big on that. In Port Macquarie we did a lot of work. We had a great drug and alcohol service. But that again depends on personalities and who you work with very well. I would really like to see in the future that we all look at working together so we do not conflict each other and we actually start breaking down the issues that are happening in communities.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: How does that fit with the policy of New South Wales Health of not providing services to perpetrators? If your program addresses behaviours that lead to abuse, I assume some groups with whom you are working may involve perpetrators. Has that been a problem with the health department's policy?

Ms WALSH: I used to work for the Department of Health. In the context of delivering prevention programs, and I have to say in reference to your first question, one of the reasons the Kempsey High School wanted us to develop the program was that it has some very young people in year 10 who are in quite entrenched violent relationships. In the context of that, it was about getting the prevention and early intervention messages about. I think at that point North Coast Area Health Service's philosophy was about safety for those young people and ensuring that they were safe in that environment. Also, as a health organisation at the time, we were assisting the school to deliver its curriculum program. I think that is very much different from being a counsellor and having to work. I used to be a child protection counsellor in Queanbeyan. We were not allowed to work with perpetrators of domestic violence. I think that is a different context from the role we are talking about with prevention and young people. I think it is a great question from the point of view that you have to ensure safety for those young people. A lot of the work we do prior to going into schools is making sure that those young people are supported and no-one is put at more risk by being part of a prevention program. That is a great question from that perspective.

CHAIR: The Police Association commented about the changing face of technology and social media crossing over into this area of domestic violence. Have you been able to successfully evolve the LOVE BiTES program to address this? I am curious as to your findings.

Ms SOUTER: In this manual that was recently done we did not feel like we had done enough research to represent it to young people. We just attended the Federal Government's Consultative Working Group on Cyber-Safety. There are a lot of mixed messages going out and maybe some campaigns going out that are abstinence based. It is like, "Cyber safety, don't do this, don't do that." But we would approach a lot of it from technology use and young people basically developing a best-practice standard—but you would not call it that—of their use of technology. So from Facebook to messaging we touch on a lot of consent and photograph stuff from a law-based way. I do not think there is anything currently being represented that young people are not turning away from, that is not victim blaming, that is not "don't use this, don't use that." The biggest thing that is not being looked at that LOVE BiTES is trying to look at is that the internet and their phones and social media is the highest commodity that young people have. So no matter what happens in that forum, they are not willing to compromise that by asking for help because that commodity then is too big to trade because the response at the moment is this and this, "I got cyberbullied" and sexting. Then adults say, "Well, we'll take the technology

away." We are really trying to approach it from what is best practice. The idea of peer-to-peer work does not really work, but at 16 "What do I wish I knew when I was 13?" We are quite deeply trying to develop something of that at the moment because it is really needed and I am not sure if anyone is successfully engaging it. Again I think it is rooted in underestimating young people's input to these things. Sometimes it is a token consult at the beginning and not meaningful collaboration. That is the only way young people will get any kind of behaviour change or respect for relationships in this forum. It is a very interesting area.

CHAIR: Quite often I hear the radio advertisements for the website The Line. Is that something people are looking at or utilising?

Ms WALSH: We have integrated it into some of our whole-of-school programming for preschool all the way through to year 10. We have been working on that and will probably talk about that later. We have been trying to integrate that philosophy because we think it is good: crossing the line, knowing when something is okay and when something is not okay. It is something we are utilising but I am not sure that it is something that young people would gravitate towards. There are many portals out there and a lot of websites. I think a lot of professionals are using them as opposed to young people actually going in and accessing them. I come back to what Bonnie was saying: I really think we need to ask young people about this. We now have a generation that has always been online. They are the young people we should be asking. I am 43; I cannot reflect on what it is to be a young person who has always lived with that. I also think that we have some complex dynamics where young people are using their mobile phones as a dating process. So it is that flirtatious process. It is a way of connecting with each other. That is something we do not understand as adults. I really believe we have to do some work with young people around that. It is fascinating. From the research we have done young people are the experts in this field and their own lives. They are happy to pontificate on the very complex world they are in and they are navigating by themselves.

Ms WALSH: The other issue we are doing a lot of work on is the impact of pornography on young people. We are already seeing some serious consequences of that as well. That is connected to mobile phone use and access to the internet. We are in a different world to the world we were in 30 years ago.

Ms SOUTER: It is the same with a lot of the gambling games online at the moment and it all comes back to critical thought of young people stepping back and asking, "What is actually going on here?" They are just developing those tools. Of all aspects of their life they do not like to be tricked into things. If they can see they are being coerced, whether it is pornography or gambling, they want to know and see: This is what's real. That goes across to the domestic violence and sexual assault issues. I do not think it is as harnessed as it could be.

CHAIR: With the latest manual you have got, how much of that has been driven by consultation with young people?

Ms WALSH: All of it. What is in the manual is what young people want to hear about. That is one thing that we learnt very early on. When we first started the program it was focused on adult domestic and family violence. We suddenly realised that they are not interested in what adults are doing. It is impacting on them but we worked closely with young people to develop activities that they wanted to talk about and focussed on what they want to talk about. The new manual is driven by what young people think and want to hear about.

CHAIR: Governments look to numbers and trying to measure success in tangible ways. I would imagine if we asked a lot of kids that participated in the program what they thought we would get a positive response because they have been involved in the process and consultation of developing the program. Do you have any other evaluations or peer reviews that have been undertaken that we can look at? We have heard a lot of good things from people who have come here but do you have the tangible numbers?

Ms WALSH: We did a retrospective study in 2007 with 70 young people from Wauchope and Port Macquarie and we had some fantastic outcomes from them around relevance, improving their knowledge of domestic and family violence and how to support a friend. I can leave you to read those findings in there as well. We have also just worked with Dr Michael Flood on an evaluation as part of the whole of school approach as well. That is just been finalised. We are very transparent and we really believe in evaluation, so we do not leave anything out.

CHAIR: When will that data be available?

Ms WALSH: I would say in the next month we can provide that to the Committee.

CHAIR: You would like to officially table these documents as well?

Document tabled.

Ms WALSH: The other document is from our international funder. There is an evaluation on how the program was run, delivered and sustained within communities. We table all of those reports.

Document tabled.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I will be the devil's advocate.

Ms WALSH: Please do.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: It comes out of the context of having been on other inquiries that have looked at the behaviour of young people, the question of the development of the brain and particularly the prefrontal cortex which goes to the decision making and judgement. The best we are told from the science is that ability to make those finer judgements about behaviour and relationships and related matters comes a bit later in life than the years you are covering. Some people, it is argued, say that for males it is perhaps up to 25 years of age and for women it is probably 21 or 22 years of age. That is what is generally asserted of the typical way in which the brain develops. How do you reconcile that argument with what you have said about the ability of the cohort that you are dealing with to really dig deeply into some of these important and significant matters and really bring a reflection to them? What I am saying is that I am sure that young people are keen to engage in talk and express experiences once they feel comfortable with it. But making judgements about consent, and other things like that, there is plenty of science that says really young people, particularly if you add alcohol and drugs, are not in a good position to make judgements. How do you reconcile those competing views?

Ms SOUTER: I think it is a good way to bring up the true nature of prevention. It is an unknown unknown to some young people because you are giving them language around things they never had language around before. Even though they might not be at the full capacity of decision making and development and that moment of praxis, they are leading towards it. You can have that same argument between prevention, early intervention, and crisis. You are equipping young people. I think that is valid but it is the idea of do you wait until they can handle that information because they may have a situation they cannot handle. I completely agree with you but I think it does good to push their brains and expand them. A lot of information is dumbed-down in a lot of ways. I take your point on.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am not arguing against your program.

Ms SOUTER: Not at all, it brings them towards it.

Ms WALSH: Not all young people are having unhealthy relationships as well. It is important to talk about that. It is provision of that education so young people who have never had a framework for what a healthy relationship is will have a framework. When we had the interview on the *ABC* television about the program one young man said, "I never knew I was sexually assaulting someone if they were unconscious." He did not know that. It is a fact. That is why education is vital. It is about providing a framework. That is why we are working on the preschool model all the way through to year 10. This is about friendships as well. If you can learn at an early age how to have respectful and healthy friendships that lays a foundation for respectful and healthy relationships.

It is pertinent to technology. We do not have a framework for that for young people. It is happening so quickly we do not have a context. Everybody wants guidance and young people, as much as they have complex issues, want a framework and want to know what is okay and not okay. That comes back to the lying—it is all connected in that context.

Ms SOUTER: A lot of adults do not want to address it and young people have to navigate it themselves and that is where the danger slips in.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I was wondering whether or not you actually own the LOVE BiTES program and you have copyright of it?

Ms WALSH: Yes.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I would be interested if other organisations, other non-governmental organisations are looking at running this program and modelling it on LOVE BiTES, do they have to get your permission and pay?

Ms WALSH: We are very particular with the professional development around it. In the context of that we would ask to train all of their staff so they knew exactly how the program should be run and where it is coming from. We are big on fidelity. What often happens and what has happened in the past with programs is they get sent out and people are meant to run them. If you do not understand why violence against women occurs you cannot run a violence prevention program. You have to provide training as to what violence against women is and how to work with young people. Most people are used to working with adults. It is a big thing to get up in front of 25 young people and talk about difficult issues. We do a lot of training around that as well. We then provide ongoing mentoring and support because it is a challenge to run these programs. Violence against women is entrenched in society. It is difficult to be the group that leads that in the community, so we are there to support communities on an ongoing basis.

Ms SOUTER: We try to go against one agency in an area. Having three or four keeps it going, otherwise that person leaves and it disappears and it takes a lot to bring it up.

Ms WALSH: That is a major issue in our sector. There is a high turnover of staff in community services, the non-governmental organisation sector and the police. We try our best to continue on with that professional development element.

CHAIR: We know about the program and you have told us that it is about intimate partner relationships. You have also spoken about the earlier years and friendships. Part of the problem that the Committee has relates to the definition of domestic violence in that in New South Wales it includes personal violence and a whole range of other matters. Do you have a view about what the definition should be? Should New South Wales have a narrow "intimate relationship" definition? Or should it be widened to include siblings, parents and their children, family violence and so on? I would be interested to hear your views on that.

Ms WALSH: When we talk to young people we call it relationship violence, because relationships might last a night, three weeks or five years. So in the context of young people we tend to talk about relationship violence. Otherwise, it becomes too confusing when you talk about entrenched domestic violence in adult relationships. From our perspective, I think it is a great idea to have a definition that is relevant to young people because you are then covering a spectrum of things. For me, whether you are having a one-night stand or a three-week relationship, the fundamentals for the framework for respect should be the same. It is about power and control.

CHAIR: The Committee is getting evidence and submissions from a whole range of areas, and from both sides of the argument. Victoria has different definitions; it calls it family violence, and Victorian departments look at sexual violence and sexual aggression towards women as well. That is why we are seeking everyone's views.

Ms WALSH: You bring up a very important point. If you go into an Aboriginal community, family violence is very much the framework for that. So you need to look at how you would approach a program in that context as well, and that comes back to cultural safety. It depends where you are working and how to ensure you address the domestic violence in that context. Our leaders program asks communities what they think domestic violence and family violence are, because our government's definition might not be what a community thinks domestic violence and family violence are. If you are talking about ending domestic violence, and your definition is different, what are you ending? In our new research project we are looking at researching with communities first, asking them to define it for us, and then asking them what they would like the solutions for those issues to be. That is something we really have to think about across New South Wales, because every community is different, and homogenised programming will not end domestic violence.

CHAIR: What is your timeframe for that study?

Ms WALSH: We are in our first six months of a three-year funded project. We start in the community in the next three months.

Ms SOUTER: I agree that it is very difficult terrain to navigate because everyone has their own agenda. At the core is that victims are very much under-resourced to address what they consider to be domestic violence. One of the activities of the day is: What is domestic violence? Every child and teacher, and even some of the other service providers say, "Oh, I see." If even the sector is not arriving at a common definition, perhaps our expectations of victims to negotiate this terrain are too high.

CHAIR: Even if it is early or through the programs, have you got any collated information as to what the community and those participating think domestic violence is?

Ms WALSH: No. We will have by the end of the year. I think it will be really interesting. We find that, with young people, at the beginning of the program we ask, "What is domestic violence or relationship violence?" They think it is physical assault. They are not really aware of all the other behaviours that come within the definition. So one of the most powerful outcomes we get from our program is that young people say, "Okay, I realise now it means all these different things." It is the same for sexual assault. Young people think of rape; they do not think of all the other behaviours that come within the definition of sexual assault. That is why the education aspect is so critical; young people do not realise that these behaviours happening in their lives are unhealthy and can be very damaging to them.

CHAIR: Unfortunately, time has beaten us. Members may pose other questions to you on notice. If so, the secretariat will work with you to facilitate a response within 21 days, in accordance with the resolution of the Committee. Thank you for your ongoing work and for your time before the Committee this afternoon. Thank you for being able to come, Ms Walsh. I appreciate that you have had an interesting day.

Ms WALSH: I thought I was going to New Zealand at one point.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: We finally got to see you. We have heard a lot about this program.

(The witnesses withdrew)

ELEONORA RAFFO, Coordinator, Liverpool and Fairfield Staying Home, Leaving Violence Project, South West Sydney Legal Centre,

CLAUDIA GUAJARDO, Community Safety and Crime Prevention Officer, Fairfield City Council, and

RANNA PEERA, Child, Youth and Family Worker, Community First Step, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Good afternoon and welcome to our witnesses from the Fairfield Domestic Violence Committee. What we thought we would do this afternoon is have an informal conversation around your experiences in the area of domestic violence and particularly how you see it, what are some of the issues, what are some of the recommendations you think we should be looking at as a committee to ask the Government to try and change. Would anyone like to start with an opening statement?

Ms GUAJARDO: Thank you for the opportunity for us to speak to this inquiry on the issue of domestic violence. The Fairfield Domestic Violence Committee aims to work in partnership with our local organisations with a commitment to reducing the incidence of domestic violence in the city of Fairfield by developing strong partnerships, networks and opportunities to address the issues affecting our community through education awareness raising and training.

We would like to also note that whilst the issues raised today are relevant to the Fairfield city, because obviously we represent that community, we would like to acknowledge that south-west Sydney as a whole is unique in its cultural diversity, and the needs of the women and children affected by domestic violence transcend geographical boundaries, the boundaries that we share with our neighbours—a lot of the issues are quite similar.

CHAIR: What are the issues that you see in the south-western Sydney area that we need to be looking at?

Ms GUAJARDO: As the Crime Prevention Officer I work across the board in terms of community safety and crime, and in domestic violence there is a recognition that whilst there are many agencies working towards delivering services, there needs to be a more coordinated approach to the delivery of these services where there is increased dialogue not only through government and non-government agencies but by government agencies themselves around what is being delivered across different sectors, and the understanding that each community, including ours, which has a very high culturally and linguistically diverse community as well as many new arrival refugees, those needs are very unique to those communities. So it is about looking at that and then being able to develop services and also that organisations are able to really deliver to the needs of these people.

CHAIR: Have you got a specific example? We can give you one that we saw in Forbes, where there was a need to transport a family from one town to another. A government car was available but it was not for that purpose. So workers will not step outside their job description and ultimately the needs and the safety of the victim and the family were put to one side because of the silo approach. In Victoria last week they used a great term—they are looking to blow up the silos.

Ms GUAJARDO: If I could speak to that? I think there is a huge need for that with families across the board, particularly with emergency issues where there are crisis needs. For example, if a family is found homeless or they need emergency accommodation, they are engaged with one service and it could be a government service. They are getting one need met but there is not someone who is looking at their overall needs, and that one government agency or one non-government agency is communicating to say these are the needs overall and how can we address the needs of this particular family.

Obviously, accommodation, transportation, child protection—all of those issues are incredibly important and sometimes when there is a lack of communication that is where it falls down. It would be great to see participation of some of our local government agencies on a committee such as our domestic violence committee so that that communication is opened so that people are more aware of what is happening across the board.

CHAIR: Do you think that lack of communication is because of privacy legislation and information sharing?

Ms RAFFO: Some of the challenges are really around what we are able to say. We are quite constrained in what we can do and in what we can say. I was the coordinator of the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service for nine years and it is certainly one of the difficulties. We are all trying to work for the same outcome in terms of improving that situation for that woman but we are not allowed to share information, we are not allowed to talk about what is really happening, and I think it will often hinder what we can do and, in fact, sometimes put that woman more in danger. We all have particular information that if we work together I think it would improve the situation. It is an area that needs to be looked at. I do not really know what the answer is. I mean, not that I want everybody's information shared with everybody, but within the area of domestic violence I think we should be able to provide information to each other in some sort of way

CHAIR: We heard this morning of an example in Austria when it is deemed that it is about the safety of the family, particularly the woman or the children, there is that ability for agencies that are using the one system to be able to access the information about that family to find out about the history and other services that they are accessing. That is something that maybe needs to be considered as well.

Ms RAFFO: One of the things is women have to tell their story consistently over and over again. If we are able to talk together, if we are able to work together it is much easier sometimes for me to go, "Look, this is what's happened. This is where we are. What can we all do together?" That is instead of sending someone to this organisation, that organisation and them having to tell their story over. It is not good.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The issue of assessment tools used by the organisations is very much one for the non-government sector; it is not really a matter that government can direct. Are the groups doing anything to resolve that issue such that a woman and her situation can be evaluated once, whether it be by the refuge that is admitting her or by the service that is assisting her in a community-based sense? Is there any work being done on an evaluation tool that can be accepted by other organisations? We have all talked about what we need to do. Do you see what I am saying?

Ms GUAJARDO: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I guess I am just saying it is not something the government can do. Is it not something that the sector can do for itself?

Ms RAFFO: But privacy legislation stops us from doing those things. I guess in my experience working with police, there is information and although we have worked very well together we are still not allowed to share certain things.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: But if you had an assessment tool that everybody agreed on, a template almost, that woman could give permission for that tool to be shared with other agencies as an alternative to going through the whole process all over again, could she not?

Ms GUAJARDO: I think in theory that makes a lot of sense where you would have more of a coordinated approach to a framework for domestic violence. You may have one organisation that was the first point of call for a woman. It does not matter who the organisation is, but as it so happens a woman might go to, as an example, Centrelink for crisis assistance and then tells her story and then goes to another agency for housing and has to tell the story again but has originally contacted a non-government organisation and given them her story. I think that makes a lot of sense, but it is about developing a more coordinated framework where people are on the same page about what is being delivered. So if there is a document that is created and you are the lead organisation working with this person, then of course you take on the responsibility to ensure that the needs of this woman and her children are met throughout that process.

I know that in the United States there are services that have one-stop shops where they have a coordinated approach to service delivery. There is one place where the women will go to get counselling, social services, housing, I suppose legal assistance or police support. They will go there and all of that will be looked at, including non-government organisations. So I guess it is about being able to work on that. I understand that non-government organisations are probably best placed to work on that, but I also think that it is largely a government responsibility particularly when we are talking about things like child protection and mandatory reporting. For example, the Department of Community Services would have the information on a family where there is long-term violence, where there has been long-term reporting whereas other agencies may not. So it is

about that cross-dialogue as well. So I agree there should be something that is a bit of an umbrella, but we all need to come to an agreement about what that is.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Particularly just focusing on service needs. You do not really need to know every grisly detail about every black eye. Indeed, services ought to be able to be delivered without having access to all that information, especially if matters are before the courts. But we have had so many suggestions in new areas for resourcing to this Committee and we know everyone really wants to make a difference, join the dots. I am just wondering if there are things that the non-government sector can do without funding from government necessarily but by working together with a more united voice to pull some of these tools together.

Ms GUAJARDO: If I may say in our area we have roughly 200,000 residents so it is quite a large local government area. What we have tried to do with our domestic violence committee is we have tried to in a way get all our agencies to have that dialogue: Okay, so if you provide this and you provide that, how do we build those networks so that if you have a client whose need is not being met, how can you do that? That is the forum for that committee.

It also provides an opportunity for workers to be trained because I think in many respects what we have discussed in the past is that there has been an emergence of a lot of generalist workers having to deal with domestic violence issues. They are not necessarily experts and they do not necessarily have the insight or the experience to deal with a lot of issues they are confronted with. So it is about being able to provide them with at least the basics so that they know where to go from there.

I think, as you were saying, it is time we break the silos. I think in small areas these things are occurring. I think that as New South Wales it would be great if we could really come up with something that would be more kind of across the board so we could sit down and have the discussion about what works and what does not and what examples are there that have worked in some areas and can they be adopted to develop it further in other areas.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Thanks very much to all of you for coming today to give the Committee some guidance in our inquiry. As you can appreciate, at this point of the inquiry we have received quite a lot of information and evidence. I want to focus on a couple of key areas that have been raised with us and get some understanding of how those sorts of issues or experiences may be different for women of culturally and linguistically diverse [CALD] backgrounds. An issue that has been constantly raised with us is the role of the domestic violence liaison officers [DVLOs]. We have had evidence that they work well in some commands, are pretty much non-existent in others, or are poor or mediocre in others. Could you give us some idea of your experience with DVLOs within south-west Sydney, because I think you all have experienced them from a number of commands.

Ms RAFFO: I guess in terms of DVLOs they work really, really well if they are committed. The structure—and I am sure you have heard this in terms of how policing works. And it is getting better. I can see that it is getting better. But sometimes those positions are not valued. They are not seen as a way of moving forward so people go into it for a whole range of reasons. Great DVLOs are the ones that have gone into it because they truly are passionate about the issue of violence against women, or violence I guess. When they are committed and when it works well and there is a willingness to acknowledge that it is not just police, it actually is a partnership in terms of your local services and you are all working together for the one goal, it works very, very well.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do you have much experience of DVLOs that have what you would believe is a good level of cultural awareness? Also have you come across many who are bilingual?

Ms RAFFO: Yes. At Bankstown we have had a number of bilingual officers. I guess Bankstown is unique in that it has a fairly senior officer overseeing a number of other DVLOs. They have got more than one, which is not normal to be honest. Having someone who gets it and having someone who is willing to work with organisations like ours where primarily we spend—when I was with the court assistance scheme we spent all of our time at court. Having someone who can look at all the issues for CALD women in terms of some of the complexities of going through the legal process, the shame, the language barriers, the lack of knowledge of what is going to happen through that process—having someone who gets it has been really fantastic.

CHAIR: Can I just pick up on that? That is the Bankstown Local Area Command?

Ms RAFFO: Yes.

CHAIR: It has a number of domestic violence liaison officers, but you also said that they have someone who is quite senior overseeing the domestic violence liaison officers?

Ms RAFFO: My experience, as a general rule, is that the domestic violence liaison officers are usually just constables whereas Bankstown has a leading senior constable in that position.

CHAIR: As the domestic violence liaison officer?

Ms RAFFO: And there are two other domestic violence liaison officers, so they have three in total.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: It is worth noting that it is also the largest command in New South Wales by population. It is a very large command. Do you know whether or not that came out of the original project they had there where they combined Department of Community Services [DOCS] and some of the domestic violence workers based within the police station? Was that a consequence of that, or did that happen separately or independently to that?

Ms RAFFO: My involvement with Bankstown came two years ago, so I do not really know when we came in. It kind of grew because of the court advocacy service [CAS], the police and the Department of Community Services [DOCS] that were really very much a unit. We worked together and we had the same goal. We might have slightly different job descriptions and slightly different outcomes, but the same goal was just to support women. Working together in their capacity was great. We saw good outcomes. In saying that in terms of Fairfield, we do not have a culturally specific approach. They have all been Anglo-Saxon domestic violence liaison officers, and it does make a slight difference having someone who kind of gets it.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I know what you mean. One of the other areas I was interested in is with the apprehended violence orders. There are two things about them: One is the idea of having Victoria's safety notices and whether or not you think that is something that would be useful in New South Wales. They can be applied for immediately by the police at the time of the incident. The police do not have to return to the station and seek an interim order and return with that. That is one element. The other element relates to breaches. One of the conditions of the apprehended violence orders and one of the things we have heard from some witnesses is that some of the conditions are really setting up the perpetrator or respondent for failure. They put conditions on there that just do not take account of cultural differences, living arrangements and so on. I would be interested in whether you have some experience of, or views on, that?

Ms RAFFO: In relation to having police taking out orders and doing them, I think that is a great idea. I think that will alleviate some of the problems of the defendant leaving the property, not getting served, and having to wait months and months for that person to be served—if you can ever find them sometimes. I think it is a good way of trying to manage that, with the view that it will come to court. There is some immediate protection because I guess the main problem is what is going to happen that night. In relation to making orders, I guess in my experience we see both, such as where the orders are not adequate, they are not enough or they are not strong enough, or where a situation has happened and time has gone by. The immediate threat might not be there and a woman may want to look at having him back at home. I understand from a police perspective that they have absolute fears and they do not want that person to come home, but she does. It does set up a situation, if something does happen, where she is not going to tell, she is not going to call the police, and she is not going to have the confidence that people will listen to her. So it is catch 22.

I think having services where you work together can alleviate that process. For example, you could have the police doing a particular part and then you could have the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service [WDVCAS] speak with the women again to ensure that it is what they want. Then those services are working together and working it out—"This is the best kind of AVO for that particular client." Again, it is not one organisation; it is a number of organisations working together.

CHAIR: Ms Peera, I just wanted to find out how the issue of domestic value has impacted on your role and the work that you do?

Ms PEERA: We are a generalist service. We work across different areas—community, youth, children. My role is a caseworker and we provide educational and recreational programs. We work with schools,

so we come across a lot of young people and families that are in domestic violence situations. That is how we started getting involved with it in the Fairfield Domestic Violence Committee. There are a lot of generalist services out there, particularly youth services. We would like to see them have more involvement with the domestic violence committee and have better strategies to deal with domestic violence. That is on the way. We are trying to make that happen. Basically we have a strong relationship with services like the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service and the Staying Home Leaving Violence program. So, yes, we just manage the clients and then, throughout, the case manager will find out what kind of services or what kind of referrals we need to make.

CHAIR: Are any of your clients, for want of a better word, perpetrators, or do you deal only with victims and their families?

Ms PEERA: Being a generalist service, we would have clients that are perpetrators. Again, we have to follow the appropriate channels—whatever it is they would need, such as court support. My personal commitment, being a convenor of the domestic violence committee, is that I do more work around victims. We have other workers who would take the work that needs to be done with perpetrators.

CHAIR: This question is addressed to everyone. How much of the work that you or your organisations do comes from the domestic violence parcel, the yellow cards from the police? Does any of it?

Ms RAFFO: In terms of the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service [WDVCAS], a percentage of it when I was coordinating that. In terms of Staying Home Leaving Violence, the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service [WDVCAS] and Staying Home Leaving Violence for our area is auspiced by the same organisation.

CHAIR: Right.

Ms RAFFO: I coordinated at one stage. But we worked really hard at having of the domestic violence cards, or the yellow card system, which is what we call it, to get them to come to our service, but only the ones where there is a legal proceeding happening, such as an apprehended violence order, a breach, or some kind of court process. Where police have gone to an incident and no further action is being taken, that goes to a local refuge, Bonnie's. It is split. We get Parramatta ones and Holroyd. But to answer your question, a percentage probably would be about 15 per cent.

CHAIR: Do you believe the system is working well in your area for those early referrals?

Ms RAFFO: I think it is a good system. I think it really is up to the local area command to push it and to make it work and to set up a system within the police station that says, "We want 100 per cent compliance." By that I am saying that it is offered and that police officers, general duties officers, learn to offer it in a way that people understand what they are signing. Where it works well is because I guess there is that leadership concept of where the command has truly believed that domestic violence is important. They have a good system and that kind of tapers down.

Ms GUAJARDO: For our local government area the benefit has been that both our local area commands, Cabramatta and Fairfield, are incredibly committed to the issue of domestic violence and really advocate that out to the station if there are issues. For example, as a worker in local government, I will get a lot of the complaints or issues that arise from other areas. So, my role is to take it to them and have a discussion about what might be working really well, what might be a little bit flawed. Both of those local area commands have such a great commitment to domestic violence that things are working well because they are filtering it through from the top to the bottom. Of course, there is always room for improvement.

A video was recently developed for training of officers in how to use the yellow card. That video talks a lot about the reasons you should do this. Some of the reasons are to alleviate your workload as well. In a way I guess it is a selling point for police officers. If I can offer this assistance, information, support to a woman at this point, later down the track that person will have the information, resources and choices to be able to take it further.

CHAIR: Hopefully the main selling point is to stop the violence?

Ms GUAJARDO: Hopefully, yes.

CHAIR: Which, as a consequence alleviates the police of work?

Ms GUAJARDO: That is correct, yes. That is the ultimate goal, that in the long run you look at decreasing the incidence of violence. In our modern society it is probably impossible to see a future without some form of violence but I do not think it is unmanageable. We have a lot of resources at our disposal to be able to address a lot of issues regarding domestic violence. Again, I go back to the fact that if we are able to communicate really well and have open dialogue and develop systems where people are communicating more effectively—you will notice there are so many things happening that people are not even aware of, projects, working with schools. Rana does a fantastic program with schools in healthier relationships. Things that are not necessary common knowledge, but if you start investigating you will realise how many incredible things are out there.

CHAIR: But again we are looking for the cultural shift that the police believe their job is to prevent the violence and as a positive response or consequence it reduces their workload, rather than offering these things up just to make it easier for them in the future.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You may not be able to comment on this but if you can I would welcome your thoughts. Obviously in Fairfield things are quite well organised in terms of coordination, obviously the collegial relationship you have between yourselves and Working Together. Is this typical of local government areas around New South Wales or are we looking at something quite special here?

Ms GUAJARDO: I would like to say it is but I think it is more unique in our area. I think it comes down once again to the commitment of organisations to work together towards a common goal. I know from speaking to my counterparts—I am part of the local government crime prevention network, a New South Wales-based network—that not everything runs that same way. I guess it is also starting at that local government level. Not all local government areas have a crime prevention or community safety officer, so some local government areas do not have an umbrella or a person saying let us try to pull all the systems together. There are people juggling more than one role as well so that domestic violence is not a priority. In our local government area domestic violence and our crime prevention plan is one of our key priority areas.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Why is that so? How did that come about?

Ms GUAJARDO: We looked at consulting to develop our most recent crime prevention plan. We looked at consulting with organisations and the community and really looking at what are your community safety and crime prevention needs. Obviously domestic violence came up quite significantly and there was also the lobbying of a lot of the organisations in the area that brought it to the surface to ensure it always stays on the agenda. My commitment, having worked in the area now for almost 20 years is that I still feel local government has a huge part to play in building a framework for organisations to come together where there might be a bit of fragmentation. Again, I cannot speak to other local government areas because not every local government area has a priority on domestic violence. It would be interesting to see a recognition that domestic violence is a very big part of our society and we all have it in our roles to make it a priority.

Ms PEERA: I would like to add that normally a committee like that would be just a forum where people just meet and information share. This committee is very special because it is very active and it comes down to having the key people from the key organisations that are working on the issue. That is what makes it so special. It is very active and at times it can be a lot of work for all of us. It is extra work that people are taking and people are committed to. That is what I think makes it more special.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I gather to get to this point of activism and consideration of this being an important issue, this has been built up over a period of time?

Ms PEERA: Yes, definitely.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: It just did not manufacture itself, did it?

Ms PEERA: No.

Ms GUAJARDO: Not at all.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: What was the key behind getting that energy and consideration?

Ms GUAJARDO: It is an interesting question because I know neighbouring local government areas are trying to inject the kind of motivation and life into their communities that currently exists in ours. It is about individual workers coming to the party, about people having that commitment and prioritising it as a commitment. In the last couple of years a lot of the frameworks for how people work have changed. A lot of ways people used to work where they could do a range of things have narrowed and all of a sudden your work consists only of casework. You do not do community educational community development.

What we have tried to do is say okay, people are restricted by what they can do because their funding bodies have made those restrictions but how can we still provide for the needs of people, for example, in training. We did some surveying and found that training was in really great need. We ended up doing training over a year. Every month we delivered different training on domestic violence-related issues. That stemmed from mental health and domestic violence to immigration and visas, and immigration law and domestic violence, which is information that again workers in general found vital because it was things they really needed to get a better understanding of. That is where we are unique; we see a need and we say you have the resources, you have the expertise, how about you try to do that. You have the expertise and knowledge in this other area, how about you try to do that. That is how we tried to share the load a bit more. We are always stretched for resources. I am very lucky in that I have a local government, a council, that is very supportive of domestic violence and the projects that we run. A large part of my budget is concentrated on domestic violence projects.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You are obviously the crime prevention officer, which is quite a broad term. What percentage of your time would be devoted to domestic violence-type matters? Would that be in excess of 50 per cent of your time, or less?

Ms GUAJARDO: No, I would say almost bordering on 50 per cent. Maybe given that we have to work at 110 per cent, but a great part of my work consists of domestic violence.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: A significant part?

Ms GUAJARDO: A very significant part, yes.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I am interested in knowing the services that are currently available that you provide for children of victims of domestic violence?

Ms PEERA: When children are involved, that becomes a child protection matter so the matter will be dealt with by appropriate agencies—like Family and Community Services. Are you asking about recreational or educational—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes, do you actually provide anything?

Ms PEERA: My organisation in particular, we do not provide counselling but we provide recreational programs. Recreation would be the main part of our services to children. For families as a whole it would be again taken back to the aspect of casework and what it is they would need and making the appropriate referral, more like that. We do also some educational programs for children. The educational programs we currently run are for high school age. For primary school age we have a couple of healthy relationship programs. However, that is not just targeted at children of victims; it is in general.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I am interested also in your comment that parents and carers involved with abusive children should be mandated to attend parenting programs. What programs are running currently? Why do you think it should be a mandatory requirement?

Ms PEERA: I was actually going through that. The person who put the comment in there is no longer with the committee. So I could not get a bit of background about it.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You can take the question on notice.

Ms PEERA: Yes, I would like to take it on notice and get back to you later because I am not aware of the current programs that are in place.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are there any barriers to the Staying Home Leaving Violence program or in implementing it?

Ms RAFFO: Challenges?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes.

Ms RAFFO: In the area that we work in Fairfield we have a high cull population in case managing. I guess the challenge is the use and availability of interpreters. There is a cost, realistically, to have a one-on-one interpreter to do some case management type work. Yes, we get the test telephone service, but for one on one it is a challenge. It will be impossible to have a worker who is able to support every language in the Fairfield LGA. We have a Vietnamese-speaking worker. Obviously, it is much easier for the Vietnamese clients. I speak Spanish, so it is much easier for those clients. When I am working with an Arabic woman with an interpreter it is much harder. That certainly would be one of the challenges.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: What is the availability of interpreters in court? In Victoria we saw one interpreter explaining the court case to both clients. Does that happen in Sydney?

Ms RAFFO: Yes. It is something that happens.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The solicitor and magistrate may not have a clue what is going on; the interpreter is just sitting there.

Ms GUAJARDO: That is a huge issue. In the past where it has been problematic is with particular cultures where actually talking to an interpreter means that that information might filter through to your community or that you might recognise the interpreter. If, for example, the interpreter is very unique in the community so there is only one or two of them in a whole community, women might be reluctant to actually discuss anything. Again, if there is only one interpreter for that community, that interpreter will interpret for both parties. Correct me if I am wrong, in the past we had situations where the interpreter was giving advice that was completely way off base—you should be doing this and you should be doing that and you should really go back to your husband—that kind of stuff. It was only because there was a worker nearby who spoke the language and understood what was being said and thought, "Hang on a minute. This is not right." Those issues occur. How you address them, particularly in communities where the pool of available qualified interpreters is so small, is an issue. Do you advocate and lobby for more people to actually become interpreters in that particular language? Then there are all the cultural issues associated with that and how that community will view you. In many case studies women have been shunned by their community because they have gone through the legal system. There are really complex issues with interpreters.

CHAIR: Are there not standards for interpreters for funding?

Ms GUAJARDO: Yes, of course.

Ms RAFFO: There are standards, but for particular languages or availability you may not get a level one interpreter. You might get someone who is not up to that level. Certainly, my role was very clear, "You're here to interpret." I guess we have worked long enough to know to get back into that situation. It is definitely a challenge.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are volunteer interpreters allowed to be used?

Ms RAFFO: No, not to my knowledge.

Ms PEERA: If you mean that they are unpaid, it would be, but they would still have to have the qualifications.

Ms RAFFO: Not within the court system. It should not be.

Ms PEERA: I was talking in terms of services.

Ms RAFFO: If you are talking about NGOS, that is a different story. We are always begging, borrowing, "Look, can you help us out with this?" people we know who have the right philosophy and ideas, but

they may not be qualified interpreters. It is another community worker. We do that. Certainly I do it because I know how difficult it is in some areas.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Do you occasionally come across a case of violence where the threat is so large that you feel the family needs to be relocated out of the community to elsewhere in the State?

Ms RAFFO: Yes I have.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How is that organised?

Ms RAFFO: It is difficult. I have not done it for a long time. I keep going back to when I was case managing previously. It is difficult in trying to get really basic things like changing your name, getting a driver's licence in another name. If you want to move to another area or State and you no longer want to be known as Mary Smith, it is a really, really difficult process. I do not know how women do it on their own without having some support.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I hear stories in refuges of people not having any papers; they have never really organised the birth certificates for their children and are living fairly chaotic lives. It is a major issue to get people's papers in order.

Ms RAFFO: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Perhaps it would be quite useful for everyone in the client system if they could have a little order to the papers and medical records they need?

Ms RAFFO: Yes. In an ideal world when we are working with women prior to them leaving, it is about getting them ready to do that, but when an instance happens that they need to leave, certainly a lot of women lose everything—clothes, jewellery, papers, photos, children, all of those things are gone.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Perhaps when it is the other way round and they are in the house and the perpetrator has left but the tenancy agreement is not in their name, that can be very complicated as well, can it not?

Ms RAFFO: There have been changes to the legislation that allow for that. If it is a rental property and it is in both their names and an exclusion order has been made, there have been changes to the legislation in New South Wales that will allow for the real estate agent to change the tenancy to her, but the issue there is can she afford the rental on her wage or her Centrelink benefit? Does she feel safe in that environment?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: There are other issues but at least those measures have been taken regarding the tenancy agreement. I was not aware of that. That is good news.

Ms GUAJARDO: It is more problematic when you have your own property where it may be in one or joint names and there are all of the legalities of being able to go through that process to say, "Well, okay, we've owned this house together for the last 10 or 15 years, but now you've been excluded." There is a range of legal hurdles that people have to navigate through, which I guess are many reasons why when women are in those situations they decide to actually leave the property. In a way it is less complex than having to face the legal hurdles of property settlement stuff, which is lengthy, time consuming and costly in many respects. Unless you are going to take over the mortgage repayments, if there are mortgage repayments, then again we come back to the same point, "Can you afford that?"

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: There is no assistance for women attempting to do that? From a State point of view it would be a big help if more of them could do that, particularly in relation to the shortage of emergency housing.

Ms RAFFO: The Staying Home Leaving Violence project is aimed at trying to keep women in their own home. As a general rule, and I am speaking broadly, he is probably an employed single person, does not have the children, may have family, and he is more likely to find accommodation as a general rule. We would look at trying to keep her in that home, even if it is a mortgaged home.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It would be cheaper for the State to pay the mortgage than see the whole family go into a refuge, would it not?

Ms RAFFO: A woman we are helping at the moment owes \$10,000 because of all the hassles that have happened and as much as she is working and paying off the mortgage, there is a very good chance that she is going to lose that property because there is a back pay of \$10,000. The banks will not come to the party. They are not prepared to take an extra \$50 which makes more sense because it will eventually get all its money.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: If she loses the battle the costs to the State will be extensive, will they not?

Ms RAFFO: Absolutely. If there was some assistance to be able to say we will pay that \$10,000 and keep her in that home it is so much better for her and her three children. She is working and willing to pay it.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: On a confidential basis could we get details of that case?

Ms RAFFO: Sure.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I wish to pick up on some of the answers that you have given in response to questions from my colleagues. Can I go back to the membership of your domestic violence committee? Do the police attend?

Ms GUAJARDO: Yes.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Regularly?

Ms GUAJARDO: Yes, primarily only one local area command. In our area there are two local area commands. The meetings are held at the Fairfield police station on a monthly basis. Obviously they are in attendance. We have a few more challenges with the Cabramatta local area command and that particular domestic violence liaison officer. The domestic violence liaison officer works part-time, the meetings are on a Monday and it does not suit, so there are challenges in that respect. Yes, the police are engaged.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: What about New South Wales housing, do they attend?

Ms PEERA: Not regularly, only when they have been invited as guest speaker to talk about a particular issue. That is one of the things that is missing from this committee is participation from key government agencies. The non-government sector is already there but that is what it is lacking.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: What about education and schools?

Ms GUAJARDO: No.

Ms PEERA: Ranna works closely with the local high schools and has fed information to and from that. Expecting the principals of our key high schools to attend might be difficult. What we have been looking at is attending the principal's forum which occurs every three months and our local area commander has done that and we have bounced issues such as violence against young people in high school and relationships in high schools. That was a conversation had a few months ago and about how can the schools, our committee and the local area command work together to address some of those issues. While they do not participate I think the relationship is a stronger relationship than I would suggest with organisations such as Centrelink or DOCS, who have been invited on numerous occasions. Once again, we understand that the workers who are case workers, if a crisis occurs, they are not able to attend. It is a challenge in that respect, but we are trying to work around it to cater for those needs.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: What mechanism do you have to feed information back to those various government agencies that are either unwilling or unable to attend?

Ms PEERA: Previously we have had what we call a yahoo group and people can subscribe and they get all the information from the group. We have gone in a different direction and we are using Human Services Network [HSNet]. It is on a membership system and that is how the information is fed through, through mail-

outs. When there are particular issues that need to be addressed we have invited those Government agencies but that would be their main participation, when they would come as guest speakers.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I am thinking particularly about the case you raised in relation to the woman with the mortgage. We have heard from the New South Wales Women's Refuge Movement earlier today. Clearly housing is one of the major issues facing women and their children who are experiencing domestic violence. Is there flexibility within the department of housing if you go to them with that case and say can you provide some funding or assistance in this case? What is likely to be the response? A more fundamental question is can you go to the department of housing with that request?

Ms RAFFO: They do have a project that potentially may allow us to get some money. Housing New South Wales is going the other way. They are changing so many things where before people were allowed to get bond money, now it is a loan. I cannot see that they will give this woman that sort of money to stop her being homeless when they are taking away all these other services that were there for a very long time.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: In those cases are they making special consideration for women who are victims of domestic violence?

Ms RAFFO: There are programs like Start Safely and Staying Home Leaving Violence have a lot of clients that are Start Safely clients, where Housing NSW will pay the rent for a period of 12 months to assist women to settle, to get on their feet, to be able to work on what is happening in their lives so they do not go back into that relationship. It is a fantastic idea. It is limited in terms of the income they get and in terms of what rental properties are available and who will rent to someone who might have six children.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: And no rental history.

Ms RAFFO: That is correct.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: In the case of a woman where the perpetrator has been removed and she and her children are remaining in the house but it is an existing lease, is she then entitled to funding to continue to pay the rent if she qualifies in terms of the income criteria?

Ms RAFFO: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. It is about us making an application to Housing NSW and they will make a decision in terms of all the information that they have. One of the biggest challenges has been income—if they are \$20 off or \$5 off. I understand it has to stop somewhere but it is a blanket "you can only spend \$350 on rent" and that is it.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: It is the amount of rent, not only their income?

Ms GUAJARDO: There is a massive shortage of rental properties available in the local government area. Those that are available are a minimum of about \$500 a week. When you weigh that up and then you look at the competing challenges in terms of our extensive waiting list on the department of housing list for Fairfield, which is something along the lines of 14 or more years that you are on that list. That keeps growing. How do you determine who gets a property when we have so many disadvantaged families who are deemed a priority and domestic violence is but one of those areas. It does become a problem in being able to make your client, who is in a domestic violence situation, their priority, because they see so many different things a day that they would like to be able to assist with.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: If I could go back to the question of interpreters. Do non-government organisations get additional funding to engage interpreters when you are seeing clients?

Ms PEERA: As a non-government organisation, we are exempt from interpreters fees. There is no additional funding.

Ms RAFFO: Do you mean face-to-face?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I did not mean the telephone service; I meant face-to-face.

Ms PEERA: I am not sure about that. I will have to get back to you on that.

Ms RAFFO: Face-to-face, for both programs we get a pocket of money, and the organisation spends that within the context of its provision, but no set line says it is for interpreters.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: What funding do you receive to provide a service, whether you are providing it in Fairfield, Port Macquarie or Ku-ring-gai? I would assume that your organisation would have far greater need for interpreters than say Port Macquarie, which might have greater needs for transport. Would you all get the same if you are funded to provide the same service?

Ms RAFFO: I would suggest, yes. I can only speak for the two programs that I have worked on recently. One of the projects does think about the needs, but there is no set amount to be used for interpreters. Most services will get free telephone interpreting, but not necessarily for interpreters to work face-to-face. Within the court system, the courts are able to organise interpreters, and we use those services. But for long-term case managing, it can be problematic.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Is there a code of conduct or ethics for interpreters that you engage to work with victims of domestic violence?

Ms RAFFO: My understanding is that there is a code of conduct on the website and there are certain rules that interpreters must abide by, but I do not think that is specific to domestic violence.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Is there training for accreditation to work with victims of domestic violence? Do interpreters have training that accredits them for working with victims of domestic violence? Obviously, they would need to have level 1, level 2 or whatever level of language skills, but particularly where they are working with victims of domestic violence, as when they are working with victims of sexual assault, one would think there would be a level of accreditation. Just as we expect people to have a level of cultural awareness, one would think interpreters would need to be aware of issues surrounding domestic violence and sexual assault, particularly around gender and power. Are you aware of any such training that interpreters undertake?

Ms GUAJARDO: I am not aware of any training. I think with interpreters it is very much black and white; they are there to interpret exactly what someone is saying, without any need to have a basic understanding of what they are interpreting. That could be in whatever context they are providing an interpreting service. I think there is a lot of merit and value in being able to establish some form of training, whether it is basic one-on-one domestic violence training for interpreters. We advocate for police to become knowledgeable in domestic violence. People might say, "But they are attending a call-out in the middle of the night, and they are just doing their job." The reality is that the better their understanding of the subject matter, the better they will be able to even relay the information. I am not aware of any training, but it would be fantastic if there was training for interpreters in domestic violence matters.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You gave the example earlier—not the first time I have heard it—of an interpreter, usually a male, telling a woman she should stay in the relationship and not cause shame on the family. I think it is something we should be looking at, and I was interested to have your view on that.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Ms Peera, in the work that you do at the schools, do you work with any young students on preventative aspects of domestic violence, in other words, talking to students, explaining to them why we say no to domestic violence?

Ms PEERA: Definitely. The programs that we run at the schools are mainly around healthy relationships. Before hearing from us the Committee heard about the LOVE BiTES program. Similarly, we talk about healthy relationships and the early warning signs that young people should recognise as indicators of what is not healthy in a relationship.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Did you develop that material, or was that purchased off the shelf somewhere?

Ms PEERA: Some of it we have developed ourselves. Some of it has been developed over the years from the Fairfield Domestic Violence Committee's working with different schools. We see, from evaluations regarding students and teachers, that it is very beneficial. A lot of the kids refer to it as being an eye-opener. Many young people perceive domestic violence as being physical abuse or sexual abuse; they do not think about the psychological, emotional and financial aspects of domestic violence. But they get to learn about those

aspects. Even though young people are not going through relationships, or are not in a home affected by domestic violence, often they pinpoint other things that they see in their environment, whether from their friends or from watching television shows such Home and Away or whatever.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Do you believe there is a case to be put that there is room to do more of inside our schools?

Ms PEERA: Definitely. We believe that all schools should implement domestic violence education as part of the curriculum, starting at the primary level so that even young children can learn what is healthy and what is not healthy about relationships.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Do they deal with any of the relationship matters within the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education [PDHPE] units that they do in schools?

Ms PEERA: Yes, but I do not believe it is in depth. That is why schools engage people like us to go into schools and provide more specific programs. Also, it is very important to do some work with teachers, because teachers have a huge amount of disclosure from students. Sometimes they may have a lot of information but may not know how to respond to domestic violence, and so a lot of that information is lost. It is not until these issues are brought up again and again that they are picked up by a school counsellor or somebody from outside the school. So I think it is very important to do a lot of work with teachers as well.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Do you get a phone call inviting you to come to the school, or do you go round knocking on doors so that you can get before classes, or is it a bit of both?

Ms PEERA: Generally, we would be door-knocking. Some really good schools would let you in, but other schools are a bit more hesitant. Once you establish the relationship with the schools, they keep coming back to you and asking you to come back, because they recognise the value of the program.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Do you do this just at public schools, or do you also visit independent and Catholic schools?

Ms PEERA: So far, the majority has been with public schools. We do not have any issues about working with private schools. In the past, we have worked with private schools as well. It is definitely not an issue.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I apologise if you have covered this, but do you have financial counselling services as part of your committee?

Ms PEERA: No.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Do you have access to financial counselling services for women victims? I know that those services are very overstretched, that is why I am asking the question.

Ms RAFFO: I guess it is like anything: as a service you build relationships with your other local organisations and there are individual people who we will ring and say, "What can you do?" So they are available and they are stretched.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Clearly every woman in crisis ought to ideally talk to a financial counsellor, should they not, to just find out what their situation is and what their options are?

Ms RAFFO: Perhaps not at that crisis because really they are interested in making sure there is accommodation—

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Sure, but then as part of the assessment process, because their financial wellbeing is going to be critical to the options available to them?

Ms RAFFO: Absolutely, yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is financial counselling something that could be considered? Would that be beneficial, or are you not really seeking those services?

Ms RAFFO: We do in terms of our clients. They are available and they are usually run by church-based organisations, but whether they could be funded better to provide a more extensive service. I know that they are stretched and sometimes it might take a couple of weeks to get in to see them.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: For example, the woman who has got the \$10,000 debt, is she working with a financial counsellor at the moment?

Ms RAFFO: Yes. There have been a number of organisations working to try and assist through that process and there was a financial counsellor assisting.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Which service was that?

Ms RAFFO: I am thinking it was the Salvation Army, but I would have to absolutely confirm that. It is not one of my clients.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: As a solution to that problem financial counselling services could be a mechanism to start solving those problems.

Ms RAFFO: In this instance there was a bigger issue. I am happy to find out.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I would love to make some representations and learn more about that case, because often people get into financial problems and it collapses everywhere—their credit card bills, their rates, and they are sinking. But it sounds like this woman is not in that position; she is still keeping her head above water.

Ms RAFFO: If we could get past this, and whilst the Staying Home Leaving Violence program will stay involved with her as long as she needs it I think there is absolute potential. That is what our program is about: trying to keep the women in their home.

CHAIR: We have 10 minutes to go. I am going to leave it to you to have the final word. A lot of information we have heard is about how we can get the communication across the non-government organisations and the government departments and make sure that it is implemented at a local level. Granted there probably needs to be a bit of work on some of the government departments attending some of your meetings, it sounds to me like you have got good local cooperation and implementation at a local level, particularly with the non-government organisations and the local government sector. It looks like it is a model that certainly could be investigated for other areas.

Given that what you are doing seems to be working in your area, I will let you each in turn answer this—and this is a very broad mission statement type question—what would be the three or four things that we could recommend that you think would make a difference to addressing this area? I know that you can only talk about your communities but what are the three, four or five things that you would like to see as recommendations from us to help you address this issue at your level? Ms Peera, would you like to start?

Ms PEERA: For me it would be going back to that main point of coordination of services. Like you said, it looks like it is working fine on the non-government sector level, but if government agencies would have a brief or something. There needs to be involvement when it comes to issues like domestic violence and whether that will make a difference in them being part of it.

CHAIR: What about if I phrase it this way, that the government agencies need to take a person-centred approach rather than a system-centred approach in looking at the victim and their family as the issue, not the system in which that victim and their family are working.

Ms PEERA: That would be wonderful. I think that would solve a lot of the problem. Better coordination, everyone work together, bring the issue to the table and raise the profile of the issue so everyone can work towards one goal.

CHAIR: Ms Guajardo?

Ms GUAJARDO: In terms of our area I feel that it is all about the early intervention stuff. I think we need to start from young children, and I understand that young children's capacity to sometimes interpret things is different because they develop at different stages in their lives, but I think that the inherent concept of what is a healthy relationship and what is not a healthy relationship you can take throughout your life and I think if we start at that very early intervention stage where we are educating our young people, where it is an inherent part of the education curriculum and children are getting that, then it gives them the empowerment in their future to be able to recognise when something is not going right or to see that at home things are not normal, because a lot of children and a lot of young adults interpret their family dynamics as normal, and it is only when they are then told hang on a minute this is what something good looks like and this is what the bad thing looks like that they realise that they are not in a very good situation.

So I would say that early intervention and prevention is definitely a key issue to be looking at. Awareness and bringing it out into the media and being able to get it out into our community and give our community a better understanding of domestic violence, campaigns that centre around raising this awareness where the big players, White Ribbon and Sixteen Days of Action every year, they have become global campaigns that do have an effect. I think it is about teaching our young men and our adults, who are fantastic role models. We have not actually spoken about some fabulous men who are great role models in our community who really do believe that there is no place for violence against women in our society. I think they are the people we need to engage with. I believe that engaging with these men as role models is really important as well. So I think the awareness and the education are important in that respect.

Finally I would say that it is about that coordination, it is about people really acknowledging that each person affected by domestic violence will experience it differently and that there is no one-size-fits-all kind of solution, that the needs of these women and children have to be looked at individually. If there is an overarching framework that can assist in doing that I think that would be fantastic, and it would be fantastic to see that developed over time. I know there are other models in other States and other countries that work quite well and I think we could stand to learn from those models and adopt some of those things.

CHAIR: Which ones are you talking about?

Ms GUAJARDO: For example, the one in America, the One Stop Shop and that particular model, that has been working quite well probably over the last 10 years. I was listening to the professor talk about how that was established and how effective that was. I know that the Victorian model is quite effective as well. I think if we are looking at best practice we could probably learn from what works well. We do not need to reinvent the wheel, I think we just need to learn from what is working effectively in other parts of the world and adopt some of those strategies.

CHAIR: Ms Raffo?

Ms RAFFO: I support what Claudia and Ranna have said. There are two things I would like to add. In terms of our community I think why it works so well is because the local council has seen the issue of domestic violence as being important, and in my time working in the Fairfield local government area there has been a bit of leadership in terms of the role. Claudia has not always been in that role, there was somebody else there. It is that role in terms of having that bit of leadership and the council having funds. It is seen as a priority and I think that is really important. I have worked for a number of local government areas. That is not the case in all local government areas and I think it is a good model. That is one.

I guess in terms of Fairfield, I think in the legal system there is not always consistency in how matters are dealt with. There is not always consistency in terms of penalties and I guess it is difficult to get women to stick through that process if they do not see that they are getting a good outcome. I would like to see that there is training. I am sure you have heard all this.

CHAIR: But we would like to hear it from you.

Ms RAFFO: Training of magistrates. Police are doing well in terms of training but it could always be better. I do not think specialised courts as such are going to work but I think that we should have specialist prosecutors and specialist court staff. That means staff that are trained and they understand the dynamics and they understand the complexities of domestic violence, as well the area that we work in because Fairfield is unique in some of its complexities.

CHAIR: On behalf of the Committee I thank you for your submission and for coming along this afternoon. The Committee has resolved that the response to the questions you have taken on notice should be returned within 21 days. The secretariat will liaise with you to facilitate that response. We may also pose other questions to you on notice because once we digest what we have been through this afternoon there may be other things that we want to follow up on. Thank you for your work and for your time this afternoon. We really do appreciate it. (

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 3.32 p.m.)