REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9 TO 14 IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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At Sydney on Wednesday 11 June 2008

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The Committee met at 9.15 a.m.

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PRESENT

The Hon C. M. Tebbutt (Chair)

Legislative Council	**Legislative Assembly**
The Hon K.F. Griffin	Ms M. T. Andrews
Reverend the Hon F.J. Nile	Mr S. R. Cansdell
	Dr A. D. McDonald

ANDREW GEORGE McCALLUM, Chief Executive Officer, Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, 699 George Street Sydney, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I understand you have been issued with a copy of the Committee's terms of reference and a brochure that outlines information for witnesses appearing before parliamentary committees. Is that the case?

Mr McCALLUM: Yes, it is indeed.

CHAIR: The Committee has received a submission from the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies [ACWA]. Do you want to make the submission part of your evidence today and can it be made public?

Mr McCALLUM: Yes.

CHAIR: I direct that these materials be attached to the evidence of the witness to form part of the evidence. Do Committee members concur with authorising the publication of the submission?

ALL MEMBERS: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you want to make an opening statement before we ask questions?

Mr McCALLUM: Yes. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Committee. I will not go over what is in our submission but, thinking about what to say today, it is very hard to talk about this without sounding very muddled about some of the things you want to be involved. Given that ACWA's primary concern is representing the more disadvantaged sections of the community, those who actually end up in the care system, in the statutory child protection system, I suppose I will address some of my comments around that context. Children do not magically appear nine to 14. There is a life before nine and usually that life before nine has a significant impact on the likely outcome of their life during the subsequent period, nine to 14. So, I suggest the context in which I frame my comments would be that early intervention services and universal services need to be carefully considered in the context of services for the under nine age group.

Put in the broader context, most of the services that I would be advocating for all children happen at an early age. We hear a lot around early intervention services and providing universal and early intervention services. Life outcomes for the teenage group are very much predicated on how well they do and how well are the services they and the parents receive for that particular age. I talk about the culture of what is happening today. I do not think we are actually able to have the intergenerational equity issues that we as an older generation actually are prescribing for the younger generation and what that means.

So there is a contextual element to all of this, which goes to the heart of what is the culture and environment that we want children to grow up in. A lot of that revolves around adult role models. We hear a lot about the issues of violence, bullying and the like. We look at the adult role models in people's lives. I would not put too fine a point on politicians in that some of the interaction between adults in leadership positions that happens in this country actually reflects on it. We talk about bullying and violence in society. We actually see the way the public resolution of conflict in this country also revolves around that very adversarial nature. From our parliamentary institutions down we tend to look at a very adversarial way of resolving conflict. I think that we cannot move away from the fact that we cannot have a sense of do as I say, not as I do mentality in the way we are expecting children to grow up.

Returning to the notion of children in disadvantaged circumstances, services at the end of the day will only be remediation for what has gone wrong in the past and grow in the maturation process for children. I am a great advocate that in time we need services when crises happen, but if we actually focus all our attention on the crisis, then we actually only do remediation work, we do not do our preventative work. I think that is really the sole message for me: that in this process we actually get down to the efficacy of remediation versus prevention. The score is well and truly out there that a dollar in prevention is actually worth 9 to 10 dollars downstream in what you are looking for later on. That is very true when you are talking about the child protection system. If we can keep children out of the care system, we actually save a lot of dollars in real terms, but we also save a lot of hardship for children down the track.

In New South Wales at the moment we have two processes happening: the rollout of the expansion of interests for out-of-home care. It is my wish and hope that those services do not focus wholly and simply on fattening and broadening an out-of-home care system but actually look at what is needed to nurture children and prevent them from coming into the care situation. We have the Wood commission going on at the moment, which is looking at some of the unsustainable escalations in child protection notifications and placements that are happening in the State. I also hope that that commission will come down with some findings that looks very heavily at the system as a whole and not just the pointy end of the system, which is when everything has gone wrong and we need to place kids or when we have notifications.

We have an intake point with the Department of Community Services in this State that is currently overloaded and unsustainable. When you have over 260,000 notifications to a helpline it is ridiculous to think that you will have anything meaningful come out of that process. You have to actually do something about filtering and monitoring that so that only your "real" cases get through to the child protection end of the situation. As it currently stands, for families in crisis in this State to get a service they need to go through the child protection system, and that is a very blunt instrument to expect families to go through. I think I have probably said enough for an opening statement.

CHAIR: Thank you and thank you for the submission that ACWA provided as well. In the work that your organisation does, particularly supporting organisations that provide care to children who cannot live with their own families, do you see that there are specific needs of children in that 9 to 14 years age group that are different and in some ways more difficult to meet than children in the younger age group?

Mr McCALLUM: When talking about kids in the care situation, we sometimes regard out-of-home care as being the service in itself, like the bed is the service or the accommodation is the service and that is never the case. People are starting to realise that the experience of care actually comes under the heading of trauma. It is trauma for kids to come into care now, so when we make those decisions we have to make sure that that trauma is worth the effort with regard to what you are removing them from. Sometimes they are value judgements and we have to be mindful of the fact that removal of children is not necessarily in and of itself a solution to their particular problems. It may actually put them on a road of no return in many instances if we do not have stable accommodation, if we have multiple placements. We need to be very mindful of that.

Yes, we need to make sure that we have a well-trained, skilled workforce that is looking after these children. It is not about just having happy homes or well-meaning people to look after people. We need to have people who understand the developmental needs of children who have come through quite traumatic circumstances and we need to have the wraparound services that go with supporting those people because the primary giver cannot be expected to do that all on their own. I think too often we think the placement of the child is the end. It is only the beginning. If we are actually looking for productive adolescents to exit at the other end, there are a lot of services that need to be put into place and a lot of training of the people who are doing the primary caring to make sure that the maturational needs are met and the understanding of what trauma does to people's ability to assimilate, learn and fit into school.

We are talking about nine year olds. It is that pivotal time when kids move from primary school to secondary school where they either make it or they do not, and if they do not, it is very likely that they will not make it at all during the secondary school system and they will be the school excluded kids; they will be self-excluded or they will be excluded by the system.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: I only have one question. You talked about the difficulty with early intervention. I have written about fragmentation. As you are aware, the services are incredibly fragmented, especially for the highest risk groups. What do you think this Committee should be doing about that?

Mr McCALLUM: There is the opportunity—and we do not know the full extent that the rollout of the special interest process will actually deliver us in the totality, but I was hoping that the process will address some of those issues of fragmentation. You are so right. People are actually going from this service to this service or this service and sometimes parallel services when really we know that the cliché of a seamless service system is what we are looking for or a web of services is what we are looking for. Accommodation services do not exist in isolation and sometimes we see out-of-home care as being something discrete and of itself and then we get other services.

It is so important that the schools, the families, the caregivers and all those sorts of things come into our whole system so that we have wraparound services for the most vulnerable children and I hope that this

Committee would actually be encouraging that we do not put all our eggs in the out-of-home care basket but make sure that somewhere along the line we change the emphasis from prevention and early intervention. Of course, we have to actually meet the needs of those that will happen now but we cannot actually divert our focus from some of the early intervention and prevention processes because we will continue to grow an out-of-home care system that will be unsustainable.

The workforce will not be there. We know we are struggling to get foster parents now. We are competing nationally for this very diminishing workforce because it is a care-giving workforce that is going to be affected by an ageing population and a whole range of other things such as wage disparities between government and non-government. There is a whole range of issues that will fragment it even further if we do not have a clear vision for an integrated service. The more fragmentation, the more cracks people will fall through.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: In your submission you noted a need for drug and alcohol services equipped to deal with the younger age group. Can you tell the Committee what are the inadequacies in the current system?

Mr McCALLUM: There is quite a public debate going on around the opening hours of licensed venues, coupled with alcopops and the like, and how we actually deal with that situation. Again I go back to the culture. I think there has to be understanding of the culture associated with drinking habits within the country. I note *Four Corners* on Monday night dealt with that notion of looking at the culture. I think we need to make sure that there are relevant education programs at appropriate times, but peer pressure will beat education hands down every time.

The alternative is that we make sure that there are other options rather than alcohol-based entertainment from a very early age because what happens with nine-year-olds is that they aspire to the time when they can actually access the adult venue. If we do not actually make a conscious effort to engage them in other activities that lead them into a multiplicity of entertainment options for themselves—I am not a prohibitionist in anything—but I think if we do not offer the menu or the menu only has one very alluring option on it, that is where kids will gravitate to. How do you make sporting clubs, entertainment venues and all of those sorts of things relevant and appealing to people without an alcohol base because alcohol and other drugs—it is a continuum and one leads to the other. If we are honest, alcohol is probably the major problem rather than other drugs because it is legal and we actually seem to minimise it but if you talk about family violence and family breakdown and a whole range of other social issues, it is firmly entrenched in a lot of instances with alcohol abuse, not other drugs.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: In the covering letter to your submission it states that your organisation supports a re-evaluation of the role of all tiers of government with the private sector in reconfiguring the workplace in ways that supports parents with children. Could you elaborate on that?

Mr McCALLUM: Again, it is a "do as I say, not do as I do" mentality. I notice the current Federal debate around work for life choices and balance. We cannot actually articulate a philosophy around what we think is important in this life when we actually have our leaders mirroring and mimicking a different one and actually justifying that in a way that says it is more important to do this than it is to do that. Balance is the key issue here. All learning opportunities for children come at the earliest time in their life and what they see happening in their families is what they will actually replicate in their later life.

If balance is not a key element of some of those situations in the normal community, then why are we surprised when it is not then carried on as a particularly appropriate model for these children to take into the future? If we are going to talk about work life balance and family engagement, we have to actually make it a reality, not just rhetoric. We have very good on the rhetoric but when it comes to the reality, I do not think we have workplaces that currently encourage that work life balance, that are totally family friendly in their approaches. If the employing bodies cannot do it under self-regulation, there is a place for governments to step in and say that we need to actually quarantine some of the elements of work life balance in legislation.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You want to see changes to the number of hours we work, or the times?

Mr McCALLUM: The flexibility and the way you work I think is what I would be saying. There are some legitimate ways that employees can negotiate with employers around how they configure their work life that best suits the age appropriateness of their family.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: But it also relates to where people live.

Mr McCALLUM: Yes.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: In the sense that people spend two hours or three hours commuting.

Mr McCALLUM: It does. We cannot have these conversations in a vacuum about what the future holds in terms of changing generational aspects. I think I spoke about generational equity before. I think with the issues of climate change and the changing environment, we are seeing the tip of the iceberg, especially in terms of the escalation in fuel prices at the moment. But it is almost a nonsensical debate, really, we are having about the price of fuel because it is really what are we doing to make sure we can go beyond this debate and look at all the other options: we ain't going back to how it was before. To have the debate actually diverts our attention from what the real solutions may be in the future.

I think part of what you are saying is that it is about situation and place. It is about how people work and where they work. It is about employees and employers coming to good arrangements around what is best for them and for family because if we are going to bring back the notion of a sense of family and the family being the primary moral instiller for children and the educator of children, there has to be time for that to occur. We have communities that are raising children. It is a cliché, but it takes a village to raise a child. We do not actually have the village at the moment.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Andrew, you spoke in your opening statement about remediation versus intervention.

Mr McCALLUM: Yes.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Are there particular models of early intervention programs that ACWA would recommend for expansion of development in New South Wales?

Mr McCALLUM: Yes. I think the Federal Government is on the right track with the notion of the universal access to early childhood services. My notion or my view has always been from my days of running large service delivery organisations, in my time as ACOSS president and looking at the broader issue of what is happening in Australia that you see the communities that do best are the ones that take the community development model and a long-term model. You do not make changes in communities overnight. If problems take generations to solidify, they take generations to move through them. You have to look at progress as incremental, not absolute. It is very difficult for governments because governments like things neatly tied to election cycles. Communities do not operate like that.

When I say that we have to invest in communities and we have to invest universally in communities, targeted, stigmatised services do not promote access. Once you get into a very hard-end welfare approach to remediation and the like, you build resistance. It is usually compulsive that people get engaged with those services and that is not the way. From having a teaching background, you know that learning happens when people are engaged and are willing participants. That is where you have to have that saturation of communities where we know there is large disadvantage. It is targeted universality of some of those services. The more disadvantaged the community, the more you have to make ease of access to early childhood services and maternal and child health services. That is where we get the best bang for our buck and the best start in kids' lives.

But that has to be focused on parents. You have to make these things happen. It will not happen by osmosis. If the services are not readily accessible and there is no clear "what's in it for me" element to getting people along to it, it will not just be building services or building community options for people. It takes a long time and it takes very skilled workers, community development workers, to be able to sit and listen and resource communities, not lead them. Too often, organisations want to go in and do. You have to go in and listen. You have to go in and work alongside. You are the person who provides and who helps to find the resources. You are not the person who does it for them because as soon as you leave, it will fall in a heap.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Yes.

Mr McCALLUM: You actually have to embed it in the paintwork of the community. That is one of the most skilful and most difficult things for people to do and for people to understand. It takes time. It is

building with little infrastructure issues. It is providing a particular social group in that community that is driven by the needs of that community. When I worked some years ago in Bendigo, we did a program called the Long Gully Community Development Program. It started on the basis that this was an area that was high in child protection notifications. That was the reason we went in.

We found very quickly that that was a very stupid way to frame the problem. We had to reassess what we did, and little things, like a historical group, like a walking group, grew out of it. You found that that particular community—whatever anyone else thought of them might have been one thing—were very proud of their community, but they held that light under a bushel because they knew how they were perceived by other people. So you have to give them ways to wave their own flag, not wave it for them.

CHAIR: Thank you. That is very true. We probably have time for one more question. Does any member have a question they may want to ask of Andrew?

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: I do not think the question has been asked about the level of income support that is currently available for young people in that age group.

Mr McCALLUM: There is a national process happening at the moment with a national framework for child protection. It is being driven out of Jenny Macklin's department and I am engaged in that. I am a bit disappointed that it is a bit thin at the moment because that this is the area in which the Federal Government can significantly have an impact—the area of child protection, lower incomes and disadvantage. Let us be honest: when we are talking about all these things—I keep saying this—we are talking about public policy for poor people. When we talk about child protection, we are talking about child death, and we are talking about all of these things. At the end of the day, it is public policy for poor people.

We should be very mindful of that and be very mindful that what that means, usually, for poor people is that what they lack most is money, and that manifests itself in housing, education, health or a whole range of the sort of things that the rest of the community has. That is where the Federal Government has the power to pull some of those levers, and it should. Income support and the availability of income support is a primary one. The compulsion elements around some of the welfare-for-work stuff really fed child protection problems rather than helped them. You put poor people in disadvantaged circumstances and give them compulsion about how they will retain their income or about their children, and some of the family things suffer.

The Federal Government has a primary role. The States should be pushing very heavily now that we have great collaboration on a federal level. We should be pushing them very strongly because they are the ones with their hands put up at the moment. What is coming out of Jenny Macklin's department is not touching on the areas around those who hold the purse strings. I think they need to be brought into that net.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Andrew. You have given us a lot to think about and certainly have illuminated the submission from ACWA in a really useful way. It is much appreciated, thank you.

(The witness withdrew.)

LOUISE VOIGT, Chief Executive Officer, Barnardos, 60-64 Bay Street, Ultimo, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Thank you for your attendance today. Firstly, the Committee has received a submission from your organisation. Do you wish the submission to form part of your evidence here today and to be made public?

Ms VOIGT: Yes, I do.

CHAIR: I direct that the material be attached to the evidence of the witness to form part of the evidence.

Publication of submission authorised.

CHAIR: We have your submission. Do you wish to make an opening statement or add to your submission before we proceed to questions?

Ms VOIGT: I wish to make just a broad overview statement. Whilst issues of this age group are of concern to the whole community for all sorts of children, for Barnardos in particular, like a number of other agencies that Andrew was referring to, our particular concern is seriously disadvantaged children, and our submission looks at and addresses those children in particular. Our special concern is children who live in seriously disadvantaged communities. Nowadays, poverty and social exclusion is found very often in particular locations, so that there are clusters of serious disadvantage. We work in numbers of these areas in the outer western areas of Sydney and in rural areas, for example in western New South Wales.

Amongst particular groups, Aboriginal children I will point to in particular, but also children from other culture groups. We work a lot with, for example, Muslim families with children of this age group who are suffering considerable discrimination difficulties and feelings of alienation at this time. Our particular issue is what Andrew described as the child protection system, and the matter of children in this age group who are brought before the court, who are often found by the department to be very difficult to deal with.

Very few support services are offered to this age group. When these children come into care, they are not nice, little, cuddly babies. Very few people want to look after them. Their behaviour is often extremely difficult to manage. When children in this older age group come into care, they tend to move more frequently in placement, and they have a very poor relationship with departmental officers. They frequently change these officers repeatedly, so that any stability, either of place in residence or of relationship, simply is not there for these children.

I would say that the Department of Community Services fails many of these children when the children finally come into statutory care, and this is a matter of great concern for Barnardos. We have focused a good deal on this age group of children in our permanency programs. At any one time here in New South Wales, we have about 150 or 160 children who would be in this age group come to us, and of those children in permanency about one-third would be adopted. The average age is 10 years. Very often this has been because the department fails to recognise their needs when they are younger, and they give their own consent at age 12.

I think what this indicates is their longing for a sense of belonging—a sense of not just being anybody's children, tossed from pillar to post and placement to placement, but to find stability. Of course, there are a whole range of other issues for these children, such as the intersection with both Health and the education department; with the education department, both exclusions and suspensions, both for the children in need who are living at home but also for children in the out-of-home care system; and the appalling lack of mental health services, in particular for children in statutory care, that is, in the care of the Minister, as well as for children in need in the community. I would point particularly to Aboriginal children in western New South Wales. That is a broad overview of where our concerns lie.

CHAIR: Thank you. Are you happy for Committee members to now ask questions that may add to our understanding of the issues you have raised?

Ms VOIGT: Absolutely.

CHAIR: One of the matters that are covered in your submission is the parenting programs that Barnardos has been involved in, particularly for parents who are trying to deal with early adolescent behaviour. Can you speak a little more about what you think works in terms of parenting programs for that age group?

Ms VOIGT: Yes. We were lucky enough to get corporate assistance from Coca-Cola in developing these programs, which enabled us to spend some time looking at what people have done elsewhere in the world and what was useful, and how to get particularly fathers to attend the program. Very often, when you talk about parenting programs you are actually talking about mothers' programs. In this age group, in particular, as emerging adolescent behaviour starts to occur in families, you find that very often there are serious difficulties if there is not a man in the household with the male, whether it be the father or someone else. So part of our endeavour was to try to encourage the man in the household to attend, however stressed he feels by the young adolescent. 10 and 11-year-olds can be extraordinarily difficult to deal with, particularly if you have not had a warm or loving relationship with the child when they were younger.

We have had some success in this. Juvenile Justice has been interested in some of the work we have done. Over the last few years there has been such a focus on early intervention, and it is no doubt extremely important. The years naught to three, and then three to five, are critical years. However, the middle years of childhood are the times when children often become obvious to the rest of the community as they pose major problems. I would hate Australia to go down the road that Britain has gone, so that children are locked up repeatedly. At the moment our level of incarceration is not good, but it is not as bad as some other countries. There is a feeling regarding young people who are in the streets in groups that somehow they do not have a right to be there. They are citizens too; they are part of our community.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: With regard to out-of-home care, you spoke about the need for standard case management. What is the state of standard case management in out-of-home care at the moment?

Ms VOIGT: Appalling. The Department of Community Services has really neglected out-of-home care for very many years. Repeated inquiries have shown this: the increasing lack of stability of young people in the system. One of the problems with out-of-home care—I will leave it apart from whether or not the department should provide it, which is an entirely other debate—is that there is a lack of trained, qualified workers, and the belief that the best delivery of out-of-home care is simply via trained workers, rather than a system which totally supports trained workers.

The Looking After Children [LAC] case management system, which was developed in the United Kingdom, is used throughout the United Kingdom in every area. It is also used in Canada and numbers of other places. It is used in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory. It is used by 20 agencies here in New South Wales, and was recommended by Robert Fitzgerald's inquiry into out-of-home care some years ago. It managed to make it to the departmental strategic plan, but I am afraid it then fell off it. Since that time, there is no standard case management system which is utilised for out-of-home care.

What our case management system does is that it says: Have you thought about this? What about that? And it does it in a regulated way in which it sheets home responsibility to the individual worker concerned and ensures that something happens. It also makes a common language, so that people can communicate about what is happening in cases, rather than having case files. I do not know whether any of you have ever seen the case files from the department; they are frequently enormous. They have numerous duplications in them.

To try to find out, for example, how old the young person is could be really quite a task—and then how one would possibly find out how many placements that young person has had, and with whom, is nearly impossible. I think the last time some money was given to the department to do some case file audits, it was taking several days to go through some of the case files to answer the standard questions. The Children's Guardian here in New South Wales is very comfortable with the LAC, which he finds is a way of ensuring that both the worker is identified and the child or young person and their family participates.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: You talked about the hopeless mental health services for Aboriginal communities. As you know, there is a workforce shortage.

Ms VOIGT: Absolutely.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: What solutions would you have in the short term?

Ms VOIGT: There is a whole range of reasons why there are very poor services. One is cultural appropriateness. Many Aboriginal people feel alienated from a system. They also have serious difficulties of transport, of getting there. Outpatient appointments are hard to make if you do not have a working car and you live a long way away. Some of the issues around the appropriateness and having some sort of translation, if you like, making sure you have Aboriginal people within health services, as indeed you do in some services, but more of those particularly related to mental health because the mental health issues are of particular complexity. Issues such as decent and good transport, making sure that you are looking at the provision of those services in a regulated way so that people do not just miss out.

At the moment people might go for an inpatient appointment time but when they come out they drop off the radar. These sorts of systems—I mean, the Health Department has a major problem everywhere with staffing, but I think we need to focus particularly for children of mental health services. There is the issue of adults and their parents but there is also the real issue for children. Many medical health services find it very difficult to work with acting out children in particular, conduct disorder children. It is like it is not their responsibility. In this State we need to have a closer relationship between, for example, the Department of Community Services and mental health services for children because it is too simple to say, "We can't do anything for this child. They have conduct disorder." What happens?

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: In your overview and in your submission you made mention of programs for disadvantaged children when they are suspended from school. Do you have any ideas as to what programs should be put in place to provide for children who are suspended?

Ms VOIGT: Firstly, you need to look at why children were suspended and offer schools more assistance in relation to this matter. Children who are suspended, the best situation is that they are not suspended so I think starting at that point to make sure schools have more assistance at that point. At times we have worked closely with individual schools around issues of particular children and this can be very successful, advocating for a particular child. There is too little of this available for children. The second thing when children are suspended is making sure that they go back. That is work with parents because a number of children who are suspended, it alienates parents and they feel alienated from the school and many of these parents were never very keen on school to begin with. So try to ensure that those parents see school as being something which may be of advantage to their children. Again, it is work with families. The third thing is making sure there are options. There are a few options around for a child who is excluded or suspended but far too few day programs, for example.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: In your submission you talk about not only children being suspended but children who do not re-enrol in school at the beginning of the school year, that they fall through a hole in the system, and you make a comment in your submission that there is only one home school liaison officer for the whole of the Western Sydney-Central Coast area.

Ms VOIGT: That is what my staff tell me. I think you would have to check this.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: What are your comments about that?

Ms VOIGT: I think there are far too few in total because when you have overworked people this way, plus a school that does not have the support system it might need, and a number of students who are posing particular difficulties to a school, people do not have a mindset in which they want to check up too much or follow through. One worker—what can they do?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: How many children do you think are in that category? Is it a large number?

Ms VOIGT: It is quite a substantial group in some areas. For example, on the Central Coast you would find quite a group of children but it would depend in which area. If you were looking at the eastern suburbs there are probably far fewer. It depends on which area you are looking at where this is happening. In some communities, for example, in outer Western Sydney, there will be large numbers of children. If you go to some of those shopping centres in the middle of the day you will see groups of children around.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Is it happening at any particular time between the transition from primary school to high school?

Ms VOIGT: I think high school poses particular difficulties for a number of children who have not done well anyway in primary school, who have missed out in primary school, but because of the way in which primary school functions it has been able to hold them somewhat better just through relationship issues. Too many of our children of the group I am talking about are getting to the age when they are to attend high school and they are certainly nowhere near ready. There is far too little remedial attention. For example, my agency is now putting considerable sums of money into running after school programs for Aboriginal children which are learning programs. We are using 125 as the learning number and we are also liaising with the schools.

For example, we will be looking at improving basic literacy while children are in primary school so that they can then take advantage of school. You cannot take advantage of school if you simply have so missed out or have been unable to function, and you are eight to nine, if you cannot even begin to read or hold your pencil properly. We are finding children like that down here in Redfern. The example, the Minister came to the opening of the Urunga Learning Centre at Redfern, which is an early learning centre for children who are attending the schools in the area. They simply are not ready for school. They are unable to take advantage of it. My organisation decided that this is where we will put our money for the next few years and so we are running them in Warren and Wellington and places like that.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: My question relates to the homework centre support that Barnardos gives to children. In my area there is a homework program that runs very successfully. Can you describe the outcomes of the homework programs run by Barnardos?

Ms VOIGT: Out in Wellington we have had one young woman who passed her Higher School Certificate. We are pretty sure that that would not have happened without—an Aboriginal girl who found study at home very difficult. There are a number of high school students out there who now are seeing it is possible that they could do okay in high school and because we are able to offer support and of course tutoring that goes in, because that is the big thing. You have individual help and assistance because there is little of it at home because your parents have not been through the same process. When you think of your own children, how much help is given by family to learning in the home and then realise that if a child is going to a home where someone is perhaps not fully literate even, the difficulties that such a child would encounter—it is those programs which are useful in the homework program. We also provide good nutritious food not just at afternoon tea. It is important. Kids learn better when they are properly fed. But there are certainly at the Urunga Learning Centre when I was down there as we did the opening the other day, the local schools were telling us and the education department which attended that opening was telling me there have been amazing results already and we have been running down there for about one term. Children who want to learn.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: You are also providing this service in relation to children, say, who come from a non-English speaking background.

Ms VOIGT: Yes, we have. We have also been providing individual tutors because Barnardo's, alongside a number of other charities, took the position that individual tutoring is often the best way for some children to make sure they can catch up. So we have run a variety of programs like this, sometimes in local libraries, a small homework group. Out in Auburn you may have seen the Auburn group.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: In Canterbury as well.

Ms VOIGT: That is right. We have run local groups like that—or individual tutors. That is really good. We ask for volunteers and people volunteer to become tutors. We select them carefully. That particular individual attention will often bring a child up to standard. In the school system, which has so many students in it, a child with particular difficulties gets left behind. There is a limited number of remedial teaching staff, and such children need quite intensive support. They also need encouragement: someone to say that it is possible for them too.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: How do the working with children checks impact on some of this work?

Ms VOIGT: Actually, it is not supposed to happen because it is volunteers. But I assure you it does happen—we make sure it does. I think there is a question about this, which perhaps the Committee could address. There are a lot of volunteers working with children in quite intimate situations, such as one-on-one situations, where the working with children check would be sensible.

CHAIR: You talked about children not being ready for school, particularly high school, and the transition from primary to high school. High school is quite different and can be a really alienating experience for kids who are struggling. Do you have any views about how high school could be better organised to support children to make that transition more effectively and safely?

Ms VOIGT: Some of the really good schools do this already through a number of programs—for example, older students take younger students who are coming in under their wing. I might say that the more affluent the area the better they are at doing this. This is also a matter of having teacher resource time and so on. As far as we are concerned, it is about a feeling of change. When the child goes to high school instead of knowing where they are going and that they will see roughly the same people, it is constant change. There is often a lack of support at home. We often use mentors for kids who are going into school. They will often chat with their kid about the meaning of this: what it feels like, how uncomfortable it is, how to find what you have got, where to put your books—all the things that very often if you come from a good, middle-class family they are doing for the kid going to high school.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: What is your take on the long-term impact on children in New South Wales of out-of-home care? How does this compare with the world literature?

Ms VOIGT: Are you talking about the average child?

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Yes.

Ms VOIGT: The research is quite obvious: Children who go into long-term out-of-home care perform extremely badly on all the indicators—and, most tellingly of all, on health indicators and education indicators. You would think that if a child is brought into care in the middle years of childhood, we could at least get that right. But we seem not to be able to do so. They tend to have babies very young, they tend to have mental health issues, they tend to be self-harming and suicide is higher among that group. They are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system. That is the research. However, we do not have to let what the research tells us about a bad system we have organised determine the future. This is why, for example, in the United Kingdom there is a very strong thrust to say that for this group of children there are targets to reach that should be the same as for the rest of the population.

The case management system, which I referred to earlier, is built around an expectation of the standard of care and the standard of achievement being the same for these children. That is really important because an awful lot of what goes on in social welfare is because of people's belief in what is possible. So a foster carer says, "That's good enough for that kid" or a foster care worker who does not know the kid says, "It's a sexually abused kid". That is the kid's title; it is not a kid who has a good friend over there and who likes the ballet. Kids become labels. The label for out-of-home care is failure, and without a strong target to reach in out-of-home care, that is how it will continue.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Louise, in your submission you express concern about the usage of alcohol and other drugs, as there are many young people aged 12 years plus who use alcohol to excess—some of it supplied by parents, etc. What is your view about that? Do you have any solutions or policies?

Ms VOIGT: I have no more solutions than most of the society I live in, except to say that I think education is really, truly important. I do not mean scare tactics, such as "If you take anything you're going to die the next day", because kids see through that. But good, targeted education about the effects of drugs and alcohol, working with groups of kids in relation to matters such as drugs and alcohol, and having programs related to that have a place. Society's behaviour with alcohol is also an issue. If you come from a family that uses alcohol regularly, frequently and to excess, it is very difficult to tell a child from such a family that that is not a decent way to behave. So I think the issue of alcohol use amongst young people is really an issue of alcohol use amongst adults, and how to use it in responsible and safe ways.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. You have given us a very good insight into the issues raised in your submission and about kids in care. We appreciate it.

Ms VOIGT: Thank you.

(The witness withdrew.)

JANE WOODRUFF, Chief Executive Officer, UnitingCare Burnside, Blackwood Place, North Parramatta, affirmed and examined:

ANNE HIRST, Co-ordinator, UnitingCare Burnside Family Learning Centre, 2 Jackson Street, Ermington,

CATHERINE TUNA VANISI, Service user, UnitingCare Burnside Family Learning Centre, 2 Jackson Street, Ermington, and

RACÉ MILIC, Service user, UnitingCare Burnside Family Learning Centre, 2 Jackson Street, Ermington, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Jane, the Committee has received your submission. Are you happy for that submission to form part of your evidence today?

Ms WOODRUFF: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Do you want to make an opening statement?

Ms WOODRUFF: I do. Thank you for giving all of us the opportunity to appear before the committee today. Uniting Care Burnside has been providing services to children and young people in the age range of 9 to 14 years for nearly 100 years in New South Wales. Our scope now extends to the whole of New South Wales. We provide those services in a context of also being experienced with early intervention services and child protection services for younger children and their families, as well as some specifically targeted programs around this age group of 9 to 14 and the Ermington Family Learning Centre is one of the examples of those programs. We also provide services in terms of out-of-home care—it is very nice to be able to follow Louise Voigt from Barnados—and after-care services to those young people. So we are able to see what works and keeps children out of trouble.

We know what is necessary during those developmental and transitional periods of 9 to 14 and, to some extent, we have seen the failures but also sometimes the successes of the system in the children we work with who are older, whether they be homeless young people or young people in out-of-home care. From that experience we are very clear about what is necessary for this age group. Three things: firstly, parental support and family connection, secondly, engagement with school, and thirdly, access to opportunity. In my opening statement I will just touch briefly on those three. What we believe to be necessary is to build resilience in parents and children. We want to see a high level of protective factors against the vicissitudes of life. We are not so naïve as to believe that this is a level playing field for all children and young people but we do want to see both that access to opportunity, which is clearly quite divisive and discriminatory in many instances now, and also that building of protective factors.

We also want to see public policies that work together and not against each other. I am happy to answer some questions later, or give some examples of the sorts of things I mean. We have a particular concern, as you might expect, for those children and young people aged 9 to 14 in out-of-home care who are probably the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children that you would be considering within your terms of reference. The middle years are an opportunity for service providers to identify risk factors that may impact on children's health and wellbeing. So we absolutely agree with Louise about the importance of health and wellbeing now and in the future. For example, this is a key opportunity for early intervention—by that we mean early in the life of the problem—for improving school engagement, for addressing emerging family relationship issues, for improving social and behavioural outcomes and for identifying and addressing mental health issues. Listening to the sorts of questions you were asking Louise, I am sure that is where your minds are sitting as well.

Currently, the needs of children and young people in the middle years are mainly being addressed through schools, or through services that focus on family issues, and those two things are often quite separate from each other. We have identified a gap in services for those who have stopped attending school, or are falling out of school, and who are also having serious difficulties with their family. Services that meet the needs of those vulnerable children and young people should be located in the community in which those young people and families live, and linked to local schools to provide universal and non-stigmatising access. The needs of disadvantaged children and young people in the middle years obviously change as they get older and move through adolescents. As children, they require educational assistance, access to extra curricula activities and access to positive role models and mentors. As adolescents they may require services that reflect their growth

and development, such as community drop-in centres, outreach programs, schools based counselling, advocacy and life skills education.

The provision of early intervention services for children and young people in the middle years would build up service provision across the continuum of care so that this diversity of needs may be addressed. It would also implement the New South Wales Government's commitment to embedding early intervention in all government services as part of the current State Plan. I will now speak very briefly about children and young people in out-of-home care. This group of children are most likely to be exposed to risk factors that have a negative effect on their resilience, health and wellbeing outcomes. They are likely to have had a disrupted educational experience due to their life experience. They are likely to have experienced many relocations, placement disruption or exclusion from school or, indeed, from families as a result of behavioural issues. This can result in poor school achievement, and also affect the child or young person's access to protective factors, such as quality relationships with peers and teachers. Many students who are in out-of-home care are not regularly attending school because they have been suspended or expelled. I have got some statistics I am happy to share with you later on, if that is appropriate.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms WOODRUFF: A review of the public mainstream and behaviour school discipline policies is urgently needed, as is improved skill and quality in the teachers who staff those schools. Vulnerable students with behavioural difficulties do require disciplinary strategies, but they do not require strategies that deny them a meaningful education. Children and young people in care also experience disadvantage and access to health services. Recent research by the Sydney Children's Hospital has shown that children in care under the age of 12 have high rates of physical, developmental and emotional health problems when compared to other children of their age. They have a poor uptake of immunisation and inadequate dental care. It is concerning that the adverse health conditions of children and young people entering care may not, under current circumstances, be addressed while they are under the parental responsibility of the Minister.

A coalition of organisations last year developed a proposal for a Government guarantee of services for children and young people in out-of-home care. This New South Wales guarantee would mean that children in care receive consistent and equitable health and education support and access to cultural activities, regardless of their age or geographic location. By making a commitment to this guarantee, the Government could make a difference to the lives of children and young people. I am talking about approximately 10,000 children and young people in out-of-home care in New South Wales. Of course, a number of those are younger than the group that you are looking at, and some of them older, but nevertheless a significant number. I will now speak briefly about resilience.

Resilience is a life skill and also a life circumstance. It identifies the ability to overcome adversity but any use of the word must be sensitive to the influence of protective factors on a person's resilience or the parts of their life that help them to face inevitable difficulties. Education and meaningful family support are key areas for building the resilience of children and young people and their parents whilst those children are in the middle years. Government investment in support services that meet the needs of children within their family makes them ideally placed to encourage long-term change and positive outcomes for that child or young person. Families are best placed to teach children and young people important protective factors such as relationship building, communication, self-esteem and problem solving. The delivery of a suite of family-based services that reach across the continuum of care from early intervention support through to intensive family support is an ideal way of building resilient children and young people at every socioeconomic level.

Family support is also meaningful if it does not make parents feel solely accountable for problems that they cannot solve on their own. For example, the conflict between increased workplace demands and the lack of after-school supervision for the middle school years is one experienced by many parents and one that is not the responsibility of any one person or any one parenting team. Helping children and young people to become healthy, resilient adults is not an elusive or magical process. We deal in hope, but we also deal in reality. It is a patient process that requires community investment. The Ermington Family Learning Centre is an education-based service that provides literacy and learning support for local primary school children. The outcomes of this process of building resilience, I think, could be best explained by both Catherine and Racě, if you are happy for them to speak. Thank you very much.

Ms VANISI: Thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is Catherine and I want to tell you a little about ourselves so you can see how far we have come because of the educational programs provided by

Burnside Family Learning Centre. I am a single mother with two girls, Racě, 10, and Maja, nine, and from the time the girls were born I suffered through domestic violence, having to escape with my daughters to a refuge three times. After four years of being abused I finally succeeded in leaving my violent partner. Then in 2005 I became seriously ill due to a chronic disease called SLE, otherwise known as lupus. With the loss of my lower left leg we had become homeless for three months because I could no longer walk up the three flights of stairs to get to our unit. During that time we had to stay with different relatives, moving from house to house and planning to get to a refuge. It took me a year to be rehabilitated and during this time both girls moved to five different schools, which made it very difficult for them to catch up. I was very concerned because I had left school at the age of 15 with no high school qualifications, so I knew that I would not be able to help them.

By now I was really concerned about the children, but especially my eldest, Racě. She clearly had low self-esteem and no confidence. I was told by her teachers that she was in the bottom four in her class. When I approached Burnside Family Learning Centre in 2006 I felt war-torn as though I had come out of a war zone because of all the trauma of domestic violence, family break-up, my illness and disability and our being homeless. The staff were very approachable and made us feel welcome, and we warmed to them straightaway.

Racě received tutoring in English and maths and both girls attended homework groups one hour a week. They also accessed tennis groups and the 'Seasons for Growth' discussion groups where they were able to talk with other children their own age about traumatic situations in their lives such as serious illness, loss of a family member or family break-up, which can take a huge toll on a child's learning. These services provided by Burnside we would not have been able to access otherwise. I was also able to access family counselling and parent education groups, and acquire a senior first aid certificate. We did life stories where we got to talk about our problems as adults and I attended a TAFE literacy program, which all helped to build me up again after surviving trauma.

I now work as a volunteer at Burnside Family Learning Centre and I am now employed in permanent part-time work in a call centre. I am also studying welfare through TAFE correspondence, working towards becoming a mediator with the Family Court. Racě is now an equal in her class. She is able to keep up with her peers and her school reports show constant progress. She makes friends easily and is full of confidence. Today the children's father and I are working together to give the girls the childhood that they deserve. To tell you the truth, I am not sure where we would be without these services. Since participating in the education learning groups at Burnside Family Learning Centre I have noticed a great need for more of these services for low-income families just in the local school in our area alone. Thank you.

CHAIR: Catherine, thank you so much, because it helps us with our inquiry to hear your story and your personal experiences. I know it is not always easy to tell that but we really do appreciate it. Does Racě want to talk to us about what things we should be doing for kids, because we are looking at kids between nine and 14 years. How old are you, Racě?

Miss MILIC: Ten.

CHAIR: Do you want to tell us about what you think we should do?

Miss MILIC: Thank you for letting me speak today. My name is Radmila but my friends call me Racě; it is easier to pronounce. I am in year 5. I go to Rydalmere Public School. I also attend Burnside Family Learning Centre where I have tutoring for one hour a week. My tutor's name is Tina. She helps me with maths and English and she has been helping me get through the year 5 basic skills test. I also go to homework group class with my sister, Maja. The homework group has helped us a lot. Since attending Burnside I have been to a lot of activities, which I would not otherwise have the chance to attend.

One lot of excursions I went on was 'Exploring our World'. We went to Mangrove Boardwalk and Newington Armoury where the bombs were kept. It was fun to hear about what happened in the olden times. On Surf Safety Day we got to go to the beach and learn about surf safety and deadly creatures in the sea. At the art workshop we worked with clay and expressed ourselves through art. At breakfast club it was fun to talk and laugh and have breakfast with friends. At the young carers' camp I got to go to the bush. I was able to go because my mum has a disability and I have been helping her because it is hard for her to get around. At Fitzroy Falls holiday camp there was a lot to do. "Seasons" is a group that helps us to deal with changes in our life. It is called Seasons because life changes and seasons change, too. The group was fun, and sad at times because you talk about people who died, but you realise that you are not the only one that has bad times. Since going to

Burnside I have felt confident in myself at school and I am not shy to put my hand up in class. Thank you for listening.

CHAIR: Thank you, Racě; you are a good reader. That was excellent; you did really well. It was great to hear about your experiences. Thank you again, Catherine. We usually publish the transcript of evidence that is given to the Committee. I want to clarify whether Catherine and Racě are happy for us to publish the transcript of their evidence? We will send you a copy first so that you can check it and make sure it is accurate. If you do not want it published, that is fine. Are you happy with that?

Ms VANISI: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. As I said, it is useful for us to hear about your experiences. It helps us achieve a good understanding of the issues that are facing children between the ages of nine and 14. Thank you, Jane, for your comprehensive introduction. Ms Hirst, you are the coordinator of the Family Learning Centre. Do you want to tell us what happens at that centre? Do have a view about something that Jane mentioned in her comments relating to the after-school needs of children aged nine to 14, as most after-school services cut out at the end of primary school?

Ms HIRST: It is a hard act to follow in every way. I have been very fortunate, as I have worked for many years as coordinator for the Burnside Family Learning Centre. Because of the way we are set up we are able to respond to what parents, children and young people tell us they need. UnitingCare Burnside can be quite flexible. It can develop programs in response to what families tell us and also based on research evidence. Racě is a good example of children—she is not the only child who can speak like that—that are able to use a range of our services. We have 73 children linked to the centre from the ages of nine to 14, and we have 49 families from 12 different countries—the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, and we have many Australians, refugees and Aboriginal families.

We have had great success with people taking up the services and using them. We have achieved good outcomes. We are committed to children staying in school, staying within their families, and being part of the community. When they are embedded in the community they can reap all the benefits of belonging to the community and they can also contribute to it. As you can see, Catherine is a huge contributor, as is Racě. That is what we aim towards. We have a wraparound service model based on services to parents and to children, and we have a repertoire of services and programs that they can use. People select what they need. There are services for parents, there are parent groups and TAFE literacy, and there is family counselling. Then we have programs based on education for children. Our whole focus is education and we have mainstream non-stigmatising services.

Although many families might have particular issues that they are dealing with, as Catherine pointed out, they come because they want to learn. We have private tutoring and a homework group. In addition to academic support we have a range of programs that enable us to go into local schools. We have them at the centre and we also have them after school. We have transition to high school groups for after school, homework groups, a breakfast club to give children a good start to the day, and all sorts of programs that build on children's emotional and physical health—tennis, music, excursions and camps. We have a range of things from which all children in our community have the right to benefit. To be successful in school, children must not just be able to read and write, although that is crucial; they have to have some broad life experiences. We also run a social skills group for directly teaching children about being resilient, communicating, and coping with grief and loss.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Anne.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Thank you for your submission, which refers to school-based early intervention as an example of best practice. It sounds as though that is what you talked about earlier. How many clones of the Ermington Family Learning Centre are there, and how many should there be in New South Wales?

Ms WOODRUFF: It was interesting listening earlier to Louise Voigt. I would not want to speak for Barnardos, but she made the point that Barnardos made a decision to put its money into that area, which is exactly what Burnside did with the Ermington Family Learning Centre. It is almost totally supported by Burnside funding. It is unique within Burnside and I think it would be pretty unique within the spectrum of services. If we had the resources we would clone it in every area where it was needed. A couple of characteristics of the service are important. First, it targets children and young people and their families that are

disadvantaged in some way—and that happens to be the public housing areas and the feeder primary schools in that geographical location. Targeting a disadvantaged area would be one of the things we would recommend.

Second, the relationship with the school is a deeply reciprocal and respectful one. That is what makes this work so well, in particular, for the children but also for the parents. A lot of parents have difficulty in negotiating with the school system. Perhaps they have had difficult experiences themselves, or they have come from other countries with a completely different set of expectations about education. With those two provisos I think this is a model that could be replicated widely. The group that started off this program—you can see that I am looking at Anne to ensure that I have this right—targeted children in the middle years of school, or early on in their primary school experience.

That is exactly the target group at which you are looking. When Ermington was well established and working with that group of children, it became apparent that there were younger children in families and often there were also older children. It has become what we describe as a soft entry point because it is about parents caring about their children's education and success, which then opens the door to a range of services.

CHAIR: Thank you, Jane.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: In your submission you mentioned that Brighter Futures might be extended to include families with children in the nine-year-old to 14-year-year-old age group?

Ms WOODRUFF: I will do a quick update for you, in case you are not familiar with Brighter Futures. The Department of Community Services describes 'Brighter Futures' as an early intervention program. I do not want to have a dispute with the department about nomenclature, but I would have to say that it is a child protection program. The reason for it is that the children are already in the child protection system before they are referred to the program. They may be just in the system, but they are in the system. It is different from many of the families that we work with through the school system at Ermington. That program started off being targeted at children aged nought to five.

You would understand why that would be a concern within child protection. The resources have always been pushed towards very young children because we are all concerned about the vulnerability of children who are completely defenceless. There is a move to extend Brighter Futures to children aged nought to nine. From checking with my own staff recently I understand that that has not yet occurred, but we would be generally supportive of it because families are not comprised only of children aged nought to five. People do not live their lives in little packages that suggest that, if they have a difficulty with one child they should go one way and, if they have a difficulty with another child, they should go another way.

We are broadly supportive, although it raises some challenging issues about the sorts of skills we need to support children in school, which may be different from the skills we need to support children in preschool and early learning. We think it is important to have a similar program for children aged nine to 14 because there is nothing for them within those developmental periods and major transition periods. We could talk about a lot of them, but those that are very obvious to everyone involve children moving through puberty and the transition from primary school to high school. If this program is a good program for younger children—and we believe it is; we like this multifaceted model of working with education and child development as well as with families, so it is putting those two things together, which are quite crucial—it would seem logical to extend that model, in an age-appropriate way, to older children. To my knowledge, no conversation is going on about that.

This age group is the group for which there are almost no formal services. Because of where they are they do not join up very well. For instance, there is a Commonwealth program called 'Reconnect', which we all support and like, which tries to keep families together, and there is a 'Links to Learning' Program which is funded by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, which aims to keep children in school. They are both good programs, but they do not actually join together terribly well. I suspect that even the resources we have could be better utilised with better linkages. In many areas we just have either nothing or we have so few people on the ground that effectively it makes very little difference. It is a little bit like the home support workers in education you were referring to earlier. If the numbers are so great in their caseloads or the people they have to work with, then they make very little impact indeed.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Could you explain the 'Sista Speak' Program and the 'Children's Living Skills' program? What do they offer?

Ms WOODRUFF: I will ask Anne to talk about the 'Children's Living Skill's Program and I will refer you to someone to get better advice about the 'Sista Speak' Program, but my understanding is that it is a program that came out of what I believe is now called the Office of Women—it was the Women's Coordination Unit when I headed it up and then it became a department, and now I think it is back to being an office. It is a program that is working with Aboriginal young women. We have been looking at the program in Dubbo because, obviously, we work with a very large population of Aboriginal children in families in that area. If I refer you to the Office of Women, it would be able to give you the specific details of it. I will get Anne to talk about the Living Skills Program.

Ms HIRST: It is designed for children in primary school up to the end of year 12. We have it at the centre. It is a multifaceted program that supports children being successful in school and in life. A children's community worker goes into local schools and teaches whole classes, including many of our children, about social skills, puberty, communication and so on. It includes our programs at the centre, our getting ready for high school and communication skills. It includes sending children to camp, a breakfast club before school, and special excursions to art galleries, music, tennis and so on. It is all of the other things that help children be successful in school and in life and which, in an ideal and fair world, all children would get a chance to do without having to set it up in the local community. It is a very natural program. It just replicates what is done out there, ideally, but because of equity, we do it with extreme care and sensitivity involving the parents as well to make it work because it is not a case of just sending the child out the door. It would not happen.

Ms WOODRUFF: If I could just add that this is the most formal living skills program that we run in Burnside, but we would have components of this program in all of our family and community centres in disadvantaged areas. It is the same principle again for this age group about education: the service and the families working together rather than being separated. We have a number of programs on the Central Coast as well that would be targeting specific issues within schools—late primary school, early high school—around the same sorts of things that Anne was just talking about.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: You said earlier that currently you had roughly 79 children accessing your services?

Ms HIRST: Yes.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: What sort of turnover do you have over 12 months? How long normally do those kids stay in a program? What is the success rate?

Ms HIRST: I do not have access to information about long-term life success, but all the programs are evaluated by asking the children how they have found them, what suggestions they have.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: Your success story is sitting there.

Ms HIRST: That is right. It is constantly being evaluated and because some of the funding for the 'Children's Living Skills' Program comes from the Department of Community Services, they have quite rigorous reporting systems about the children's learning and the gains as well. In regard to turnover, the children can stay as long as they like. Some people come for a few months and then perhaps move areas. Ideally, it is really good if people can stay for a period of time. One of our goals actually is to have people stay in the community. They often come into our area because they can get housing after they have come out of the refuge system. One family once said to me, "We stayed because of your centre being here." If we can have stability in those families and they can stay, it is better if families can stay for some years because, for example, Racé might do tennis in year three and then she might go to an art appreciation workshop in year four and in year six she might do two school terms in the getting ready for high school program, which is 20 hours of preparing for high school. So, if they can access the program as they reach each stage, just like children would in a family doing tennis one year and tutoring another year, as they develop and change we can also talk to parents and support them. We all know as parents that as children change it is a whole new ball game. It can be quite a quick turnover but, ideally, children can remain as long as they like until they get well into high school, and then they can still come to our homework group and have access to volunteer and professional teachers for mediating with the school as well as with programming with their work.

Ms WOODRUFF: Could I just add two things very quickly that were not mentioned. In my opening address I made a comment about conflict between public policy. There are many examples of that, but if I can just throw one on the table for you, which you may well have heard from other people—that is, the difficulty for

children with either an identified or a non-identified disability and their access to a range of other services. Recently we had an experience where because a family was taken into the Brighter Futures Program, even though that related to their younger children, they no longer were eligible for respite care services from the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. With great advocacy one can overcome these difficulties, but we should not have to be advocates for things like that. It is about how we build up a range of services and assistance for the needs of the family as we are able to do at Ermington rather than the policies coming from the top down and then often people falling through the gaps.

The other thing I wanted to say very quickly was that I said I had some statistics about children in out-of-home care and school suspensions. We did this for another purpose just recently, but we looked at all of the children in our service in out-of-home care and 20 per cent of those children had been suspended from school in 2007. We provide stable placement, so we are not looking at kids moving in and out all the time; we are looking at stable placements and 20 per cent had been suspended. The average length of suspension was two months. That is a long time to be suspended from school. The final statistic that I will leave with you is that 40 per cent of those children were under the age of 11. This is a really serious problem in trying to build resilience and protective factors for these children.

CHAIR: We might try to get more information about those figures separately. We appreciate you taking the effort today, particularly to bring Ann, Racé and Catherine along because it is relevant to our inquiry.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

ELENA KATRAKIS, Chief Executive Officer, Carers NSW, Level 18, 24 Campbell Street, Sydney, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: I declare the hearing resumed. Our next witness is Elena Katrakis from Carers NSW. Elena, you have been given a copy of the Committee's terms of reference and a brochure of information for witnesses?

Ms KATRAKIS: Yes.

CHAIR: The Committee has a submission from the organisation. Do you want that submission to form part of your evidence today?

Ms KATRAKIS: Yes, thank you.

CHAIR: What is your professional occupation and the capacity in which you are appearing before the Committee?

Ms KATRAKIS: As the chief executive officer of Carers NSW.

CHAIR: Probably most of what I would like to say generally in the way of general information is within our submission, but I highlight or bring to the attention of the Committee the population group of young carers and some of the caring issues. I understand from some of the people who were before me giving evidence that the young girl who was there has been in a young caring role, from what Jane Woodruff was able to let me know during the break. Carers NSW, as people would be aware, is an association and peak non-government organisation [NGO] for relatives and friends who are caring for people with a disability, a mental health problem, a chronic condition, or who are frail. We are funded as the peak organisation in New South Wales and we receive money from a range of State and Commonwealth government departments.

We are part of a national network of carers associations. We work collaboratively to lead change and action for carers across Australia. Some of the core work that we do is around being the voice for carers in New South Wales, undertaking research policy development, advocacy, providing carers services and programs, and providing education and training for carers but also, importantly, the service providers within health and community care sectors within the State. In New South Wales there is estimated to be approximately 750,000 carers. A young carer within our work is a child or young person under the age of 25 who provides support for a family member who has a long-term disability, a mental illness, other illness, or a drug or alcohol problem.

Young carers usually have more responsibilities than other young people of their age and this can impact upon a range of their social and other interactions. Young carers might undertake a range of tasks from cooking, cleaning, being responsible for finances, helping to support and take people or a member of the family to medical appointments, and so on. Within New South Wales there are approximately 90,200 young carers under the age of 25. Nationally there are just under 350,000 young carers under the age of 25. Approximately 29 per cent of those nationally, which is just over 101,000, are under the age of 15. I am just trying to distil down to the population group and the age group that you are looking at. If we make the assumption that it is 29 per cent of the young carer population, that means that, within New South Wales, there are probably around 26,000 young carers under the age of 15 that we are looking at.

We currently have about 1,500 young carers on our database under the age of 25. The funding that we get as an organisation is in part, as I said, from DADHC, the New South Wales Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, which funds us just over $207,000 a year, and from FaHCSIA, the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, which funds us $85,900. That means, all up, that the funding that Carers NSW gets is just under $300,000; it is $293,283 a year. That equates, if you average that out across the young carer population in New South Wales in total, to $3.25 per young carer, which is not a lot of money.

What we employ and what we do within our organisation is we have three staff, not all full time, and we run the Young Carer Project. We run two camps for young carers within the calendar year. If we have additional funding that we get from donations, from Rotary for example, we run a third camp. We run camps for age groups of 8 to 14 year olds, 14 to 17-18 year olds, and then 18 to 25 year olds. So the two primary ones are the ones that we run. We only do the older one if we have additional funding. We are looking at other ways that we can provide services and recreational support for that group. We also provide information, advice, referral

and counselling. We have a young carer website. We have online counselling and we provide group counselling and interaction for young carers. We are one of the main points of contact for young carers in New South Wales.

At the national level a number of things are happening. There is an Australian national young carers action team which brings together young carer workers and young carers from each of the State and Territory carers associations to meet annually to look at some responses and, I suppose, other initiatives around young carers generally. The network of carers associations is planning a young carer forum at Parliament House in Canberra on 26 and 28 November to bring together young carer service providers to bring the issue to the forefront and hopefully do some presentations and things to some of the Federal politicians. They are I suppose in a nutshell some of the issues as we see it.

I suppose in terms of what we think is needed, it is important that there are supports for young carers, one that young carers are identified and able to access services and they are able to be identified across not only the education system but also the community and health system. Access to respite for young carers is a key issue. There is a young carers at risk program that is funded by the Commonwealth Government and delivered through the Commonwealth CareLink and respite centres. It is quite limiting in operation. It is there to target young carers who are at risk of dropping out of secondary school. Often times there are kids who have already dropped out that are then unable to access that respite. Often there are young kids who have maybe moved on to TAFE or other secondary education and they are not eligible for that respite either. So there are some issues with the availability and eligibility and the spread of that sort of provision.

Access to financial support is another major issue for young carers and also in particular around delivering supports to the young carer within the family context. So it is not only dealing with the young carer; it is dealing with what is going on in that family to better support that young carer but also what the family situation is and what the caring environment is and what the particular issue is. I went to one of the young carer camps earlier this year and what I was struck by was that you had kids who are kind of just going through the normal kids stuff. They are a developmental adolescent, with whatever early adolescence developmental issues. You have then on top of that a group of kids who have their developmental issues but also in the main—I suppose it is not a full generalisation—come from quite disadvantaged backgrounds and families and homes, often sole parent families, often low socioeconomic status.

Then on top of that you have the issues that they would be dealing with as a young carer in not having access to after-school activities because they have caring responsibilities, having difficulties at school because they are trying to balance what they are doing at school, their learning, but also the caring responsibilities at home. So you have those kind of issues and the impact, I suppose emotionally, on them carrying and doing those extra tasks. So all of that, how that impacts on them relates to the young carer and then their capacity to be able to see through education and training and school, to move on and transition from high school through to higher education or employment. There are a number of impacts and I think there is a lot more that can be done in this area.

CHAIR: Do you know what percentage of young people who are carers actually identify as such and are known to Carers New South Wales? Would there be a large group of young carers who perhaps do not identify as such?

Ms KATRAKIS: Absolutely. We know from the ABS statistics that there are approximately 90,000 young carers under 25—I am talking about the broader group, not just your population group. At the moment we have just over 1,500 on our database so we know that there are many more out there. I suppose it is getting the message out there, getting acknowledgement of the needs of young carers as a population group from services so that at schools teachers are able to pick up those kinds of issues and refer them into support services like we provide at Carers New South Wales but also provided by other services. So, yes, absolutely, but it is obviously not the reach that we would like across the State.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Could you suggest to the Committee one simple, cost-neutral intervention policy that the New South Wales Government can introduce to help young carers? You have asked for financial assistance. What is something we can do from a policy point of view that is cost neutral?

Ms KATRAKIS: Things like the health and community care systems. It is around assessment. If it is a parent that the young carer might be caring for, it is going in for some sort of health intervention or whatever in hospital. It is around recognition and a full assessment to take account of what the caring situation is at home. It is around that early identification. When you are doing a comprehensive assessment of a person or a family

situation it is about asking those questions. Often young carers, one, do not identify; and, two, want to fly under the radar because there is fear about what that might mean for them—whether it is intervention by the Department of Community Services or other agencies—"What is going to be the flow-on for me? I'm doing this as a young carer. I do not want to rock the boat and I want to support my mum, dad or whoever at home." So there is also a bit of a fear factor as well. So in terms of cost-neutral policy, I think it is early identification and early intervention and referral to services that already exist.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: You are a support group but it seems that you are also an advocate and referral centre. How do you survive on that sort of funding?

Ms KATRAKIS: That is one part of a raft of other programs we do. Our team is very small and the services we provide can then be limited. Camps are one particular aspect of intervention but I also think that, as a peak body, we cannot pretend to service every young carer we would like to go on a camp. So part of what we would like to do is build capacity in mainstream services to recognise young carers as a population group and respond to them. Whether it is sport and recreation camps or other services and associations that have mainstream services, if they see young carers as a population group then we can work with them to develop programs to deliver a camp or deliver other services to respond to young carers' needs as a particular group.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: To follow on, do you find that other services interact with you and support your advocacy on behalf of young carers?

Ms KATRAKIS: I think we get varying degrees of partnership and input. We work with a broad range of other non-government organisations that might be illness specific and the like. We run a group called the Strategic Carers Action Network, or SCAN, which brings those non-government organisations together. So we look at a range of different issues where we can intersect and work across the sector. If other organisations are identifying young carers we want to be able to work with them, provide our expertise and advice and mentor other services to also deliver services.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: When a school finds out that a young person is a carer, what sort of assistance and support can they give them? Do you have any examples of how schools can, and do, support young carers?

Ms KATRAKIS: It is quite mixed. Some of the examples from some young carers who have had a good experience at school and have been supported is that there is flexibility around not starting and ending times of school but around where they might have added responsibilities and cannot do some after-school activity that is expected of them, or when work might need to be handed in there is some flexibility around that. I suppose there is also linking into what services the school has in terms of providing counselling and support for that young carer and their situation. In terms of respite services and flexibility—and we have coined a bit of a phrase within the carers associations—often there is a lot of red tape and things are caught up in red tape, so we like to talk about pink elastic: you stretch that red tape to make things a little bit more flexible in terms of responses.

One of the carers associations that also delivers respite services—which we do not—has delivered respite in a flexible way to young carers to support them at school by providing a young carer with a laptop. So if they cannot make it to school they can log on and join the lesson; there are arrangements to do that remotely. Other forms of respite is if the young carer or the kids in the family are unable to get to school because of transport and other issues, then the respite has paid for a taxi to get the kids to school. It is around looking at other practical ways to support young carers' involvement and capacity to be able to attend school and to make the most and the best of those years.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Where do some of these things fit in relation to the carers allowance and young carers' eligibility for that allowance?

Ms KATRAKIS: In general, they are not eligible. An age limit kicks in for that so there are difficulties around young carers being eligible for the carers allowance.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: It is probably also more difficult because a lot of young carers would not want people to know that they are caring for a family member.

Ms KATRAKIS: That is right. It impacts on other aspects of their lives as well—their capacity to do other things.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: Elena, what difficulties do you see organisations providing services to young carers face in obtaining funding in order to provide comprehensive services?

Ms KATRAKIS: It is about looking at what is needed for young carers. I suppose respite is a bit of an example of that. Often, yes, respite is needed, but it is around flexible respite and having some innovative options for respite. Money may be thrown at respite services but it is not addressing the need that is required. So there is funding there and departments and agencies will say, "But we're putting all this money into respite", but it is respite that is not meeting an identified need. So I think you need to have the evidence base and the research to look at what those needs really are.

One thing I did not mention at the beginning was that the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales and Bettina Cass are working with a range of government agencies—NSW Health, the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, the Office of Children and Young People, Carers New South Wales and Carers South Australia—on a research project around young carers. That is underway at the moment and hopefully that research will be finalised by the end of this year or next year. That will be able to inform us about some of those supports and needs. They have gone to some of the camps in both States and they are interviewing young carers and service providers to look at what their broader needs are. Money is put into services and things but whether it is directed at what is needed—there is a disconnect there.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Thank you for the information you have been sharing with the Committee. I have a general question about young carers. Are many caring full time and not attending school or work, or are most of them meeting their caring responsibilities after school?

Ms KATRAKIS: They can be the primary carer because they are the one that the care responsibility falls on mostly, particularly in single-parent households. That means they would be doing full-time care but balancing that with school. So they would go to school, they would have caring responsibilities in the morning, they may come home at lunchtime—depending on where the school is, how close they are and that sort of thing—and then they would be doing caring responsibilities overnight and go to school again the next day. So a lot of young carers are primary carers, but not all. They also may have caring responsibilities for a sibling—they are not the primary carer but they may have quite a significant caring role.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Is there any way that the school can identify those children? You said earlier that some of them are fearful and perhaps want to keep it confidential.

Ms KATRAKIS: It is around early intervention. It is around recognition of the needs and issues of young carers. It is promotion of that group, if you like, and the services to address their needs. But it is also around intervening early if issues and things are picked up at school—for instance, if a child is falling off and having problems it might be related to a caring scenario. It may be something totally different but it may also be a caring scenario. It is about having caring as an issue on the radar of teachers and schools to be acknowledging and picking it up. So it then comes back to education and training service providers.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Do teachers provide extra support for that child?

Ms KATRAKIS: That is right.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Would the school automatically report them to the Department of Community Services?

Ms KATRAKIS: No, the child is not at risk.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: So it should not report them.

Ms KATRAKIS: Provide support and link them into services like ours or others where they might be able to get respite to attend school and do some of those things.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Should we provide an educational program to tell young carers their rights or where they can get support?

Ms KATRAKIS: That is right. We do a bit of that work but we need to, you know, with $3.25 per carer there are limits as to what we can do. Last year the State Government launched a New South Wales Carers Action Plan, a component of which is, I think, DADHC is going to be hosting a young carers roundtable to time it with when that research from the Social Policy Research Centre becomes available to then look at working across all the organisations about some of those responses at the State level, so we are hoping that that happens and there are some good outcomes from it. But in the short term, there are all these other things that need to happen. The thing about the Action Plan is that, I suppose, responses for carers traditionally within New South Wales were through NSW Health and through the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. The New South Wales Carers Action Plan does signal a response across government so there are initiatives from the Department of Housing identifying carers generally as a population group within the provision of social housing. There are provisions for the Office of Industrial Relations, Educating and Training et cetera. It has been around for a year and things are starting to happen but it is a five-year plan so we are hoping that things will happen during the next five years.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: The camps for the 8 to 14 year olds, who looks after the person being cared for?

Ms KATRAKIS: It is whether you can arrange respite at that time or whether other family members can come in. It is not all young carers are caring for a parent, they may be caring for a sibling. Obviously it is around availability for the kids to be able to come, usually it is a four or five day camp, so usually you can try and get respite and arrange respite for the person that the child is caring for to enable the child to have that respite to go to camp.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Is it usually a barrier or is it normally surmountable?

Ms KATRAKIS: It can be a barrier. It depends where the child is coming from and access to services, particularly in rural and regional areas where there is much more limited access to respite services.

CHAIR: The committee's inquiry is looking at the needs of children between the ages of 9 and 14 and young carers are a really important subsection of that age group. What you have provided the committee today will help the committee to make the right recommendations with regards to young parents. Thank you, it is very much appreciated.

Ms KATRAKIS: Thank you. Thanks for the opportunity.

(The witness withdrew.)

BELINDA EPSTEIN-FRISCH, Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development, of Post Office Box 502, Epping, 1710, affirmed as under:

CHAIR: The committee has received a submission from your organisation. Do you want that submission to form part of your evidence today?

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: Yes.

CHAIR: In what capacity do you appear before the committee?

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: As an advocate for the Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development.

CHAIR: Do you want to make an opening statement?

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: I will talk in a summary way to some of the main points that are made in our submission. I think the key message that Family Advocacy wants to put to this committee around the issues for children and young people with a disability in this age group is the way in which we view children and young people with disability, and the expectations we have for them, will have the most profound impact of their lives. Our submission and our belief is that children and young people with a disability have the same basic fundamental needs as their peers who do not have a disability. They need to belong, to have friendships, to grow independence and to be valued. The issue is that they often need additional support to enable them to meet those basic fundamental needs.

One of the issues that we put to you in our submission is that they are often supported in systems that do not value them in the same way; that have a deficit view about the way in which these young people present. They are seen as needing a whole range of things, and that the systems that are there are there to fix them or to remove their burden from their family, and that those kind of messages provide a great deal of difficulties for children and young people to emerge to develop an identity as teenagers as young people who want to belong. Our submission has tried to identify our information in a framework that applies to other children around risk factors and, you know, that exposes them to additional difficulties—risk factors such as low self-esteem, poor social skills, poor problem solving, early school leaving; issues in the school context such as school failure, bullying, peer rejection, poor attachment to school; and community and cultural factors such as the lack of supports and services and social and cultural discrimination.

Increasingly, children and young people are in the regular class of local schools but schools need additional support to really include them and provide them and their peers with a good education. They are less likely than their peers to attend before and after school programs, vacation programs and other activities that children of this age group attend in their local community. Those who are reliant on the specialist disability service system often miss out on their opportunities for the rough and tumble of an ordinary life are restricted through a range of processes that include conservative understandings of occupational health and safety, the discriminatory attitude of some programs, and the lack of support for their participation. What we are arguing is that it is never too late to build the protective factors that enable children and young people with disability to be active participants and to improve their self-esteem and to become much more active members of their own communities.

We have put together a range of recommendations—and I am mindful someone asked about cost neutral recommendations—but a lot of them we are talking about are actually about cultural change within existing resources. You can always use more resources, and Carmel, you know, we have argued on these points many times, but I think we would argue that the way in which we use resources can be used slightly differently to make more of a difference and a stronger impact. Just to look briefly in terms of the implications around schools and around specialist disability services, there is a lot of goodwill in schools to include children with disability but they need some additional technical assistance to enable them to do that. Some of our recommendations are about repositioning some of the specialist expertise that currently exists at a level of distance from schools, positioning that expertise in the school, so that those people can both work with the children directly, but perhaps even more critically can work with the teachers to build on their knowledge and skills that will enhance their capacity to teach all children.

Another area relating to schools is mentoring and peer support programs. We have become very used to using an adult as support and as the teacher's aide and they provide an important role for many children. Sometimes they can also add a barrier to the real participation of children and young people because at that age if you have an adult velcroed to your side it can isolate you in the community. There are lots of examples of proper support for peer processes that bring other children from the class or older children in the school system to build a school community where the child with a disability is more supported.

In terms of issues and recommendations about the specialist disability service system, they are really about helping the actual workers. I do not think the specialist disability service system is very focused on child issues. There is therapeutic intervention to fix the child, to address the specific therapeutic or learning need, but not in terms of help to be a child and to build resilience and relationships. We have moved from having respite that happened in a centre or a respite house somewhere. That is still provided but the system has moved to a much more flexible approach. Respite usually means removing the child from their family and often from their community. We have moved to more flexible forms but those have been constrained in many ways and the support worker often becomes a paid friend for a child rather than someone who sees it as their role to help facilitate relationships between the child with a disability and other children in that youth group, Guides, Scouts, church or after-school vacation program or what-have-you. It is about what is value-added. It is about a cultural shift and the way in which that support worker understands his or her role to build those relationships rather than to mind the child.

There is a range of suggestions around helping the disability service system to see children with disability more as children first. The rhetoric is absolutely there that that is the case, but we feel there is a lack of technical expertise to make that happen. So our recommendations are about facilitating that cultural shift. They are the main kinds of things we want to draw to your attention. Probably the key message that comes from our submission that may be different from others is about really seeing the child as a child and building on and strengthening their capacity to be a teenager and be like the other children in their neighbourhood. They just need some support to do it but they are faced with a system that tends to want to fix them or to mind them. Whilst there is no doubt they have developmental needs that should be addressed, they need help to be just an ordinary kid. I will respond to any questions that you might like to put to me.

CHAIR: Thanks very much, Belinda, for that and for illuminating your submission. On the issue you have raised with regard to support workers being able to better facilitate children with a disability to interact with their peers and have friendships, what sorts of skills are needed and how can we develop those skills in support workers to do that more effectively?

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: I think one of the critical things is a value base. I do not think that in our system at the moment we provide sufficient values-based training and general orientation to many of those key support workers. We require more and more certificates 3 and 4 and what-have-you, but it is not clear to us that that actually provides the understanding of the kind of role that the support workers need to play. If you look at some of the constraints that I alluded to, for example in occupational health and safety, with the flexible respite system, which in principle should be great and should mean someone who is allocated to a young child and their family to help do what it takes, the framework and resources are there but what often happens is that services want to rotate staff. Many services have active policies that say, "We need to be careful about attachment." I imagine most of us here are parents who over time have had babysitters for our children. We would not be leaving our children aged nine, 10, 11 or 12 on their own, with or without a disability. When we have placed ads in the local paper or gone to our church group or whatever, I have always asked people to think about giving a year. Maybe it will not work out for a year but I certainly want someone who is going to have an attachment to my child if I am going to go out and leave my three daughters with someone who is initially a stranger coming into the house. Because services are scared—I am not quite sure of what—they rotate staff, so there is not the same opportunity to develop that knowledge and relationship.

Then, for example, a family is not allowed to suggest that the child get a friend to play, as many children of this age do after school. They might have a friend to play after school or on the weekend. That cannot happen with the support worker because that worker is not allowed to look after another child. Their focus has to be on the child with a disability. Families often report that they might have to get another babysitter for the other child or two in the family while the support worker looks after the child with a disability. That becomes expensive and is potentially not inclusive. It does not have to be divisive but it does not build a system.

The other cultural issue in all of this is that I do not think anyone explains to a support worker that it is their job to try to build a friendship between this child and the other children in the group. Most of them are

trying to do their very best; they are well-meaning often young men and women, but they do not understand that the nature of their role is such that success would be that they were actually right over at the side or back of the room or helping the Guide leader get the morning teas ready. They are there if necessary, just in case, and in the best scenario they would be able to have a fade-out role. They might be there at the beginning to help facilitate and maybe give some background information to the youth group leader or the after-school vocation care worker, but in a successful situation they would be doing themselves out of a job. Many of them do not understand that; it has not been put to them. There is not a kind of vision that this child can, on his or her own, be a member of the group. That is where by promoting membership and inclusion the system gets value added.

If you have a night in a respite house it leads to the demand for another night, because, "Gee whiz, that was kind of nice and calm and it was good to go out with my husband and I am really looking forward to the next one." Similarly with a flexible respite worker who is a paid friend, "That Saturday morning was pretty good, thank you very much, but I'm looking forward to the next one." There is nothing additional that can come from it, whereas if a child or young person is helped to become a member of a church group, Scouts group or whatever, over time—no-one pretends it is easy for all children and it happens like this—there is much more opportunity for natural relationships to develop: a birthday invitation; one family joining another family for a barbecue. What we are doing through that is enhancing the opportunities for freely given relationships. That is what gives values to all our lives and, from the perspective of the system, makes people less dependent on services.

Ultimately, services are important; no-one pretends that they are not. But services are not the things that give us a good life. What is really important to us in life are the relationships we have with people we love and who care about us, not necessarily care for us. When we are isolating children with disabilities from their neighbours, their peers and their community, we are reducing the opportunity for them to have those relationships. Their families, who are much more isolated, need more local connections than families that do not face those sorts of challenges.

CHAIR: Thank you. That really helps us to understand the issue.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Who funds the Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development, and what does it do?

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: We get Commonwealth and State funding through the State Government. We get funding through the Department of Community Services and we get Federal funding as an advocacy agency. Would you like me to outline it for you?

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Yes.

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: The Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development exists to enhance the voice of families in speaking out on behalf of family members with a disability. At the centre is the person with a disability. The institute acknowledges that families tend to be the ones who are there in the long run and we need to help them to speak out most effectively on behalf of their family members. We do that through three core functions—what we call advocacy and leadership development—and we run workshops all over the State. Last year we were in about 30 locations and we provided skills-based and issues-based workshops. We look at the map and we draw up a plan. We have been to Cobar and we try to get around the State.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Is this for carers?

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: The people we invite to our workshop are family members. These days we invite not just the mother and father; we also invite a grandparent or an interested neighbour. We are encouraging people to build their own support networks. It is often valuable for an adult sister or a nearby cousin who is really close to the family to join them in the workshop so that they have a joint learning exercise.

We have an information function. We do not do individual advocacy, as we are small and statewide. I cannot think of the exact number of families that rings us each year to clarify issues and to seek information. Sometimes people ring us many times in a period of months and then we do not hear from them for years. We help them in thinking through an issue or preparing for a meeting. They can ring us after the meeting and we debrief them and decide on the next strategy. We also have a resource library comprising articles, books, DVDs

and cassettes. We try to provide families with stories, information and research in areas that are of importance to them. I then undertake the advocacy work for the organisation, so there is one part-time person doing that.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: I think you have already answered every question. In your existing programs what support mechanisms or attitudes are needed to encourage better schooling and social inclusion for children with disabilities? You have already covered many of those issues. However, it comes back to attitudes or to educating carers to include children more.

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: I think that is really important. When you talk about carers, the vast majority of whom are parents. Parents have a natural authority with their children that we all expect. By and large parents think about the best interests of their children. The term "carers" is a broad-based term that can be confused with people who are there in a paid capacity. We tend to prefer to think about families and parents because there will also be siblings and what have you. Through our workshops and our interaction with people we try to help them to have a positive vision about their sons and daughters with disabilities. Families go through an assessment process but when they go home a dozen negative issues overwhelm them.

They are real issues. We do not pretend that kids do not have developmental needs, and therapy and education are important in addressing those needs and in helping a child to reach his or her full potential. However, sometimes those things overcome families and it seems impossible for them. In my submission I refer to a couple of true-life stories, in particular, one about Alex who has multiple needs and who has been diagnosed with more problems than I can mention. Ultimately, the family was able to pull itself away from the therapeutic intervention treadmill and it reclaimed Alex as a child. Families that have to start thinking about providing a two-year-old with a home when he or she is an adult miss out on the birthday parties, the pleasures of parenthood, and children growing up.

We need to help families reclaim their vision and their authority so that they have some kind of control over their children. Because they have a child with additional needs it does not mean that they have to have a life of terror. We need to improve the system to give families that vision, which is hard. Whilst ‘Stronger Together’ has provided us with significant additional resources we are still operating in crisis mode. There is no doubt about the fact that money is important, but we have moved away from building a resilience in individuals and families and we have made people much more reliant on a system that can never meet all their needs.

Something might be held out to you, for example, you can get respite, or you can have this or that. Many people think, "If only I could get that respite my life would be better. If only I could get this my life would be better." However, it will not be better. It might make a difference at a particular time but those are not the things that build a community. We need to help people to reconnect with community. There is the age-old saying that it takes a community to raise a child. We must put in place strategies and processes in our community that rebuild the community. That is the strongest thing that will support children with disabilities and their families and help them to live decent lives.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: I refer to participation in before school and after-school care programs and vacation care. How can we assist children and young people with a disability to become more involved in that? What would be required?

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: Over many years the out-of-school-hours [OOSH] programs have been terrific. Nowadays a lack of support often prevents children from being included. In general, more and more schools have welcoming attitudes, as they know that children with a disability have a right. Children go to special schools and sometimes the taxi will drop them at the local OOSH program and what have you, which is terrific. However, funding for additional support has not kept up with real costs. Sometimes centres that have been welcoming have attracted a larger number of children and they are financially unviable. It is about having a system in place and providing more real funding at a level that effectively meets those additional costs.

Many children have benefited enormously from these programs. The area around high schools is much more problematic. Many OOSH services have continued to include high school children who have been at their centres because they are good people and they know what will happen if they do not. Sometimes it is inappropriate because you have a strapping 17-year-old in a place where there are five-year-olds, six-year-olds or seven-year-olds, but they do it with a good heart. Of course, other schools have had to say, "I am sorry, but it is no longer appropriate."

As our submission indicates, the Federal Government seems to be scoping work around some sort of program that has been referred to as OOSH, or some sort of out-of-school-hours programs. However, it seems as though it is leaning more towards vacation programs, as it is much more difficult for kids who are going to a number of different places. The idea is excellent and we do need some government support in this area because teenagers without a disability can be left at home much more, they can go home with a key and do not need someone there, but many young people with a disability certainly could not do that.

We would like to see much more resources used. We acknowledge that that will be for less days, but at least have the option that you can have support for your child to hang out. What do teenagers do? They hang out at someone's place or go to the movies, these sorts of things. So, the resources for that child with a disability could be used to enable them to do what they want to do—hanging out with the kids from school—rather than putting all the resources together in some centres where children who are part of their regular communities are forced to be only with young people with a disability. The other important thing as far as their interests is that we need to make sure that any after-school and vacation programs for teenagers come from a teenage-type auspice. Attaching it to the primary school no longer becomes appropriate, but there are the Police and Community Youth Clubs [PCYC]. Local councils have a range of activities. It is just about finding an auspice for that kind of support that is congruent with teenagers.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: This is probably a practical question. You have talked about children with disabilities. Have there been any surveys of children with disabilities and the problems they are facing so that you could be targeting the specific areas of concern? Or do you just do one to one?

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: No. We have not done surveys but we are in touch with lots of families. That is where we get our knowledge. Because we go out with workshops, people then will talk about the issues in their own local area. I think that the issues we have identified in the submission are main ones.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Are the children at the workshops?

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: No.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Only parents?

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: It is only parents because, first of all, it would be uncomfortable to be talking about images and issues around children with a disability and having them present. If you want them to build a positive self-image, you do not want them to hear about all the difficulties their families are facing and how to help them overcome those.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I was thinking only just to get feedback from them; the sort of feedback you are getting.

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: A lot of families are really struggling because they are seeking services that are not there or they are trying to use services that do not make a difference. What would be necessary to support a child in your family might be different to support a child in my family because every family is different. If you have the teensy slice of resources that is mine, you know, that the system says, "These are the resources you can have," the extent to which they are under my control, I can influence what it is used for, then I will be able to use it to make a difference to my family. But if I have to use the resources in a way that makes a difference to Carmel's family, it might just not sit so well and so not be as potent and as effective.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You mentioned social workers lacking empathy. Should they attend your workshops? Should we make a recommendation that they attend your workshops?

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: We often get service workers who want to attend, but we say no to them. Our limited resources are for families, and services should be providing that orientation training development to their workers. We acknowledge they do not always do so, but if no-one else is providing opportunities for training development for families and if our limited resources are used for workers, then families miss out. That is why we make that decision. We have argued within the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care [DADHC] over many years, as Carmel will know, that DADHC and government have a greater responsibility to lead around these issues and provide that training and development, and help support the kind of cultural change that we think is necessary.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I thought it might have helped the social workers to hear the parents discuss the problems.

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: Maybe if we had more funding from other places, but I think you are interested in cost neutral.

CHAIR: Not absolutely. I think Andrew was specifically trying to get an idea of some cost-neutral initiatives, but we are not just limited by them.

Ms EPSTEIN-FRISCH: Sometimes we have grown and developed and the world has got better and sometimes there are things we can take from the past. There are lots of things from the past I am glad have gone, but when the Commonwealth Disabilities Services Act came in in the mid-eighties and the work was happening across Australia, there was an American chap by the name of Wolfensberger, who was a really very profound thinker. He came up with a theory called social role valorisation—SRV. It actually gives value underpinning and helps people understand the place of devalued people in our society. Out of his work came a lot of values-based training that was quite widespread in the late eighties to the mid-nineties across Australia. That helped organisations to understand the basis on which I am speaking. It led to helping workers understand that the way in which they could actually help a person with a disability to be included is to help them to take on a proper role, not to be seen as a dependent person always in need. Each person, no matter how complex their situation is, could take on a role as a volunteer, a friend, a house sharer that helped build their image in the community, which was a really important thing rather than being seen as poor unfortunates in need of everything.

CHAIR: Thank you for attending. We appreciate your generous knowledge and information.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

TREVOR RAYMOND CLARK, Director, Education and Research, Autism Spectrum Australia, 10 Alanson Avenue, Bulli, New South Wales, 2516, and

ANTHONY JOHN WARREN, Director, Children and Young Families, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Autism Spectrum Australia, 41 Cook Street, Forestville, New South Wales, 2087, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: The Committee has received your submission. Are you happy for that submission to form part of your evidence?

Dr CLARK: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you wish to make an opening statement—either you, Trevor, or Anthony, or both of you? After that we will ask some questions.

Dr CLARK: Both. Thank you for the opportunity to come and speak today to our submission. We thought it was important to raise issues related to this particular group of children on the autism spectrum—those who have Asperger's disorder and who are sometimes classified as high functioning autism. This is a particular group of students, as distinct from the whole of the autism spectrum, who have a particular set of needs and, resultant from that, a particular set of service provision, we believe, is required to support this particular group of children.

I will refer to parts of the submission. I will highlight the challenges faced by this particular population and some of the issues or services we are trying to provide to support them, such as in education. Anthony will expand somewhat more on the impact of Asperger's disorder and perhaps dispel some of the myths around that population. We will talk about some of the current services and some of the services that we think this group of children require. Just very quickly I will introduce an overview of the complexity of issues faced by this group. We believe the children with the diagnosis of Asperger's disorder or high functioning autism face complex life challenges across all the community settings—education, the community and at home settings. These students present with significant challenges related to their social and emotional development, their learning and cognition and behavioural difficulties.

Due to the needs and the challenges experienced by this group of disabled children, we believe that currently, particularly in the education system, they suffer an additional disadvantage. We believe that their needs, especially those in the 9 to 14 years age group as they transition from primary to secondary school, are not being fully met. It is our experience, from operating services and educational services for over 40 years to children across the whole of the autism spectrum, that this group suffers frequent bullying and they become targets for bullying, especially in mainstream educational settings. Many of them suffer from co-morbid conditions, such as anxiety and depression—Anthony will talk more about that—and generally we believe they are misunderstood by government, education providers, parents, peers and the wider community.

Putting into perspective children and young people with this diagnosis of Asperger's disorder high functioning autism, I mention that they form the upper part of what we call the autism spectrum of disorders. It was not until the beginning of the 1990s that Asperger's high functioning disorder was actually recognised as part of the autism spectrum. Following that point, these children were diagnosed, which is part of the reason for the very large increase in the diagnosis of children with autism, as I am sure most people around the table are aware. But we believe that this has led to confusion. Children who have this diagnosis do not have intellectual delay or suffer from intellectual impairment. They can have a normal or above average intelligence quotient [IQ] or cognitive development. Therefore that leads to the myth that these children will cope and they will be fine in a mainstream setting without support.

One thing we need to highlight today is that currently this particular group on the spectrum do not meet the criteria for Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care funding because they do not present with intellectual delay. That leads to many problems in terms of putting in place appropriate services. I will ask Anthony to talk about some of the impact of this disorder on the children.

Mr WARREN: As Trevor said, Asperger's disorder is one of the autism spectrum disorders. They have a neuro-developmental basis or cause, which means that parts of their brain and central nervous system are damaged. The evidence is that, essentially, this damage has occurred because of damaged genes that have been inherited. There are many genes involved in the expression of autism and that explains why each individual is so

very different and unique from another. There is very significant unmet need regarding the provision of support for people with Asperger's disorder in our community. Just to illustrate that, I mention that the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders in New South Wales is around 45,000 people who have an autism spectrum disorder. Autism Spectrum Australia, which is by far the leading provider of services for people with autism, supported 6,000 people last year, that is, 6,000 individuals with autism. So out of 45,000, we are in touch with 6,000 individuals. People with Asperger's particularly fall through the gaps in terms of service provision, as Trevor has mentioned, partly because there has been a recent explosion in awareness about Asperger's disorder existing to the extent that it does, and because services do not have the specialist training and expertise to cater for the needs. For example, generic mental health services frankly are not sure how to work with a young person with developmental disabilities such as Asperger's, even though they may also be presenting with co-occurring very significant anxiety and depression.

The primary disability of Asperger's or the primary impairment of Asperger's is a social one. People with Asperger's have very significant social comprehension and social interaction difficulties. For example, that means that they have enormous difficulty reading facial cues and interpreting body postures and making sense of certainly the language and the vocal expressiveness of their conversational partner. That fundamental difficulty in interpreting social information leads to fundamental problems with empathy or not recognising that another person with whom they are interacting is, for example, unhappy with something they are saying, or maybe even angry. They have enormous difficulties therefore with what we call reciprocal social skills, and that is being able to have a two-way conversation where you actually respond to information that the other is providing, when the conversers take turns, and the conversation stays on topic and there is chitchat, as we would know it. That kind of conversation is enormously difficult for people with Asperger's.

As Trevor has mentioned, they are also particularly vulnerable during those adolescents years of 9 to 14 and especially to bullying because other peers become aware that they are very different. They are very easily led because they think and are processing information in quite a different way. It is very easy to set them up and say to someone with Asperger's or to a young fellow to behave in a certain way, and he might do that, even though it is certainly not appropriate. One of the major effects of social impairment is social exclusion. Certainly from 9 years of age, people with Asperger's or children with Asperger's are very aware of the differences in their social difficulties. That leads to social anxiety and often avoidance and often anxiety and depression. People with Asperger's, despite relatively normal expressive language skills and being able to speak in sentences, for example, nonetheless have enormous difficulties with comprehension, with understanding, with reading between the lines, with inferring, and with getting the overall meaning of the other person's communication.

They tend to focus on one bit of information and they have a tunnel or one-track very rigid way of processing information. You can imagine the difficulty that that leads to when they are trying to make sense of instructions a teacher is providing in class or being part of a social group or a peer group. They have a lot of executive functioning difficulties, such as problems with organising and planning or problems with managing their time and allocating time as well as a very rigid way of thinking. In an extreme form, that is an obsessive compulsive disorder. They have learning disabilities, despite broadly average intellectual ability. They have a lot of disabilities because of motor planning and because of that problem with inferential and high-level comprehension. They have a lot of difficulty with reasoning, with following a teacher's instructions, and with being able to understand, say, topics that are being presented by teachers.

Australian studies by people like Professor Bruce Tonge and Professor Stewart Enfield from the Brain Mind and Body Institute in Sydney show that 40 per cent to 80 per cent of people with Asperger's present with very significant degrees of anxiety and depression and also with behavioural concerns such as self harm. They have significant difficulties managing and regulating their own emotional reactions. They are very much more at risk to attempt suicide. As they move into adult life, a very high percentage will go on to present at mental health services. There is very high unemployment for this group. Studies in South Australia and the United Kingdom indicates that 80 per cent to 90 per cent of people with Asperger's are not employed.

There are other difficulties, particularly around the psychopathology I have touched on. For example, with our criminal justice system, they and their families have enormous difficulty accessing appropriate support from the initial issue, the point at which the policeman might become involved because of some inappropriate behaviour, through to managing the court process. We have put proposals to the Attorney General's Department about autism support professionals being available right through that system, for example. I should probably stop there and give people an opportunity to ask questions.

CHAIR: Thank you. That gives us a good understanding of Asperger's, which is important for the inquiry.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: I have two brief questions: The first is about diagnostic services and the second is about education. I have concerns that Asperger's is not well diagnosed by many trained professionals. What is your take on that?

Mr WARREN: Yes, that is right. You are absolutely right. The main problem is that there are not enough clinicians with training in the specialised assessment tools that are now available. There has been great progress in the past five years particularly but that means that lot of professionals who see a child who has Asperger's do not necessarily recognise that it could be an autism spectrum disorder and they might misdiagnose it as a very significant language learning type disability with attention deficit disorder for example, or as a young person with very significant social anxiety and some learning and attentional and planning difficulties. So it is a significant need. We need more clinicians trained and supported. Autism Spectrum Australia has an assessment service and a model for assessment which we have developed with the Royal College of Physicians—that is, the paediatricians. That is a five stage model and the college has accepted that as a consensus way of outlining an assessment process that will more accurately and earlier identify children.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: The second question relates to education. We know about the lack of classes. Which model works best for educating a child with Asperger's syndrome—inclusion or exclusion?

Dr CLARK: It has been the experience of Autism Spectrum Australia that the satellite class program, which I mentioned in the submission, is a small class of five or six students—sometimes a double class which we classify as 10 or 12 students—in a mainstream setting. It is staffed by one of the teachers or the staff from one of our six autism special schools that cater specifically to children with autism spectrum disorder. The whole concept, the whole philosophy, the rationale for those satellite classes is to work on the children's skills to be able to facilitate further transition. We are finally doing research—the other hat that I wear—on the outcomes for children going through the satellite class program. We did a first survey; we tracked children. We started our first satellite class in 1992 in an education department school in Belrose in the northern suburbs. That program has been so successful we now have 64 classes spread across New South Wales, with many more expressions of interest coming from both Education Department schools and Catholic schools for us to establish those classes.

We tracked the children from 1992 all the way to 2002. What were the outcomes? We discovered that 89 per cent of the children that had been in an aspect satellite class program—and, dare I say it, part of our transition program; we spend a whole 12 months on transitioning children from those classes back into their local mainstream schools—were still in the same mainstream environment at their local school where they exited from our satellite class program. I guess what is unique about the satellite class program—and I know that the New South Wales Education Department did; we have worked very closely with the Department for many, many years on this particular issue of autism. They established some of their own autism specific classes. I think now there has been somewhat of a move away from those classes, which I think is somewhat unfortunate but the Department did establish some of those classes and some still exist but they are not quite following the transitional model that we offer in a satellite class program.

Again, to answer your question, this program is unique to New South Wales. It is actually unique internationally in the field of autism as an educational provision. We are engaging Macquarie University in discussion to do a major research study tracking children, the long-term outcomes of the satellite class program. We believe on the surface that it is highly successful for Asperger's high-functioning children. We need to get that information out there to the wider field of autism and to other educational sectors. I need to advocate very clearly for autism specific specialised short term programs. We are not talking about long term. Our model is to improve work on the student's skills. If the students are able then, we take the next step to inclusion, which is the whole aim of all our educational programs. Even though we have autism specific special schools, you might say, "Well, this is a segregated autism specific satellite class." The whole aim is to work with the children and families to take the next step.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: Can either of you discuss some of the positive outcomes that programs conducted by your organisation for nine to 14 year olds are achieving?

Dr CLARK: I guess one of the main achievements—and again I refer back to the satellite class program—I think it was about 10 years ago we established our very first secondary satellite class program. Historically, they started off as infants classes, then with the natural development they moved to primary aged

classes and it was in about 2001 we established the first secondary satellite class in a Catholic school in the western suburbs of Sydney, at St Andrews Catholic College. Ever since we started that very first satellite secondary model, we have been swamped with referrals, demand from families, other educational providers trying to get access to the classes. That program has developed rapidly and we believe it is an extremely successful model.

The children in the secondary satellite program—I think we are up to about 14 secondary satellite classes; we cannot keep up with the demand to develop those classes—are fully integrated into their secondary subjects. They start their day in the autism home room; they end their day in the autism home room. Our staff will however they go in support the children as they are undertaking the mainstream work and then again our highly skilled and trained staff, which is the other part of what it takes to deal with this population, support the children with their social and emotional development, and of course their behaviour challenges.

I guess I need to state my experience in developing and running the satellite class program. In terms of our multidisciplinary team, energies, resources, school counsellors, speech therapists, occupational therapists, probably the major part of their work is undertaken with supporting students in the secondary satellite class program. The needs are so great to support the children and we are having success. Some of the students are going back to their local colleges; some are moving from that class into TAFE and university programs.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Dr Clark, you said that you have had a big increase in the number of people bringing their children into this program. Do they arrive with a medical diagnosis or do you do another test to ensure that the child has autism?

Dr CLARK: We have what we call an eligibility process and an eligibility committee. So every child, no matter what part of the school they are seeking, what age and what stage, must meet the criteria—and this relates back to the New South Wales Department of Education and Training guidelines—set down by the Education Department in terms of their diagnosis. They must meet the criteria for diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder. To safeguard that process, our eligibility committee is made up of people external to Autism Spectrum Australia. It is made up of representatives from the Association of Independent Schools, paediatricians from children's hospitals in Sydney, parent representatives and clinical psychologists. So they must meet the criteria laid down for Department of Education funding.

I must acknowledge the funding base. I guess the major thing that has made a difference to the school program is something called the Supervisors Subsidy Scheme, which was put in place many years ago by the State Government and is administered by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training. It is a funding stream to non-government schools and special schools for children with disabilities. I guess many years ago the founders of our organisation argued, quite rightly, that there was a high need for a high level of funding to support children with autism. That funding remains in place today and through that funding stream—and I must acknowledge the education department—in some ways the criteria was broadened to support children across the spectrum. That is where the problem lies; in other government departments that criteria has not been broadened to put in place funding for adequate services.

I guess what we are alluding to today, and as Anthony said, is that the needs of this particular population are complex. They are greater, dare I say, than many children with higher levels of autism and higher on-the-surface support needs. That is the myth we want to dispel today. Those at the top end of the spectrum do not have an easier row to hoe; in actual fact, they have many more complex issues to face because they are so close to full inclusion in an environment the problems are much more.

Mr WARREN: Their support needs are just as high as for the group with an autistic disorder who also have an intellectual disability. It is just that their support needs are very different because they are higher functioning. But the evidence is that they are much more likely to have co-morbid emotional and other mental health issues along with the range of difficulties that I have mentioned.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: What steps are being taken to identify children with high-functioning autism in the school system? Are teachers being trained in what signs to look for to recommend further services?

Mr WARREN: There has certainly been an explosion of awareness about the characteristics of Asperger's disorder. I think the Education Department has done a great job through its school counsellor system in providing information to teachers and in setting up referral pathways to services, including ours. Yes, I think

we have done relatively well over the last 10 years. There are still children being diagnosed with Asperger's in their adolescent years. Of course, adults missed out because Asperger's was not recognised when they were at school. So we still have many adults being referred or coming forward, wondering, "Could I have Asperger's disorder?"

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: Do you have any out-of-school programs to help parents of children with autism? For example, a lady in Clarence has two kids, one with high-functioning autism and the other with Asperger's, and she said she would love to go shopping one day without people thinking she has two naughty, horrible children.

Dr CLARK: Absolutely. To answer your question, no, we do not have after-school-hours programs or respite care facilities. We have had to refer families and students to other programs and DADHC-funded services, et cetera. We do have something new, though. We are delighted to receive funding from DADHC for the next three years for a brand-new peer support network program that will be our first after-hours program for primary and secondary age students. They will be established across the metropolitan area and they are after-hours programs. Students will come after school and engage in a range of leisure programs. There is high need, which was identified by our small itinerant education and outreach service called the Educational Outreach Service. We wish we had funding to increase the number of staff on that. Each term they have probably 100 referrals to that service. We have basically two or three staff who are trying to provide outreach services in mainstream schools.

That service is going to run the brand-new peer support network program. We are delighted with that. I guess we have learnt from working with families and children with Asperger's and high-functioning children in mainstream schools that this is what they want. They have asked for this. Part of the program is not just leisure and recreation but teaching social skills to develop social networks and interactions, which is one of the major complexities and issues with Asperger's and high-functioning autism.

Mr WARREN: I am sure you will hear through many of the submissions around children with disability that one of the greatest issues for families is finding appropriate respite and simply available respite that fits with their family and individual needs. It is a significant issue.

Dr CLARK: To finish, in terms of identifying need, whenever our organisation is considering establishing further educational and satellite programs we now undertake community consultations. In the last 18 months we have undertaken two major community consultations that have involved families, parent support groups, the Department of Education and Training, the Catholic education system, and the independent school system on the mid and far north coasts of New South Wales and in the western region of New South Wales. What has come back is that the top priority across all those consultations is: How do people deal with Asperger's and high-functioning children with complex needs in mainstream schools? We work very closely with the New South Wales Department of Education and Training and the director of disability there. I was at a meeting with him probably four weeks ago and it was expressed that the highest priority is trying to support this particular group of children within the education system.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. We appreciate the time you have taken and also the depth of your evidence.

Dr CLARK: Thank you.

Mr WARREN: Thank you.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

ROBYN MONRO-MILLER, Executive Officer, Network of Community Activities, 66 Albion Street, Surry Hills, sworn and examined; and

PAULINE O'KANE, Development Coordinator, Network of Community Activities, 66 Albion Street, Surry Hills, affirmed and examined.

CHAIR: Robyn, the Committee has received a submission from your organisation. Are you happy for this submission to form part of your evidence here today?

Ms MONRO-MILLER: I certainly am.

CHAIR: Would either of you like to make an opening statement before we ask questions?

Ms MONRO-MILLER: I am happy to make an opening statement. Network of Community Activities has been established for over 35 years and provides resourcing and support to children, primarily 5-12 years of age, through the out-of-school-hours sector and also other community development activities for 5- to 12-year-olds. Increasingly our interest has been drawn to the up to 14-year age group as we are seeing that the services are failing to meet that age group's needs. We frequently get calls from parents concerned about what is going to happen to their 12-year-old once they leave an out-of-school-hours setting. Through our community development activities in rural and remote areas we are increasingly seeing the 9-14 age group missing out on access to services and activities for their development.

CHAIR: One of the issues that has prompted this inquiry to look at children between the ages of nine and 14 is what you have identified in your opening comments and your submission, that is, the concern, particularly for working parents, that once their children start high school they usually do not have access to after-school care services and often are going home to an empty house. Can you give us a feel from your experience of how prevalent you think that is and also if there are some services available to high school-age children and whether they are well utilised, and also whether the services would need to be different from those that are provided to the younger age group?

Ms MONRO-MILLER: I think the concern about what happens to a child once they start high school is very high. The phone calls we get in the office from parents increasingly report that they do not know what to do with their children once they enter high school. Some out-of-hours school services do allow children to attend for that first year of high school but it is not necessarily something they have to do and certainly it is not always what the children wish to do. We also have an issue, even with the 9-12 age group, that programs need to be sufficiently stimulating to keep children involved. Network for many years has been offering specific training courses to staff because the engagement of staff in the program and their ability to engage the kids in suitable activities for that age group is a challenge because they are dealing with a cross-section from 5-12 years of age. A lot of services are doing this very well and they have high retention rates. Where services do not do this so well we see the retention rates for that age group drop off and parents are increasingly pressured into sending their children home or to alternative accommodation.

Another issue for parents at this age is financial pressure. If parents have to make a decision about whether to pay childcare fees for their five-year-old or their 10-year-old, they often decide that maybe their 10-year-old can go home by themselves or do something else that will not cost any money. So there is that financial pressure on parents and they sometimes make choices for their older children that they would not allow their younger children to participate in.

In regard to your question about the success of programs that are operating for the older age group, they are quite limited in number, but we have identified in the submission some areas that are running successful programs. Those programs I have identified also have high utilisation, which we see as one of the measures of success. Children at this age can and will vote with their feet, so regardless of whether a parent wants their child to attend, if the child does not want to attend there is often very little a parent can do—although one would like to think they could—to force that child to go to the program.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: The recommendations near the end of your submission are very good. I have two questions: what cost-neutral recommendations would you suggest the Committee take up based on all those you have given us? Which one do you think we should be looking at first?

Ms MILLER: Cost-neutral recommendations?

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Give us both, if you like.

Ms MONRO-MILLER: I am not sure whether we could say there were any cost-neutral recommendations. I would not be able to tell you strictly that there were any cost-neutral recommendations because I think there is always a cost attached everything, even if it is in volunteer hours. I think there is a cost for the child impact statement that is required by all levels of government, but I do not know whether or not that is able to be absorbed without an obvious statement. A lot of the approaches will mean that we are looking at some level of cost, even the idea of using local libraries for additional support staff. The idea of the juniors card is something that—

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: I put an asterisk against that item.

Ms MONRO-MILLER: That will not be cost neutral. If we weighed up the benefits to establish what we would gain from children's input into the community, their access and potentially the effect on juvenile delinquency, we would probably find that the benefits outweighed any costs involved. As long as you cost the benefits I would say that they are all cost neutral.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: Would you describe for the benefit of the Committee the way in which play rangers work in the United Kingdom? Has any specific research been done on the importance of play for the nine-year-old to 14-year-old age group?

Ms MONRO-MILLER: I will ask Pauline to answer your question relating to play rangers.

Ms O'KANE: We have not seen any specific research but our organisation has a biannual conference that is attended by a lot of international speakers. We highlighted some projects that we had heard about that were happening in other countries. There has been a lot of research in England in particular which has a national organisation called Play England. I suppose it goes back to open space. Parents are not happy to let young people between the ages of nine to 14 go out into the community. In the United Kingdom they have started to look at the types of spaces that would give those children independence, which is open parks, some of the regional parks, and places like that.

But the barrier to young people using those facilities was that nobody in the community was around. It was about funding those organisations to put in a play ranger, or a contact person who would provide some sorts of activities—they might be environmental, creative or sporting activities—to engage young people. Once they get to know an area they begin to use that area as a place in their community. There is a lot of research to support the idea that, once you get people into areas, it has a self-perpetuating effect. People start to feel that there is a safeness there. In reality, parents are not happy to send their children out to the park all day unless some supervisors are there. There have always been adventure playgrounds. The United Kingdom is starting to look at providing that sort of facility in more open space type project areas.

Ms MONRO-MILLER: Currently, Victoria is one of the only States in Australia that still has adventure playgrounds in their original format. About four adventure playgrounds are funded through a combination of funding from local government and funding from the community. Those are open spaces where children can go to and play in a safe environment. Staff members are present but the children engage in play. That still attracts that older age group.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: How would the 'Schools as Community Centres Model' work in New South Wales for this age group? I have two schools as community centres in my electorate—one at Umina and the other at Springfield.

Ms MONRO-MILLER: At the moment the focus has been very much on the younger age group. Schools as community centres could be extended into the high school area where we have programs available for children to attend high school after hours, even for accessing sports facilities. High schools have the best sporting facilities, for example, basketball courts and things like that. As we have identified in our submission, those things are often put away because vandals could come in and damage them, which they can. However,

there is also the idea that people generally—teenagers and young people—want access to basketball courts and to activities that are available at those schools.

Effectively, that is where play rangers could kick in at high schools. There must be somebody in the playground supervising the sorts of activities in which children engage. The other thing relates to the access of parents to those places. In the same way parents need support when they are dealing with the difficult transition of a child into adolescence. We must develop opportunities for parents to get together through the community centre approach.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: In recommendation 5.1 you ask the Committee to hold an Inquiry into the sexualisation of children through the marketing of products. Why did you make that recommendation? What impact would sexualisation through the marketing of products have on children in the nine-year-old to 14-year-old age group?

Ms MONRO-MILLER: Quite a bit of research has been done on the impact of advertising on children. This has been a concern of ours because increasingly children are being targeted in ways that are not appropriate through the marketing of products. We have only to switch on afternoon television to witness that. Whilst there is no sexualisation, afternoon television is full of a series of advertisements. As each advertisement comes on, my eight-year-old daughter tells me, "I want that" as we go through the process. There is an issue about marketing to children and where it is appropriate and where it is not appropriate.

A number of lobby groups have been established to look at this issue. I can give you the websites and the contact numbers so that you might speak to them. There is sexualisation of children in the products that are being marketed to them. I do not know whether you are aware of the advertisement that is targeting young girls to learn how to pole dance. Pole dancing, which is a new activity, is probably good for your fitness but it is symbolic of a large range of women being sold into sexual slavery across the world. It is not necessarily appropriate, we feel. That is just one example. Increasingly we are seeing children being targeted at a younger age for marketing and products. If you walk through any department store you will see a whole range of lovely lingerie for young girls. We are seeing these pressures coming about. We think there needs to be an inquiry on just what is the effect of media on children and also the effect of how they are marketing because in many ways it is detrimental to our children and their childhood.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: You mentioned libraries and after-school care for young people. What types of programs do public libraries offer students in country areas as well as city areas? To what extent are these currently available and being accessed? Is the funding from local councils or through organisations' programs?

Ms MONRO-MILLER: I believe local government actually funds their libraries. In the same way that the programs we have identified are different according to what local government you are in as to how much local government wishes to support these initiatives, the same thing happens in libraries as to what is provided. We receive feedback from time to time that librarians increasingly are becoming concerned that children are sent to libraries in order to—

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: Babysit.

Ms MONRO-MILLER: —to provide some sort of care environment and save money for parents. If you are financially strapped, where do you send your child? If you can send them to the library to do their homework, great. This is becoming a bit of a problem for librarians because that is not necessarily what they see as their role. There is the potential that children should be able to access their local library and there would be somebody there who could give them support at times. It is just a proposal, but perhaps if we looked at this differently rather than seeing it as a problem of young people actually using libraries after school, maybe there is a role not as child care *per se* but as support . In the same way a play ranger is not there to provide child care but to support the young person's inclusion into the community to learn to use the library, how to access the library and not be seen as a problem when they attend the library because of what they will get up to.

Ms O'KANE: Just to add to that, if you look at a lot of librarian programs during the day, they will actually offer quite a lot of early childhood programs. More and more libraries are offering activities during vacation care, however, there is very little on offer after school. So, it is sort of highlighting and raising as a focus that young people should be encouraged to use the library and not be treated as a menace, especially when they are transitioning. We heard about a project where an out-of-school-hours [OOSH] service had taken

children, just the year six students, out to local places in their local community. They had done this without funding. One was the library, but again the barrier was what was on offer for those young people if they did go to the library after school.

Ms MONRO-MILLER: Particularly when you get to that 12 to 14 year age group, they are potential trouble. You see them and think 'What are they going to get up to in the library?' It is about changing perceptions. I think I have provided a quote in our submission about how we treat our children and the need to actually be aware that they pick up on our feelings. Are 12 to 14-year-olds problems? If we treat them as problems, yes they will be problems. They like to respond to us in a positive way. We found that in our out-of-school-hours services if the 9 to 12-year-olds are seen as problems and hard to manage, they will behave accordingly. If they are seen as children who have opinions and want to be listened to and want fresh opportunities, then the minute they are engaged, they are a delightful group of kids to work with.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Following on the question about the use of local libraries, have people mentioned that after school there are not other services for that particular age group? Apart from perhaps utilising the libraries or how that is done with library staff, have there been discussions with, say, youth workers and other workers within local government? I realise that smaller councils do not have those workers, but large ones do and probably are better able to provide some of those things that you are talking about.

Ms O'KANE: I do not know whether you are aware, but there is a project called 'Better Futures' in New South Wales that actually funds projects for this age group. The eastern area covering five local government areas has a very successful project that operates on minimal funding because the Better Futures funding is a lot less than Families New South Wales funding, which is for the early childhood children. They have one worker who was funded and he resides in the Waverley Council area. He has done a lot of work with out-of-school-hours centres where he goes out and takes the young people to the youth centre in Bondi. What is really great about that project is that it operates on two levels. It has given that transition of young people into the next stage of service facility. A lot of parents are a bit reluctant to send their young children to a youth service without some sort of introduction. So, they go in there with a group of kids from the different out-of-school-hours centres and they are accessing wonderful resources because often the youth centres actually have very good facilities that are appealing to these young people. They go there once or twice a week. They are also accessing other activities. They are accessing younger older people as mentors for the young people. It is this sort of multi-layered project, but that is an isolated case. I know that the Better Futures funding, because I sit on one of the regional executive panels, has not increased and it is limited, but it would actually be really good to see that modelled in other areas.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: You mentioned five councils. Has that been done through the regional organisation or have five councils just agreed to apply for that funding?

Ms O'KANE: No, Better Futures covers five council areas and the one worker works across those five council areas.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Another recommendation you mentioned previously was a Child Impact Statement required by all levels of government. Can you discuss further about what actually is in one of these child impact statements, and which level of government has them at the moment? I am aware that Scotland, for instance, has them and other countries, but exactly what is in it?

Ms MONRO-MILLER: Currently in Australia there are no Child Impact Statements to our knowledge. What would be in it would relate to whatever decision or new legislation is coming in, it would be assessed in the same way you do an environmental impact statement. You look at what would be the impact on the children who would be either affected by this or in the community, which is what the legislation would look at. It would be an overview similar to your environmental impact statement only rather than looking necessarily at the environment you would be looking specifically at the children in the community or the children in whatever part the legislation is impacting on.

CHAIR: Is that similar to Family Impact Statements, because we do those?

Ms MONRO-MILLER: Yes. It would be very similar to that, but we are looking more specifically at children.

Ms O'KANE: A number of years ago Network did a lot of work around this area. One of the things I think is important when you look at a Child Impact Statement is planning. One of the things we wanted to have in local government legislation was that if a planning proposal came in and there was an assessment made, that you actually look at the fact that young people are going to live and probably be part of that community, and what is their access to open space: if they are living in a very condensed area and there are no plans for a local park or somewhere where they can play physical activities nearby to their house. We were talking about in some countries they actually said that if there is not a play facility on site, then there needs to be a park within walking distance. So you look at smaller parks rather than big regional parks so that kids can get out into their communities and access that because then they become the bugbear of all the other tenants and you start seeing the notices go up saying "no friends allowed", "no ball games", no this, no that, and it becomes a barrier to them actually participating in normal day-to-day activities.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. You have given us a lot to think about and a lot of good ideas. We really appreciate it.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

JENNIFER MARGARET BUCKLAND, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Children's Television Foundation, Level 3, 145 Smith Street, Fitzroy, Victoria, 3065, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: We have received a submission from your organisation. Do you wish this submission to form part of your evidence today?

Ms BUCKLAND: Yes, I do.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your attendance and for giving evidence before the Committee. We have your submission, but do you wish to make an opening statement?

Ms BUCKLAND: I feel as though we have covered that. We have tried to be as succinct as we could. I would really like to draw the Committee's attention to the report of the Australian Communications and Media Authority [ACMA] in December 2007. ACMA brought down a very substantial report that looked at media and communications in Australian families. That is a really relevant issue when we are looking at the lives of 9 to 14 year old children. It refers to the importance of media in the lives of children and puts it in context with other activities that children and families undertake. It discusses the role of media in Australian children's families. For 9 to 14 year old children, they found that television is still the most pervasive form of media that children engage with.

CHAIR: In your submission you refer to the fact that a lot of children's television programming is not reaching the intended audience. Can you speak more about why that is the case?

Ms BUCKLAND: Yes. In many ways we have a terrific system in Australia which supports the production of programs specifically for the 9 to 14 year old audience through the C television regulations, the children's television regulations, that ACMA administers. They require the commercial broadcasters to schedule each year 260 hours of programs for primary school age children, and it goes right up to 14, and within that 260 hours, 32 hours a year must be first-release Australian children's drama. They are very, very unique regulations because they do not just talk about inappropriate programs for children and what we do not want children to see but also about the other side of the coin, which is appropriate and quality programs for children and programs that we want children to see.

But the commercial broadcasters screen those programs at four o'clock in the afternoon. When you look at the way in which they schedule, the evening news is becoming earlier and earlier. They are running a commercial business and that is the time of day in which they find they can squeeze that one half-hour a day of children's programs, but that means that they are scheduled between programs such as *Judge Judy* and the *Bold and the Beautiful*, which are not appropriate for children and in which children are just not interested, anyway, in great numbers. In families today the majority of children are watching television in the early evening. They are watching after they have got home, after they have played in the daylight hours, after they have had sport, music lessons and done their homework, and the other thing that ACMA found was that 75 per cent of Australian families have rules around when children are able to watch television.

For most families, the convenient time to watch television is between 6 and 8 o'clock at night. After you have done the things I have mentioned, it is a wind-down activity. At that time of the day on free to air television we do not have appropriate programs for children. The programs that are made are subsidised by the taxpayer, usually the Commonwealth through the Film Finance Corporation, but also through State film bodies, like the New South Wales Film and Television Office. In our view, that fantastic investment in our children is squandered because the programs are on when they cannot see them.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Who funds the Australian Children's Television Foundation?

Ms BUCKLAND: It is a non-profit company limited by guarantee, and it receives contributions from the Commonwealth and each of the States and Territories. The contribution from the Commonwealth is 80 per cent of our overall funding, which is about $2.5 million a year, and then the States, New South Wales and Victoria, both contribute in the order of $245,000 a year, and the other States contribute smaller amounts. We sell around the world the programs that we get involved in investing in, and that money gets turned back into new productions.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: So the television channels do not have any—

Ms BUCKLAND: No, they do not support the ACTF.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Okay. You have recommended that shows should be provided between 6 and 9 o'clock, and I agree, but few children have access to their own television in that it is a time when families together watch the *Simpsons* or *Home and Away*. How do you deal with the fact that most of these families will continue to watch *Home and Away* because the kids want to be with their parents?

Ms BUCKLAND: What we would be doing is offering a choice. It is interesting when you look at the programs. We agree that children love to watch with their parents. A lot of the Australian children's drama that gets made, parents would actually like to watch with their children. I hazard a guess that some of the programs made would be seen by a lot families as being of far greater quality than are programs like *Home and Away*. That will not be the case in every house, but you would make those programs more visible and more there for Australian children. It was interesting in the ACMA report to see that Australia, compared to the United Kingdom, has a very low rate of televisions in bedrooms, which is very interesting. One in five children in Australia has a television in the bedroom, and that has not changed. In fact it decreased slightly since ACMA last reported in 1995 whereas the United States and the United Kingdom has more than three-quarters of children. Australian households however have more than one television: the average is three. ACMA suggests that that means there is one in the kitchen, one in the family room and often one in the parents' bedroom. There are places in the home for children to make choices, but we also contend that families would be interested in those choices and possibly engaging with them.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: How much would this cost, and who would pay?

Ms BUCKLAND: It would be an ABC children's channel. The Commonwealth would pay. At this point in time it would be part of the ABC's triennial funding submission and they would be asking for a figure of around about mid-twenties, $25-$26 million a year, to run that channel. It is not a huge amount of money to set up a new children's channel that would be 50 per cent Australian content. One of the reasons it is open to be done that way is that there is a lot of existing material that would form the backbone of that channel. The additional funds would be for new content and for introducing things like daily news services for children.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: What evidence is there that age-appropriate programs with pro-social messages can increase social capabilities, such as cooperation and tolerance towards others?

Ms BUCKLAND: As part of ACMA's review, there was a literature review where research from around the world was looked at. There is a hole at the moment in that there is not a specific Australian study. We are actually talking to a couple of academics about that at the moment. But there are a number of reviews around the world by academics who looked at the impact on young children of a program such as *Sesame Street*, for example, and its connection to literacy and numeracy, but also to the pro-social messages that are in those programs.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: They are studies looking at that for younger children?

Ms BUCKLAND: Yes.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: But there have not been any studies done in relation to older children?

Ms BUCKLAND: Not enough, in our view. Again, that is why we are talking to a couple of New South Wales academics about doing a long-form study to look into that.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: Going back to talk about a channel specifically for children in relation to children's programs, how successful have public broadcaster backed channels like that overseas been?

Ms BUCKLAND: They have been incredibly successful. I point to both Germany and the United Kingdom. In Germany when they originally introduced their children's channel, which was a joint venture of two public broadcasters and used spare spectrum, it was so successful initially that the pay television channel Nickelodeon closed down. Nickelodeon has since re-established itself in Germany, but the initial competition from a channel that was using all of their archives and had so much local German content, which German children showed they wanted, was very successful. It continues to this day to be a very successful channel, and

it is highly regarded by parents in Germany on all of their surveys and very popular with children. It is competitive with the pay television channels.

In the United Kingdom the BBC has two children's channels. It has a preschool channel and a channel for six to 12-year-old children. Those channels have been shown in a number of different reports as being very significant drivers of digital take-up in the United Kingdom where digital take-up is now over 70 per cent when families saw the potential or the opportunity to have a free-to-air children's channel with predominantly British content as being something that was a very attractive incentive for them to go digital. Again, the BBC children's channels compete head on with the commercial pay television channels which are screening predominantly American content very successfully. In addition to the entertainment content, they screen a lot more around news for children, around content that children themselves have sent into the BBC for screening. They do a broader range of genres and things for children and create a sense of citizenship that schools in the United Kingdom are beginning to tap into.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I note in your submission you want this children's station to have a half-hour children's news program. Do you have any evidence that the traditional television news is unsuitable for children aged nine to 14, or do you think it is unsuitable?

Ms BUCKLAND: I guess particularly for the younger end of that age group the news can be confusing. Often when studies have been done looking at different kinds of programming and how it affects children, they are much more concerned about the news than violent programming in fiction. When they can clearly distinguish that something is a story they find it much more troubling and worrying when it is actually real. We drew that example from the BBC's children's channel because they have such a successful news program for children called *Newsround*, which is one of the most top rating programs on their channel. In the United Kingdom it has outrated the *Simpsons*. *Newsround* deals with events as they occur. It has very qualified presenters who present everything. They are very careful in their language and they are careful with their presentation. Children have an opportunity to email questions to the news. There is a follow-up on the website. One of the reasons they suspect in the United Kingdom that it is so successful and rates so well is that they suspect that a lot of adults are watching that news service as well.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Do you have any evidence of other material that is on television as to whether it is suitable for children and young people, what kind of programs, and is there any specific evidence of differing impacts on children based on gender?

Ms BUCKLAND: Again, the ACMA research did not focus so strongly on gender but again they have looked at the issue of the sexualisation of children in certain media and whether or not those images are appropriate but also programs like *Big Brother*, those kinds of programs, where they are concepts that are beyond the comprehension and understanding of 9, 10, 11-year-olds to be seen and it is fairly clear that in most families people would prefer there to be other alternatives to that kind of material.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Is there any evidence that that is causing any negative impact on the children?

Ms BUCKLAND: No. In the United States there has been a lot of toing and froing between academics over the impact of violent programming on children and whether or not that desensitises children to violence and leads to more violent behaviours. As ACMA said when it looked at its review of all that literature, there tends to be quite a lot of fence sitting on that issue and for a long time people were arguing that there was little impact but the evidence seems to be turning around with people accepting that there is quite an impact. Again, it will depend on other social factors because children who are watching a lot of violent material, there may also be social factors, the kind of family they are in, the kinds of situations they are growing up in, that may also have an impact. So sometimes it is hard for the researchers to draw out and say, "It's the television program that caused that." It might be a range of factors.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: You have referred to the digital education revolution. For the Committee's sake, would you like to elaborate on the digital education revolution?

Ms BUCKLAND: The digital education revolution will need to involve more than just hardware. We submit it would need to involve content and it would be terrific if Australian programs were able to be made available to Australian schools to use in education settings. One thing we found with our programs is that teachers have found them to be a good source for stimulating discussion around different issues and getting

children thinking and analysing. We found that organisations like the learning federation, which is a Commonwealth organisation, often uses small pieces of programs and delivers them to schools as learning objects. So we would submit that when you have a children's channel and a lot of content being created, a use for that content, particularly as it is subsidised content provided by the Commonwealth, would be to make it available to schools in an ongoing way so that they are able to use that content but also for children to expand their own skills and develop content and send that to the children's channel to showcase their work and their expertise.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: What is your take on the effect of advertising on children as it is, and what plans would there be for advertising on this new television channel?

Ms BUCKLAND: The proposal would be that it would be a public ABC channel and that there would not be advertising on the channel. We are fortunate with the children's television standards that when those particular programs are screened at four o'clock the amount of advertising is restricted, as is the type of advertising. Broadcasters must get the advertisements classified as C for that time band as well. Obviously it is difficult to do that if we ask them to start screening programming later in the evening. That is an issue for a lot of families in terms of all sorts of advertising and whether or not it is appropriate for children. It is disingenuous to argue that advertising has no impact on children when advertising is designed to have an impact on all of us.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Is junk food advertising exempt during children's advertising times?

Ms BUCKLAND: No, they are not exempt but they are restricted in being able to advertise in characters during children's programs in the way in which they advertise. Last year we monitored how much fast food advertising occurs during that C slot and we found that it was rather limited and rare, and we suspected some self-censorship is going on and that there is a lot more fast food advertising around dinner time.

CHAIR: When you were talking about the BBC children's channel you said there was some user generated content. Can you talk a little more about that? Would that be envisaged for an Australian children's television channel, if there was such a thing, and how would that work?

Ms BUCKLAND: It could work in a number of ways. In the United Kingdom children are invited to submit programs. Sometimes they just submit programs off their own initiative and that gets sent in and if they are good enough they may go on air. They will also have particular campaigns. At the moment the children's BBC department is touring around the United Kingdom and running moviemaking workshops with children and giving them the skills and encouraging them to send in little films. Occasionally it will be done through the education sector so they might talk to the department of education of the United Kingdom and say that they are interested in running a series of children's impressions of living in the United Kingdom where children contribute material that then goes into a bigger program.

There was a program recently called *The Wrong Trainers*. Children recorded themselves talking about what it was like living in a disadvantaged family and not having the kinds of things they wanted. That was then turned into a program in which animators illustrated children's thoughts. It was another way in which children were engaged and contributed to the content of the programs. There are any number of ways. In Australia all the departments of education run film festivals and different initiatives. We encourage the ABC to connect with those kinds of initiatives because they are ways in which children from all sorts of backgrounds are able to contribute as the facilities are there and provided at school.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You recommend that children's viewing be from 6.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. You would obviously experience major resistance from the commercial channels because that is their highest-rating period for their news and current affairs programs.

Ms BUCKLAND: When we originally proposed this we thought, as you did, that the commercial broadcasters might not like the idea. But sometimes you end up with strange bedfellows. I think at the moment the commercial broadcasters quite like the idea of an Australian children's channel because they are looking at ways in which they can stop broadcasting in both analog and digital and help accelerate the take-up of digital. It is expensive for all the broadcasters to be transmitting in analog and digital. So they have come to look at the idea that there be multiple digital channels as offering content that would therefore encourage people to go over to digital. A few years ago channel 7 and channel 10 said they would not use their digital capacity and have second channels, but now they are saying they are going to launch standard definition channels. So in order to have a really good offering of free digital channels, the ABC having a children's channel is regarded by them as

being quite a positive step. The industry group that would be unhappy with this proposal is the pay television industry because it would be seen as being direct competition for the Disney and Nickelodeon channels—the children's channels that are in subscription homes.

CHAIR: If there were an Australian children's television channel would it relieve the free-to-air channels of providing children's content? Would they think they no longer had to provide children's programs?

Ms BUCKLAND: Down the track they may well make that argument but until you have total turn-off of the analog signal so that everybody has access to digital television, I do not think they would succeed with that argument on an equity basis. But I think down the track they will argue for greater flexibility anyway. Frankly, this is a service that Australian families and children need. You would need to look at how those programs were provided if we let the commercial broadcasters off the hook. This proposal is of course based on the fact that there are programs being made pursuant to the standards that are being aired only once or twice and we are keen to see them go to a digital children's channel.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. It has been very interesting to hear what you have had to say. We appreciate your coming to Sydney to give evidence.

Ms BUCKLAND: Thank you.

(The witness withdrew.)

GRANT RAYMOND DE FRIES, Chief Commissioner, Scouts Australia New South Wales, Level 1, Quad 3 102 Bennelong Parkway, Sydney Olympic Park, Sydney, and

SUSAN KATHLEEN METCALF, Board member, State Executive Committee, Scouts Australia New South Wales, Level 1, Quad 3, 102 Bennelong Parkway, Sydney Olympic Park, Sydney, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Welcome to the Committee. We have received your submission, which we appreciate very much. Are you happy for this submission to form part of your evidence today?

Mr DE FRIES: Yes, we are.

CHAIR: Thank you. Do you wish to make some opening comments?

Mr DE FRIES: Over the past 100 years the scout movement in Australia has taught millions of young Australians resourcefulness, self-reliance, leadership, decision making and concern for their community and environment through peer-to-peer learning and support. We are one of the few, if not the only, youth organisation to provide this method of learning through all stages of a young person's involvement in scouting. Scouting is the largest youth development organisation in Australia and is a leader in the non-formal education sector. Australiawide, scouting has around 60,000 male and female members in its centenary year and operates through the efforts of 13,000 leaders and countless non-uniform supporters—we cannot begin to know how many there are. In New South Wales we have around 17,000 members. Approximately 3,000 of those are leaders and the rest are young people aged from six to 26.

It is our view that the period from nine to 14 years is particularly challenging for young people as they undergo physical changes that turn them from children to young adults. During this transition they experience increasing freedom and exposure to all different aspects of society. They need to learn the skills required to cope with the issues that confront them. Unfortunately, often young children are denied opportunities to grow and extend themselves because of overwhelming concerns about safety and security. Recent reports have referred to such things as "cottonwool kids" and "helicopter parents". I became familiar with the latter phrase not so long ago. I wondered what it was until someone explained that the parents hover over the kids like helicopters, frightened they will bruise their knee or break something. It is our view that young people should be encouraged to take calculated risks, encouraged to test their limits, embrace the new things they experience and learn from those experiences. By being exposed to those experiences, they will increasingly come to know themselves and determine how they can contribute to a fair and just community and how they fit into the world community as well.

In that regard, scouting is present in 155 countries throughout the world and has almost 60 million members. It provides a unique opportunity to its members to gain international experience at all ages through national and international events as well as through scouting on the Internet. Young people need to be equipped to make the right decisions for their own, and others', wellbeing. Scouting comprehensively fills the role of equipping them with life skills to be able to take their place in society. Structures in scouting such as the troop council and the patrol system in the scout section particularly, which caters for young people between the ages of 10 and 15 years, formalises this peer support in a systemic way that is managed by the youth members themselves. They have great participation in the actual decision making of their peers and what happens in their troop or group.

It is a core policy of scouting that young people should be involved in decision making at all levels. In fact, in New South Wales we have a youth advisory council for scouts whose representatives span the ages of 8 to 26. This body makes recommendations to me on all areas of scouting—and I assure the Committee that they are never backward in coming forward with their opinions. They never seem to be intimidated by adults in fancy uniforms or by any situation. It is also important to recognise that the leaders who deliver the scout program undertake compulsory accredited training delivered by the Scouts Australia Institute of Training specific to the section they will be in. This training covers not only the scout program specific to that section but also explores the developmental issues associated with that particular age group.

It is our view that social policy should recognise the importance of mentoring for young people who are experiencing the transition from childhood to adulthood and seek to assist organisations such as Scouts that are providing it. I commend our submission to the Committee and in particular the Government initiatives we propose as outlined on page 8 of our submission.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Susan, do you want to add to the opening comments or are you happy to contribute throughout the questions?

Ms METCALF: I am happy to contribute when appropriate.

CHAIR: Okay. Grant, maybe you could tell us more about how peer support is provided through Scouts, particularly focusing on that 10-14 age group, but more broadly if it is relevant.

Mr DE FRIES: The core fundamental of Scouting since day one has been learning by doing. You do not sit down in front of a blackboard and watch somebody write, you actually do things. The peer support relates to the fact that Scouts teach other Scouts their skills. The program is graded, particularly in this age group, in three different levels. It is a requirement that the people in the top two levels teach the people in the lower levels the skills they have learnt themselves. These are their peers and this is how they are taught. The patrol system consists of six Scouts, or in Cubs section, which is 8-11 years, six Cubs. They have a leader and an assistant leader for the six. The leader and assistant leader lead that patrol. They coordinate the patrol in its activities and learning experiences and they go on patrol camps together, so they do all the planning and coordinating together, obviously under the auspices of the leaders. As leaders we try to encourage them as much as we can to adopt the responsibility that leadership provides. Of course, they have to learn how to coax other young people the same age to do the things they want them to do. That itself is a challenge. That is how peer learning works. When I was a Scout Leader it was incumbent on me to make sure that these young people knew how to do things themselves and how to teach other people to do things themselves. That was my responsibility.

Ms METCALF: I would add to that that one of the things that Scouts provides that is unique is an opportunity for mixed-age children to work together outside the school environment, so they are not in an age group team, they are not in an under-14s or an under 10s. They are in a group potentially of children between 8 and 11 and 10 and 15. That not only bridges appropriate age groups but also goes across the transition from primary to high school. It means that children have connections in their community and support outside their school environment across that transition.

Mr DE FRIES: I think that is important because you then have a cross-section of age groups in each patrol, or six as they are called in Cubs, where you might have a 10½-year-old, a 12-year-old, a 13-year-old, a 14-year-old and two 14½-year-olds. They have to learn to interact with each other in a non-threatening social environment. In reality they do not do that at school or in sports because they are age based. It is quite true we are mixed; we have had girls in Scouts for 20-odd years now. We have had girls in higher age groups for far longer but certainly in the Scouts section for that long. It is quite often an interesting social dynamic to watch girls of different age ranges interact with boys of different age ranges because they do not do that at school either, at least not from my experience when I was a kid and when my kids were kids. They get in their own social clusters. They do not do that in Scouts, and that interaction also is important.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: I have had some involvement in Scouting. I think it is the most wonderful thing. When I was doing it, which is only about five or six years ago, parents who were single mothers often saw Scouts as a place for difficult children. It was one place they could access a positive male role model. Is that a local or a statewide problem and how do Scouts plan to address it?

Mr DE FRIES: I am not an expert in the field of that social dynamic but I can say from anecdotal evidence that we have had a number of situations where the only place that young male children especially can get any sort of adult male role model is in Scouting, particularly in the age groups we are talking about. A majority of Scout Leaders—they are aged 10 to 15—are males and in the Cubs section, which is the 8-11 age group, there are a lot of females but also some males as well. That is the dynamic. That has come about, I think, probably because of the skill-based levels needed in the particular sections. Certainly I know of occasions, anecdotally, where mothers have said, "We need to have a male role model and we need someone to provide it." This may sound a bit left field but the young people also get the right male role models from their peers. The 11-year-olds are not sure how a 14 or 15-year-old is supposed to react because they only see them in a school environment. Now they have the opportunity to see a 14 or 15-year-old react in a social environment with a sense of responsibility and structure that they otherwise may not get.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: That leads to my next question. Is finding Scout Leaders becoming an increasing issue?

Mr DE FRIES: Yes it is. I think that is endemic to any volunteer organisation. People are time-poor. As I mentioned, we have training that we make them do. There is a standing joke that when you take on the responsibility of a Scout Leader you only have to commit two hours a week. The joke is that that is all you have left after doing work, Scouting and family! If they want to come in we tell them they have to do this training and they have to give us a commitment. So it is difficult. We have come up with some strategies to look at how we can deal with that. We have situations where some leaders are on shift work. We have what I call shift leaders. They might be a member of the group but they can only do two weeks a month. Then we have another leader who can do the other two weeks a month. We try to be as flexible as we can to give them that opportunity. We are in the process now of negotiating with the Australian Army Defence Families Association. They have young people who obviously go around the countryside with their families and they are dislocated. The philosophy is that the one constant wherever they go is Scouting. If they start Scouting in Point Cook, for example, and transfer to Williamtown, they can just shift into the Scout group because the program, philosophy and structure are the same. The parents who are not in uniform are saying this gives their children a structure and consistency they do not get anywhere else. Everything is the same—the uniform, the badges, the delivery of the program. That is another benefit we are looking at doing.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: Grant, you are preaching to the converted here, mate. It amazes me that you have an organisation in which the kids can go abseiling, kayaking, hiking, camping, learn bush survival skills, leadership skills and development, etcetera, and yet you are having trouble getting young people and families involved. Kids and communities complain of boredom in this age group and having nothing to do, but most communities have a Cubs and Scouts group and yet families do not get involved with Scouts. It is seen is some ways as nerdish or not cool yet they are probably the coolest and best things kids could possibly do. What can you and the community do to help promote the values and excitement of it?

Mr DE FRIES: You forgot a couple of things. We have our own air wing, so you can learn to fly and we can also go scuba diving, caving, skiing, sailing—we have got them all. Yes, Scouts in the past did have a somewhat nerdy image—the little old lady being helped across the road by a Cub in a hat. Cute. It works until they are about 11. After that you have got it. That is my challenge as the Chief Commissioner. When I grew up the whole community owned the Scout hall. We built it. It was our Scout hall. Now it is the Scout hall down the road where the kids make a noise and disturb our evenings. The challenge for my group and me is to turn that around. I think we are being successful; our numbers are growing. They are certainly not where they were in the '60s when we had 40,000 in New South Wales alone, but our numbers are starting to increase because I think people are starting to realise the very things that I said in my opening: they can find no other places to teach their kids life skills.

My wife is an infants schoolteacher and she tells me of young people she has who cannot make a decision. They have to be told to go and eat their playlunch or to come back and sit in the class or go play in the yard. I think we have a subset of young people who just need us. In my group there was an elder brother and when he left his parent brought his younger brother in and said, "Do to him what you did to the other one." I did not quite know how to take that at the time. He was basically saying, "You've got the capacity to teach our young people; do it." To pick up your point, that is our challenge: to say to society we are an organisation that can do that, and we have to. I have a brilliant team around me and the executive committee is focused on giving me the capacity to be able to deliver the programs.

Ms METCALF: I would add that like so many other not-for-profit organisations we are very focused on our energies being in community, working in community and doing everything that we can for kids. Self-promotion is not necessarily something for which we have core skills or are necessarily all that interested in. We have an interest in ensuring that those kids get everything they want. You would know that the people that scouting attracts are focused on ensuring that those kids are well looked after. They would rather do that than promote something to someone who might or might not be interested.

Mr DE FRIES: About 18 months ago the Scouts identified that there was a business of scouting and a game of scouting. It is important for me to focus on delivering the game of scouting and for us to have a set of commercial young people with marketing and social experience to manage the business of scouting. Dynamic-wise I am uniform, I go and out and give things to the kids, but my committee manages the money, the finances, the structure and the assets. While I cannot go to them and say, "Give me all the money you have so that I can go and do all these wonderful things", the focus has certainly been split that way and it has been very successful.

Ms METCALF: Hence the reason we are here today.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: How important is it for children and young people in the nine-year-old to 14-year-old age group to learn about the world around them through participating in activities?

Mr DE FRIES: I think it is crucial. I speak from experience after attending world Scout jamborees. I have attended four jamborees and I have taken young people there. Last year I took some young people to England to celebrate the centenary of scouting and 155 countries were represented. There is no other social dynamic that I know in which you can sit down 14-year-olds in an area where there are people from 10 different countries around them—cultures, languages, attitudes, and all those sorts of things. You cannot get that anywhere else. Young people have come to me afterwards and said, "I am a different person now from the person I was when I came over because I have had that social exposure."

It is all right to say, "You see it on the news, you see it on CNN, but until you touch it, feel it, smell it and talk to it you cannot get an appreciation of the broader global community." One of the crucial things we have at every one of our national and international events is a thing called a global village. We use that as a specific activity to assist people to understand that they are part of a global village. That is an area in which scouting is unique. I can walk into a Scout hall in any of those 155 countries and know that I am dealing with people who have the same thoughts, ideals and principles. Last year there were 40,000 people in a field in England at 8.00 a.m. on 1 August all saying the same thing, at the same time, with the same spirit. It was brilliant, but it was scary.

Ms METCALF: Could I pick up on your learning by doing question? There are opportunities within Scouts to learn by doing that simply are not available elsewhere. As the mother of a Scout there are things that he does in scouting that I, as a mother, am horrified about. Scout leaders and the structures of scouting have faith in those children and they deliver in spades every time.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: On the last page of your submission you make some recommendations or suggestions. Your second recommendation, which caught my eye, relates to prioritising family as a mandatory social and policy decision parameter, thereby making it more acceptable for adults to dedicate time to family activities. How do we go about achieving that? What ideas do you have?

Mr DE FRIES: I can answer your question in this way. In scouting we have the concept that we do not just have, as Susan said, the scout; we encourage family involvement. We have family camps and family outings where we encourage parents to participate in activities. I suppose that partly answers your question. We put on structured family activities because we do not believe that we deal with young people in isolation. We have to deal with them but how do we do it in the broader community? I wish I knew. It is the work-life balance issue. I can speak only from personal experience. I am experienced, in particular, in my organisation.

The work-life balance has started to become a bit more pre-eminent than it was a number of years ago, even in my previous employment. It is okay if your children are sick and you have to take time off. It is okay if you leave work early because you have a commitment involving a young person. When my children were young I made a conscious decision to work in occupations where I had flexibility, but that was a personal thing. I wanted to be there for the Easter bonnet parade, the swimming carnival and all the other things that we do as families.

I think we have to make it socially acceptable to do that. How do we do that? I think we play our part by saying that it is socially acceptable to be a family in a structured environment. When you join an organisation you join as a family. We are finding that that also brings a bit of social cohesion because people then have a social group, independent of just the Scouts, the Cubs, or parents. I have friends who are part of my social group whom I met when I was 15 in scouting. I am lucky, but that is the way that it works. I do not know whether that completely answers your question.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Should the Government be more directly involved in promoting family friendly work hours and so on to give families time to get together?

Mr DE FRIES: One of the things I thought of—Susan and I were discussing it on the way in—is that we have difficulties in getting leaders because they cannot get time off work. Next week I have to go to a meeting in Melbourne on Thursday night, so I have to take a day's leave. It sounds a bit radical but we give leave to members of the Defence Force Reserve. If you are a member of an organisation such as scouting and you have to commit time, effort and energy to it, why is there not a provision for employers to give them leave,

within reason, to spend time to do it? To answer your question, we may have the capacity to attract leaders but it also frees up more of their time to give to their families and it increases the social responsibility concept.

Ms METCALF: Outside the scouting circles we need voices of people like you and anyone else with a high profile. Introducing the language of families around decisions starts to permeate the message that this is important. Even if we do not go to extreme measures, in the past proposals about family impact statements, decisions ,and so on are difficult to work through. Perhaps we do not need to go to those extremes. If people of influence, of profile, of community weight are at least saying, "Think about your family in this decision", or "I have children, and that will mean something to me", at least it starts to build a social consciousness that family is critical and it needs to be part of the decision set. It is not just about economic circumstances, it is not just about efficiency, and it is not just about the money; it is about how we as a society as a whole can best operate in all our interests. Ultimately, children do not have the same voice.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: You talked earlier about having to take time off to go to a meeting. It is a shame that there no programs are provided through juvenile justice for some of these troubled kids—programs such as self-development or self-esteem camps such as Camp Eagle Eye and other camps around the State. The programs that are offered at those camps make the kids believe in themselves. They need to get away from the crowd that they are hanging with. However, it comes back to the question of having personnel to run those camps, does it not, and you are not in a position to do that?

Mr DE FRIES: I inform the Committee that a couple of scout groups have been created in police and community youth clubs, or PCYCs, and the specific target has been troubled kids. We have used the scout method for those kids. They are not into boxing or the other things that those PCYCs have. We have done a few trials to try to focus these young people through scouting. There has been a bit of success and we have achieved some success stories. We do not claim to be 100 per cent perfect with them, but that is one of the strategies that we have looked at. Certainly our camps are there—you are right. Sometimes I reflect on the fact that some commercial organisations are praising these 10-day camps they do for young people in trouble and all they are doing is taking the scout method and applying it in those circumstances.

CHAIR: I think Duke of Edinburgh programs are prevalent in juvenile detention centres. A number of juveniles become involved in Duke of Edinburgh programs.

Mr DE FRIES: That is right.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: I refer to the nine-year-olds to 14-year-olds. There is not much for that age group that is common to football and rugby league. How much of it is an issue for the scouts?

Mr DE FRIES: The average life expectancy of young people in our movement is about 18 months to two years, or maybe three years. That tends to reflect the churn in the sporting organisations. We have a classic pyramid where we have a lot of joeys, a lot of cubs, slightly fewer scouts, and even fewer venturers, so we have that pyramid. My focus has been on retaining and recruiting people, but also saying it is okay if you want to have two years off and not do scouting. I have got children in it who did not feel the pressure that their godfather was the chief commissioner when they lobbed to the local Scout group. Their mother rang me and said, "I am terribly sorry at they are going to have to leave scouting because they have some school commitments. You are going to be angry." I said, "Absolutely not." It is okay to take time off, go and explore something else, but when you are deciding in two years time what you want to do, think about us again. That is how I see the strategy we should adopt. Certainly we would like to cling to them in desperation and not let them out the door, but we have to be realists. Young people are very restless creatures.

Ms METCALF: We know also that within the time that they are in Scouts that they will have been through a cycle of activities that will have exposed them to most of the things the organisation is great at. So even if they do not come back in two years time, they will have a very good grounding and experience in what is possible.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: What could the New South Wales Government do for you?

Ms METCALF: Do you want a list?

Mr DE FRIES: We are on the record, Madam Chair, are we not?

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: Three things, money, money, money.

Ms METCALF: Not necessarily.

Mr DE FRIES: Certainly government support in the fact that if we are looking to do things and try new things, if there is a necessity for us to negotiate to achieve eminence, that is a very tangible thing that the N.S.W Government can do for us. To provide a somewhat practical example, we have a brilliant scout facility that I would invite you all to visit called Cataract Scout Park. In 1982, maybe a little earlier, we decided to hold a world scout jamboree. We had nowhere to hold it. So we came to the government and I think Bill Crabtree was the Minister at the time. He said, "I have got some land asset cataract. Why don't you have that?" We are not saying that you have to give us all the land, but it certainly was a facilitation of helping us achieve our plans. We are looking at a number of ways we can approach government with projects. We are not naive enough to think that we go along and said, "Give us some money, you will." But we would like to think that if we came along and say, "This is a project which we think can benefit young people through scouting" that we would have the capacity to get a listening ear. how we go about it, that is a crucial thing I would see that the Government could assist us with.

Ms METCALF: We would table a fairly specific request in addition to that we have talked about. We understand that within the education system there is someone specifically responsible for Duke of Edinburgh. You are probably aware that Duke of Edinburgh generally kicks in at a bit higher age: 14, 16, 18. Having someone like that responsible for scouting within the education system would be a huge benefit not only to the education system and children in the system but it would open up myriad opportunities for both.

Mr DE FRIES: To pick up on Susan's comment, quite often we go to schools at a local level, but it is very much at the whim of the headmaster if he is keen on new being there. That is certainly a very tangible thing. And I would imagine not a very costly thing to be able to do and set up.

Ms METCALF: It would provide a fairly system approach to some integration capacity in a lot of communities.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: To directly promote Scouts in schools?

Mr DE FRIES: And co-ordinated, exactly. At one stage we tried to put on paid staff to go into the schools and promote Scouts and then do links with local groups. I would like to think—this is going away out there—we could look at after-school care for young kids. Why not run a cub pack or a joey mob through the school system? It is an hour, an hour and a half, maybe two hours and you are looking after them giving them a structure. You have all the capacity to do that in a system that is already there.

CHAIR: Thank you Grant and Susan. We appreciate your time.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

VIVIENNE JACQUELINE MARTIN, Facilitator, Schools as Communities Centre, Marrickville South Interagency, Marrickville West Public School, Livingstone Road, Marrickville,

JULIE ANN ROBINSON, Director, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, Yabsley Avenue, Marrickville,

LEE THOMAS SHIELDS, Club Manager, Newcastle Police and Community Youth Clubs, corner of Young and Melbourne Road, Broadmeadow, and

LOREN ANNE RIDDELL, University Student, University of Newcastle, 11 Alderson Street, Shortland, affirmed and examined:

LAURA ANN WILLIAMS, Youth Resource and Development Worker, South Penrith Youth and Neighbourhood Services, Town Terrace, Glenmore Park, and

LUCINDA MARGARET SOPHIE MALCOLM, Family Support Worker, Marrickville South Interagency, 44 Frampton Avenue, Marrickville, sworn and examined;

CHAIR: The Committee has received submissions from your organisations. Are you happy for these submissions to form part of your evidence?

Mr SHIELDS: Yes.

Ms ROBINSON: Yes.

Miss MALCOLM: Yes.

CHAIR: Loren, will you state your occupation and the capacity in which you are appearing before the Committee?

Miss RIDDELL: I am a second year university student at the University of Newcastle. I prepared the submission on behalf of the PCYC.

CHAIR: Thank you. It was a very comprehensive submission, so well done. Are people happy to have five minutes for opening comments? Shall we start with you, Vivienne?

Ms MARTIN: Okay.

CHAIR: Tell us a little about what you do and the issues that you perceive for this age group.

Ms MARTIN: Okay. I should have mentioned earlier that I am here in the capacity of being a member of the Marrickville South Interagency. My area is Schools As Community Centres that falls under the Families New South Wales umbrella, which is serving families who are raising children nought to eight. I am really glad to see Julie Robinson here representing the Marrickville Youth Resource Centre. The youth service is servicing children and adolescents 12 years and upwards. I think that exemplifies a gap and what we call the "tweens" that all of a sudden these sorts of services are trying to target, such as disadvantaged families who are falling between that gap, between the 8 year olds and the 12 year olds. I was going to go into some of the issues about children hanging around outside the Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, but I think I will leave it to Julie.

Ms ROBINSON: That is fine. I can talk about those issues.

Ms MARTIN: Also I want to make a very crude distinction between children from advantaged families and disadvantaged families—but of course we know there is a whole spectrum there. For the purpose of this hearing, I will simplify that. We find that if children come from more advantaged backgrounds, there is an array of things that they can tap into. If they have professional working families or working families, there is after-school care and vacation care. If you have money, you can go to sports, you can go to ballet and music and a whole range of activities after school. Children from more disadvantaged families find that much more difficult.

Also I think there is a bit of an inherent danger sometimes when we are sort of breaking children up into age categories because very often families span a whole age range. I think you will find that the resource centre that the children who do not qualify to go in, those who are under 12, are also caring for younger siblings. I know some of the families that come to my program who have a new born baby, that is, a baby born last week, and an 18 month old, and then we have a 6 year old with a disability, and then a 9 year old and a 10 year old. Those 9 and 10 year olds are some of the children who are out on the street and hanging around in the parks. Mum is very tied up with her new children in the house. The children are not going to stay around at home and will wander out.

The children of course who are out on the street are at risk. They not only ride around without their bicycle helmets, but they are at risk of predators—older people who may be involved in some criminal activities, such as drugs and all those sorts of things. They are incredibly at risk. In some cases children do not want to stay at home because they are dealing with such things as family violence or drug and alcohol abuse. Some of our families also have mental illness and are trying to parent the best way they can, but it is always hard if people are having an episode. I am going to leave some of this to Julie, to talk about how this came about, because the issue about the kids hanging around in the holidays was raised at a Marrickville family interagency or Children and Family Services Interagency as well as Marrickville South.

The response from that child and family committee was that Anglicare took the lead and decided to trial the program that was run basically by Luci, who was then a student, and by pulling resources from other agencies, with the local church providing the premises. They ran a two-week holiday program between 9 and 3. I saw some of those children after the Fresh program, and they said it was the best holiday that they had had. They really loved it. If children are provided with the opportunity to engage in positive, physical, creative behaviour where they are well cared for, then they are obviously going to respond in much more pro-social ways. It was very successful, but it was not sustainable in the long term to keep it running like that. About half the children were Aboriginal and we put forward an Aboriginal worker for the program as well.

I just wanted to say that all families want the best for their kids, even when they are doing it tough. The program provides a welcome relief to families who know their children are safe, being cared for, and having a good time. The Fresh program is also planning to run with some council support for the next holiday program, and I will pass around this leaflet.

Miss MALCOLM: There are only four of them, but it is a proposal that we put to the Marrickville Council and the Department of Community Services [DOCS]. The steering committee was formed as part of the Marrickville South Interagency. That is the proposal that is basically for the project that I am currently coordinating for Fresh for the July holidays. That explains a lot of what Fresh is about and the aims that we hope to cover.

Ms ROBINSON: I think one of the things with the Fresh program is that it is going to be based in schools. Like the previous speaker was saying, schools can be hubs of the community, like the service I work in and the SACC program. Actually placing a program like this in schools provides that sort of networking opportunity and a safe haven for that age group. I think we need to look at the whole thing as an early intervention and prevention strategy. Certainly Families New South Wales is doing that with the under-age group, but it does not stop there. I think it is a really worthwhile investment and involves a lot less in terms of resources than Families New South Wales to put those supports in for vulnerable families with children aged between 9 and 14.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Vivienne. Lucinda, do you wish to add anything to what Vivienne said? Do you want to talk about the material you have given us?

Ms MALCOLM: The Fresh program for this July holidays and the following school term up towards the October holidays will be evaluated by an external evaluator, which will be very important to be able to work out what can be an ongoing thing for the future of the Fresh program. We want to get ongoing funding for this program. Being able to externally evaluate that will be very important to be able to work through the things that worked and the things that did not work for a better project for next time.

CHAIR: What is the age group for the Fresh program and where did it come from?

Miss MALCOLM: The age group is the eight to 12-year-olds. It came from the gap between the services in the Marrickville area, so the gap between the youth starting at 12 and the family child services finishing at eight. That is that eight to 12 gap there, the kids are not getting services.

Ms MARTIN: Maybe we should add also that the police had mentioned that they were getting more and more complaints. Are you going to talk about that?

Ms ROBINSON: I can talk about plenty of other stuff, let me assure you. If you want me to give a history, that is fine.

Ms MARTIN: There has been a lot more complaints to the police about under 12s getting into mischief of one kind or another, petty crime—

Ms ROBINSON: Climbing trees, lighting fires in the bin—

Ms MARTIN: During the trial of the Fresh program last July no incidents were reported.

CHAIR: Maybe now would be a good time for you to explain what your service does and how it links in with what we have already heard from Ms Martin and Ms Malcolm.

Ms ROBINSON: We work with 12 to 24-year-olds. As Ms Martin said, 12-year-olds often have younger siblings. Also, the Marrickville area has quite a high indigenous population and a high culturally and linguistically diverse background. Particularly at the moment we are seeing an emerging community of some of the African communities so they often come through refugee backgrounds as well. There are a whole lot of issues around parents who are often working so it is often left to the siblings to care for each other. What we were finding was that that under-12 age group, we had lots of younger kids hanging in the park, climbing trees. The amount of times I would walk out and they would be climbing on my roof and I would be screaming out the window, going, "No, you've got to get down before you fall." We took it to the interagency because we were not in the position to pick up this particular age group.

CHAIR: Can you just explain why not?

Ms ROBINSON: Particularly in terms of one of our concerns was having nine-year-olds in the youth centre with 16-year-olds. It is a very different development stage and they may have different needs. We were not prepared to just kind of go, "Yeah, okay, you can come into the centre." There are also issues around duty of care and all those other contexts. So we took it to the interagencies. We kept talking about it, and thankfully Anglicare took it up, and I have to say when they ran it in July last year the young people who had been hanging in the park during the day were outside our front door before 9 o'clock. Any of you who have children, on school holidays do you ever know them to get up before 9 o'clock in the morning? I do not. So they were there, they were dressed, they were hanging for the bus to pick them up, and they went and there was not a problem. It was fantastic that that particular group got picked up.

This age group of the nine to 14-year-olds is one of the biggest challenges we face as a community because it is a group that has such a diverse range of needs. It needs a holistic approach. It needs more than just one little solution. At the moment the way the Government is going particularly in a lot of the early intervention focus that is happening, my understanding of early intervention is that it was never based on an age factor but what seems to be happening at the moment is that it is very much on an age factor. There is lots of funding out there for the under-8s but it is very difficult in terms of trying to look at this particular group. It also has lots of transition periods in it. There is all the stuff around adolescent development which is quite unique. Part of being an adolescent is becoming this independent person. They way that you do that is you push boundaries. Pushing boundaries annoys people, not just in schools but it annoys parents and family and friends.

It is often a time of conflict. Some of it is minor conflict; some of it is quite major conflict. It is a time of experimenting. It is a time of trying to break away from your family. You are becoming more dependent on your peers. If you have great peers who are very connected, fantastic. If you have peers who maybe a bit more involved in some of the more antisocial behaviour, it becomes a lot harder to stand up to some of that stuff for some young people, not all. It is an age group that has the potential to be quite difficult. If you look at some of the ways the Department of Community Services responds to reports of risk of harm, it is hard to get them to respond because of some lack of resources to that age group. Very much the focus has become the younger age group, and I think that is a danger for us. I think adolescence is such a time that if you look at some of the

statistics around child protection particularly there is a peak time of reporting in that nought to three age group, and then there is another peak which is that 12 to 14 age group.

As someone who works directly with that group, it is very hard to get a response from the department unless it is quite a serious case. That is something that as a community we need to be thinking about. Also, there is more pressure put on to parents around working, particularly with the rising cost of living these days. There will be potentially a gap around things like after-school care and school holidays. I know lots of the families we deal with, there is no way they can afford to send their young people to vacation care. It is just too expensive. We run a school holiday program every two weeks of every holidays, and it is always popular. We try to keep our costs down quite substantially. If going to Laserzone costs us $20, we charge the young people and their families $5. If we know the family cannot afford that, we will subsidise that. I think there is a need for those things as well because that helps build resilience for young people, and you need to keep building self-esteem and resilience for young people so that they can cope with every day pressures of growing and giving them a chance.

With this group, we find that you need to be able to offer a range of services, and you need to be able to look at it holistically. It cannot just be one solution. For us, one of the biggest challenges is education. This age group moves from being in primary school to high school, and I think that is one of the biggest difficulties with the education system in terms of that sometimes that transition is really good and there is support put in place but other times it is really hard for some young people, particularly if they are struggling at school. We have a number of young people who find it particularly difficult, and they are the ones who are most likely to leave school before year 10. We do two education projects. We do a links to learning project but we have also just started up a partnership as a pilot with Petersham Outreach TAFE to look at targeting indigenous young people who have left school before getting year 10, called Koori access year 10, so that they can go back and get year 10. If young people do not have a minimum school certificate, they struggle. They will not be able to do any other education training. More and more TAFE makes the requirement that they need a school certificate. That is one of the challenges for this age group.

CHAIR: Mrs Williams, do you want to tell us a bit about Spyns and some of the issues you have observed for this age group?

Mrs WILLIAMS: I have a statement that I will read because I am not that good at speaking off the cuff. I guess I work to promote resilience in young people and safe communities for them to live in. I am employed by Spyns Incorporated and funded by the Department of Community Services under the CSGP program. My position of resource and development worker for Penrith LGA brings me into contact with a variety of issues that impact upon the lives of young people living in Penrith. Spyns Incorporated received funding from the Department of Community Services in 2006 through Better Futures to present a conference for principals and deputy principals in the Nepean region on middle school transition and young people. The middle school years are considered from about year 5 to year 8, covering children 9 to 14 years old. During this time some students experience social isolation, alienation and reduced educational progress.

Two key factors to come out of this conference were effective transitions require the establishment of positive connections between young people, families, educators and the community. The second is that effective transition programs facilitate a young person's development as a capable learner. Partnerships between schools and community-based organisations can assist and support young people and their parents, either through quality after-school activities or via programs provided within the school environment. Examples of successful programs that assist this transition time and are provided by Spyns include Making Tracks, a program funded by Better Futures. Making Tracks is an Aboriginal specialist program that uses hands-on learning, Aboriginal cultural experiences and family support activities to increase the engagement of indigenous young people and their families with school. The program consists of two components: a worker who provides activities within the school and a family worker who assists to make closer connections between the families and the school.

Spyns is also funded to facilitate Friends For Life training to teachers, youth workers and community workers. This program was developed by Pathways Health and Research Centre. The project is also funded under the Better Futures strategy. The Pathways Friends For Life Program aims to prevent childhood anxiety and depression through the application of firm cognitive behavioural principles and the building of emotional resilience. The program helps children and young people aged seven to 17 years to cope with feelings of fear, worry and depression by building resilience and self-esteem and teaching cognitive behavioural and emotional skills in a simple, well-structured format. Developed in Australia, it is the only program of its kind acknowledged by the World Health Organization for its 10 years of comprehensive evaluation and practice.

Investments in programs to support early intervention and prevention initiatives assist in supporting young people during the middle school transition phase. Spyns has produced a manual called "Getting It Together—Making a Difference with School and Community Partnerships" from the Working With Young People and Schools Project. The manual supports our position, stating, "There is growing recognition that the task of supporting young people is not the responsibility of schools alone. It is a whole-of-community responsibility, including the contribution of parents, teachers and community-based service providers. Where school communities and service providers are able to establish effective partnerships there is a much greater chance of developing comprehensive, integrated responses to the needs of young people." I have four copies of this manual for reference by the Committee.

For young people at risk, it has been identified through research that education plays a vital role in determining directions in people's lives. Tony Vinson, author of the "Community Adversity and Resilience" report, speaks strongly of the links between the importance of education and overcoming or avoiding disadvantage. In the nine-to-14 age group there are increasing numbers of young people impacted by isolation, alienation, poverty and disadvantage. This disadvantage manifests as a number of social indicators, such as domestic and family violence, involvement in the juvenile justice system, substance use, youth homelessness and young people affected by mental illness. Research suggests that this group of young people often fails in formalised schooling or become disengaged altogether.

To address disadvantage requires a strategic whole-of-government approach coordinated with other State, Federal and local government initiatives to address personal, social and societal barriers to education. Disadvantage cannot be addressed by programs in schools alone, but a more resilient and educated young person can find a way to overcome life circumstances. The expansion and enhancement of the Better Futures strategy over the long term will assist in this process. Organisations cannot plan for young people's futures on short-term funding.

The last point I would like to make is that there are many great programs that build and support resilient young people. I have mentioned several in my earlier submission, such as Rock and Water, a program that promotes self-confidence, self-control and self-respect. However, one of the critical issues when providing programs within the school environment and one promoted by Spyns is that programs are provided universally to whole groups of students, whole classes or whole years and not only to students who are identified as being at risk. This ensures that students are not further stigmatised as those needing additional assistance and those who are not identified do not fall through the cracks. In closing, I would like to reiterate that partnerships between schools and community-based organisations support parents and young people through the transition phase. Services need long-term funding for planning and continuity of service, and programs need to be provided universally to help young people remain engaged with education.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Laura. Does "Spyns" stand for something?

Mrs WILLIAMS: It was initially South Penrith Youth and Neighbourhood Services, but the acronym has now become our name.

CHAIR: Lee and Loren, do you want to make some opening comments?

Mr SHIELDS: I guess we have a joint spiel that is an outline of our submission. I was approached recently by Loren who wanted to write a submission to the Committee as part of her degree. So we worked through it, discussed many of the issues and came up with the final submission. We were quite happy to go through the submission but, as you can see, it is extremely well written. At this point I should thank Loren for the effort she has made in writing the submission. If you like, I can outline the submission to you.

CHAIR: We have the submission and members have had a chance to read it so you do not have to go through it in detail. Is there anything that you or Loren would like to highlight in the submission?

Mr SHIELDS: The three main points in the submission are definitely issues for all groups of young people—I am talking about newborns to teenagers to under-25s. You guys are looking specifically at young people aged nine to 14. These are issues that go all the way through. Nine to 14 is the major age group that we look at continually because, as the gentleman from the Scouts said, as soon as they get to 14 they are starting to nominate one sport and concentrate on it rather than sports in general. That is why we believe this age group is the one that Newcastle PCYC needs to concentrate on. Thank you for your time.

CHAIR: Loren, do you want to add anything?

Miss RIDDELL: Thank you for inviting us to appear before the Committee. It is a great experience. Although I am not exactly professionally competent in this area, from my research I found that there was an overarching theme: the education system, parents and services such as the PCYC need to be aligned in order to meet the needs of young people. Just one branch will not be effective; they need to be united in their mission.

CHAIR: Thank you. Committee members would like a chance to ask one or all of you some questions in order to collect evidence for our report. I have a question for either Lee or Loren. In your submission you talk about the importance of looking at the needs of parents of children aged nine to 14 years. Have you been involved in providing parenting programs? Do you have any advice or information that you could give the Committee about how we could better support parents of kids in this age group? Are parents of kids in this age group involved in your work at the centre or do you find it hard to get them involved.

Mr SHIELDS: I should probably answer that question, even though Loren has written the submission. Parents are always involved in different activities that go on throughout the community. As to this at-risk group that we continually talk about—I guess I am speaking on behalf of everyone at the table—I believe it is their parents that do not have the involvement in the community groups that require them to know what services are available. There needs to be something to educate them in what services are provided. I know there is a diary for local community organisations that tells each organisation what is available for young people. Something similar needs to be developed for the parents of these young people as well. I believe that is required in order for them to understand what is available, otherwise they are walking around blind. They simply do not understand what is there for them. It is as simple as walking to the local PCYC, for instance, where we have youth workers, or to the Marrickville youth centre. Many different organisations have access to this information but unless parents know that information is available, it is difficult. I propose that an information diary be given to parents through schools.

CHAIR: Like a services directory?

Mr SHIELDS: That would make sense.

Miss RIDDELL: Giving parents information about what is available and what to expect from their children at these ages is important because the Government cannot necessarily get into homes. It can do it through schools and services, but the parents are with them at home and they need to be equipped at home to deal with the problems and issues that may arise at that time. They should be able to go to children's services, but they should also be given information about adolescence. They have some knowledge, but they should have access to information about what to expect and the services that will be available to them if they have problems. That information should be in homes as well. It should not be left to schools or services.

CHAIR: Are you saying that we should try to educate parents about the developmental stages that children go through as they mature?

Miss RIDDELL: And how to be more prepared to deal with that.

Mrs ROBINSON: I have done parenting information sessions. My experience with most parents that is adolescence scares them. They go from having a child who will generally follow directions to suddenly having a teenager who will say no and dig in their heels. My experience is that parents love information. We need to ensure that the parenting courses or information made available has been evaluated and is appropriate. I know that the Department of Community Services is rolling out the PPP parenting program. However, that relates to children up to eight years of age. We need something for the age group eight to 16 or 24, depending on the definition of a young person. Most parents lap up the information. Most parents—even those struggling with mental health or drug and alcohol issues—want the best for their young people. Sometimes they are not always the best person to give advice. However, they generally want the best and they will lap up any information we can give them.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Lucinda, how did you train, recruit and vet the staff and how will you make Fresh fun next holidays?

Ms ROBINSON: For the young people or the staff?

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: The young people.

Miss MALCOLM: As in how we get staff for the next holiday?

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: How did you recruit, train and vet the staff. One of the problems is that it is a two-week program. What are you going to do with them for the other 10 weeks?

Miss MALCOLM: The two extra staff members recruited to help coordinating for this holiday program are paid for a couple of days lead-up planning and for the two weeks in the holidays. It is hard to find people.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: That is why I asked the question.

Miss MALCOLM: The Aboriginal worker we have recently taken on was recruited through Vivienne Martin. She works with the playgroups at the community centre at the school. She is free during the holidays. It is an ideal job for her because she does not have work during the holidays and she is not free during the school term. Obviously, a lot of the people we need for the program are volunteers. It is very much a community-based program. There are going to be many partnerships in the Marrickville community. They are the reason this project is working. Anglicare is certainly putting in a lot of workers and people who are in a position to help the program. Those partnerships are listed in the proposal that I gave to the committee earlier. That is part of the evaluation for this July holiday. We need to work out the best strategy for recruiting and for this target group, taking into account the holistic strategy as well.

Ms MARTIN: Quite a number of the children around our area are Aboriginal. The connections that exist within the Aboriginal network are vital for bringing those children into the program. That level of trust through a community member plays a big part. The particular person we have chosen has had a lot of experience in long day care centres, but she has a nine-year-old as well and is pretty well connected with the community.

The other partner in the eight to 12s working group is from the Canterbury-Bankstown Migrant Resource Centre. Two of the workers there run an after-school program that started with Pacific Islander children as a homework mentoring program. They have quite a bit of experience and expertise working at Tempe Public School and some other places. They are also partners in this project as well.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: What is the take up of membership by girls in the PCYC? I have a PCYC at Umina Beach.

Mr SHIELDS: It varies from one club to the next club. From my experience in Maitland and Newcastle PCYCs I know that female membership is high simply because our major activity is gymnastics. The Umina Beach club is a major boxing and fitness club, so obviously it will attract more boys. We have females who do boxing as fitness training. It varies from club to club. There is a huge difference between Maitland and Newcastle in relation to the number of boys and girls.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Do you have any evidence about the effectiveness of your programs as a crime prevention strategy?

Mr SHIELDS: We produce statistics every year. Last year I believe the statistics indicated a 70 per cent crime reduction for those involved in our programs. We certainly collect statistics for each of our programs.

CHAIR: Will you table that information?

Mr SHIELDS: I can send the annual report, which contains the New South Wales percentages.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: That would be very helpful.

Mr SHIELDS: I now wish I had brought one. Sorry, my mistake.

CHAIR: That will be helpful to the committee and the figures can be included in the report.

Mr SHIELDS: That also varies between regions. The Hunter region figure is 85 per cent to 89 per cent.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Does the funding from your operation come from the Government?

Mr SHIELDS: It varies. We get funding from local government, the State Government and sometimes the Federal Government for crime reduction activities. We also get it from local insurance agencies. Obviously insurance is a big issue with crime. They are willing to support us as well. Local businesses are also willing to get on board.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: You are talking about the age group nine to 14. The youth resource centre picks up from 12 on. You have identified the gap between nine and 12. In the best of all words in terms of trying to resolve this group, should the age group be nine to 14 or should it be nine to 12 and then 12 and older? What is the best way to deal with that given that the young people being identified are nine to 14 years of age?

Ms ROBINSON: One of the things we find is, because our mark is 12, when they reach high school—and that is a really nice mark for young people themselves. They feel really special and it makes that moving into high school are even more special, I guess. That is because they want to come and hang out at our place, and they love that. We make that a mark. I do not know whether nine to 14 would work. My experience is that that age group under 10 is very different from once they get to high school. They are at a different developmental stage. They have different needs. If you look at the activities that Fresh does compared to what we do in school holiday programs. They are very different kinds of activities. We are taking young people to the movies and we are taking them to Laser Zone and we are taking them for bike rides and we do aerosol art workshops, whereas the younger age group does more things like arts and craft based in the school. You guys did an aerosol art painting well. I figure it is just the difference of the developmental stage, that is quite significant. So my thought would be it could not be nine to 14, but you guys might have a different view.

Mrs WILLIAMS: In school we are able to provide services to nine to 14-year-olds through CSGP, working in primary schools and high schools. In high schools with the primary feeder schools that feed into those schools, and also running parenting evenings where we give information on middle school transition, adolescent brain development, all sorts of information relevant to parents, I guess, and using transition as a way to get parents engaged with the school and work with that broad section of young people.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: In other words, sometimes it may be the age group nine to 14 but there are two clearly identified subgroups within that that the Committee has to take into account?

Mrs WILLIAMS: Yes.

Miss RIDDELL: They are in two completely different environments as well so they need to be assessed differently. From primary school to high school are two completely different environments. I think it is better to keep it in a subgroup rather than a group as a whole, perhaps.

CHAIR: Laura, one of the things I was going to ask you because from your submission your organisation does some work with local schools, both primary and high schools, how have you found that ability to work with the school and the school system? They are quite different organisations and often regulated by quite different needs and interests. Have you found that difficult or has that worked well?

Mrs WILLIAMS: In some respects, yes, it has been difficult because you need to negotiate with individual schools. More recently, under Better Futures, we have been able to go to the district office and negotiate with the district office and identify areas within their school areas, because there are three different school areas. Then, we just go and work with those high schools and primary schools.

CHAIR: Is there anything within the schools that you have noticed with the different schools you have worked with that has made your work more effective? Are there best practice models that you could say it would be really good if all schools did this or if all schools were receptive in this way?

Mrs WILLIAMS: Some of that is addressed in the manual. I did not write the manual and I have four copies that I will leave with you.

CHAIR: Are you happy for that to form part of your evidence as well?

Mrs WILLIAMS: Yes.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Laura, you have all these programs here. What works best? You do lots of stuff. What works best?

Mrs WILLIAMS: It depends on the young people you are working with. Girls Can Do Anything is a good program for young girls. Rock and Water has been used with both boys and girls as a resilience-building tool. Making Tracks is both boys and girls. That is the Aboriginal-specific program currently running in primary school, and it is also a transition and a family worker program because it has a family support worker attached to it. Body Think is around self-esteem and body image for young people. Recently Mission Australia did a survey of 29,000 young people. I think 30 per cent of those young people had body image as an issue. Friends for Life deals with young people who experience, perhaps, disadvantaged home lives, anxiety and depression, and assists them to cope with that and overcome it. I do not know a lot about the Rap program. I know we do it. We have other youth program workers to do that work, and Kinks and Bends, which is for the older age group and is around relationships and sexual effects and negotiating consent.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: I ask the PCYC a couple of questions. First of all, does the Newcastle PCYC work in well with local schools and what is the relationship between the PCYC and the local area command?

Mr SHIELDS: I will address the schools question first. I am currently trying to develop a school holiday program. In order to do that we have to do promotion work through local schools. Their reception to that is fantastic. All the principals have agreed to allow me access to the school newsletters to send through marketing and promotional posters and flyers and whatever I can to get this up and running. The local area command is more than willing to give us access—and I know it is difficult for me to speak on behalf of our police officers, but we continually have weekly meetings in order for me to know where they are and where they are sitting with the local area commanders and young offenders and the rest of the community. The local area command is definitely supportive of our programs and what we are doing in referring young people and also giving us officers at different times because we are at times understaffed for police officers. I think Umina Beach has access to this as well and a mobile PCYC, a truck, that we have two police officers driving around in and stopping at local hotspots in order to reduce crime in that area. We definitely have access to both of those.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Laura, in your submission you make this statement:

> Evidence based resilience building programs must be expanded through all Primary and High schools and youth services to ensure that we have healthy strong young people who are resilient, supported and confident.

How do you achieve that? What is the change that takes place in the young person?

Mrs WILLIAMS: Resilience? I think it is having a connection with someone in their life, whether it be a teacher, a youth worker or other person who supports them. I think resilience is an internal thing that can be nurtured.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: How do you describe it? Is it more self-confidence?

Mrs WILLIAMS: The ability to bounce back from adversity. To move through adversity and come out the other side a whole person able to function in society.

CHAIR: That is a pretty good definition.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Is it more like greater self-confidence in themselves?

Mrs WILLIAMS: Yes, confidence, self-esteem, belief in yourself.

Miss RIDDELL: Growing, developing.

Ms ROBINSON: The ability to cope with difficulties.

Mrs WILLIAMS: And I think it can be achieved if there are people in your life, and it does not necessarily need to be your parents. It can be other adults in your life who are models you can look up to.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: I note, Julie, you have mentioned some programs for parents. Are some of those programs aimed at giving resilience to parents as well?

Ms ROBINSON: Yes. The programs I have been involved in have also looked at how do you survive having an adolescent, because it is challenging. Also, how do you communicate to the adolescent? Sometimes what happens with some parents is that they feel like they suddenly do not know what to say, and we talk to them about just asking questions.

They come in and say to us, "But they come and talk to you. Why don't they talk to us?" All we do is ask questions. If you go back and keep asking, yes, you will get the backhanded comments sometimes or you will get the grunts—we all do—but we just keep asking. It is about talking to parents about how do you survive, how do you keep your sanity, how do you put things in place, because I think building resilience comes also from parents at times.

When you talk to young people, one of the things I always find really fascinating is that they will inevitably hear in the back of their head their parents' words. Even if they do not want to admit that, it comes out. When you start to talk to them and ask them, "Who told you that?" or "How do you know that?" you get a sense from them about where it has come from. Because we see them from 12 to 24, often when they come back and re-engage with us maybe a bit later, they will say, "You know how you were saying this? Yeah, my mum used to say that to me" or "my dad used to say that to me"; a teacher or someone. "It kind of makes sense now". Sometimes it is a developmental thing where they get to that point as well.

Ms MARTIN: I think for families who are raising children in Australia for the first time, first generation, it can be a really confronting time when you have grown up in a culture where there are very different expectations on you as a growing person with certain responsibilities and raising children in Australia. With younger children sometimes it feels a bit more under wraps but around this time it can really be quite a cultural shift and a difficult thing and one of the things I would like to see with parenting more is parenting between cultures and talking about those differences and expectations before their children even hit that age.

Ms ROBINSON: I agree, and also connection for parents. I think that is one of the things with all the parenting groups I have done, that parents talk about the best thing that they get out of it is not just the information but also the fact that they connect with other parents. If you are not connected into a school environment or you do not have friends who have teenagers around the same age as your own kids, you can kind of feel a bit isolated, so that was one of the things that they talked about; having someone else just to talk about "Hey, that is actually normal. What my child is doing is normal" was really quite affirming and helped build the resilience that you are talking about.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Lucinda, you were working under Anglicare. Was there any cooperation with churches in the area? Were they involved in any way with facilities or staffing?

Miss MALCOLM: Yes, there was the main funding—that was not that much at all—of $500 that came from Holy Trinity, Dulwich Hill, which is the church that the location was at last year.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: It was not from head office; it was local support?

Miss MALCOLM: No, it was the local church. My manager goes there. Without that location and that funding we would not have been able to do the project at all.

CHAIR: So they provided the funding and the venue as well where the kids could go for the program?

Miss MALCOLM: For example, a lot of people from the congregation provided morning teas. There were a lot of youth leaders from the congregation who came and volunteered. We would not have been able to do it without that partnership of the church.

Ms ROBINSON: It was a real community approach. There were other services that helped out as well as volunteers within the community.

Miss MALCOLM: Yes, the PCYC provided the bus to pick up the kids. We had a staff member go.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You made wonderful contact with the young people and they were enthusiastic for that school holiday period. Was there any way of keeping in touch with them after school?

Miss MALCOLM: Yes, that is the aim for the next one we are doing. The idea is for it to be a whole family approach. Our vision for the future would be for a family worker to get the connections with the kids through the family and then possibly start family work through Anglicare or refer to another community organisation because it is such a community project and, through that, link the whole way through to the next project.

Ms ROBINSON: And then they come over to us.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: And they graduate?

Ms ROBINSON: Yes.

Miss MALCOLM: Another thing we are doing is this July one of the youth workers from MYRC is coming to do a transition to youth services, meet the youth leaders that are at MYRC for all the kids in year 6 so they know, "I have met that person. Maybe I can go there" even though they are already excited to go there anyway, but some of the kids might not even know about the service there, it is to sort of link them into the services. That is the aim of this project.

CHAIR: Thank you to all of you. We have heard from a variety of people today but it is really good to hear from service providers who are actually working with young people in the age group we are inquiring into. We appreciate your time. I know some of you have travelled quite a long way. You will see the final product with our Committee report later in the year.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

MAREN LEE WILSON, Policy Officer, Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales, Locked Bag 40, Granville, and

DIANNE CHRISTINE GIBLIN, State President, Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales, 41 Cowper Street, Granville, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: The Committee has received a submission from your organisation. Do you want that submission to form part of your evidence here today?

Ms GIBLIN: Yes, we will speak to that.

CHAIR: We have your submission. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Ms GIBLIN: Yes. Firstly, we would like to thank you for allowing us to appear today. As you know, we are the peak organisation that represents parents in New South Wales public schools—that is over 2,200 organisations across the State. We work in collaboration with the Department of Education and Training in ensuring quality outcomes for our kids. We see that there are many challenges that face children and young people, not just from the age of nine but shared right across the education perspective. Particularly in this timeframe, there are unique physiological and psychological changes within children, as well as changing their schooling from one particular school to another during that period of time. So we see it as a process that these young children are taking part in as they move on in their lives.

We see the disengagement in schooling as being one of the greatest issues that face young people during that time. The evidence shows that as young as five we are seeing young people disengage in school. But what we see as part of the support for those young people, and particularly in keeping them engaged, is that we need to have a positive start to school from the very beginning. So it is not seen as a time in their life where we do some intervention but we ensure that there is a well-supported, resilient child and family as they enter the education process at the age of five, and that is part of the support that will continue through that time.

While that disengagement starts early, the evidence of its impact on young people for their lives is quite overwhelming. Leaving school early can cause issues with employment, and can trigger ongoing issues. It is also evident that young people who leave school early earn roughly $500,000 less than their peers who finish school education, and of course there are often concerns of moving into crime or other activities during that time. A lot of risk-taking activities happen with young people during those ages, particularly if they are not engaged in school.

Perhaps the best way to combat disengagement and promote student wellbeing is through establishing a sense of belonging. We find that this is where young people are developing their sense of belonging and their sense of self-worth, and it is at that time that we need to be guarded. So we need school communities, which includes the parents, teachers and any other staff on board, as well as the wider community, to be well equipped to tap into that and support these young people, and particularly support their and their families' resilience during that time. We believe that the key to building young people's engagement, sense of belonging and resilience is that partnership between the home and the school, and obviously between the home, the school and the wider community, together with the use of interagency support, similar to what the previous witnesses spoke about.

Some of the other issues that we see as parents include the increase in both parents returning to the workforce, or, in single-parent families, where young people's parents are part of that workforce. There are a number of different impacts from the working life of parents that impact on what support they can give their young people, and the workplace does have an impact on the family unit and the support of young people. We have seen where young people are at home in the early hours of the morning and getting themselves off to school, and where they feel that maybe their parents are not as involved in their education as they would like. Whereas during that period of time we often believe the myth that young people do not want their children involved in that, they actually do; it is just that the way they are involved is quite different and needs to be supported by the workplace.

Coping with the physical, psychological and relational changes at home and at school is a typical part of development. We believe it is the parents' responsibility to promote the best opportunities possible for children to allow them to feel connected, for them to feel valued at school, and to feel free to achieve potential,

and even more potential again. Once we achieve one lot of potential, we have a new potential to strive for. It is the responsibility of the whole community to support the needs of those young people, and of course it is a Government responsibility to support the whole-of-government approach to young people. The federation is really grateful to be a part of this inquiry, and we hope that whatever we can give will assist.

CHAIR: Thank you for your opening comments. One of the things the Committee is obviously considering as part of this inquiry is the fact that a lot of services for children cut out when they finish primary school, such as after-school care services and vacation care services. We have heard that some high schools offer after-school care services but it is not very common. In your view, is that an issue of concern to the parents who are members of your organisation, or do you think that parents think that once their children are in high school they are much more able to cope without those formal supports, particularly after school?

Ms GIBLIN: I think it is a bit of both. I think the other factor involved is the cost of these services to parents. A common occurrence when a child enrolled in school is that the parent thinks, "no more preschool fees". While I believe these services are essential to be part of young people's lives, often the cost is a contributing factor. Parents may even feel a sense of relief when their child does not need to be part of that environment of before-school and after-school care, and is able to access, say, local youth centres or local community organisations such as PCYCs, but it is not as organised—

CHAIR: And not as expensive?

Ms GIBLIN: That is right. You are not dropping them off and picking them up, and all those sorts of things.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: You spoke about belonging and self-worth, and about the home, school and wider community partnership. Many families start their children at school in kindergarten at a very young age, and this occurs particularly with boys. Do you find that this is a problem in high school, in the age group of nine to 14 years, with regard to disengagement?

Ms GIBLIN: I think a lot of things contribute to disengagement. The research says that the younger a male child starts school, the earlier they may become disengaged. But I think there is a lot to be said for the connectedness of what they do at school, to be connected to what their life is about. Often we find that the curriculum gets changed only every 10 years, or whenever we remember that it has not had an update in the recent few years, and the connectedness from what they are learning in the classroom and what is reality for them outside of school needs to be addressed.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: I refer to the recommendations on page seven of your report. What is the most specific, achievable one that the New South Wales Government should be doing?

Ms WILSON: A lot of these are more broad. If you are looking for something specific or achievable or implementable, I think something we talked about that specifically could be addressed is additional support for extracurricular activities, ones that are viewed as very worthwhile. They can be a fantastic connection across the transition from primary to high school. If students are connected with other students with a common interest, that is a bit of a bridge; it is something that gives them a bit more of that relational support, it gives them a sense of belonging, and it gives them more drive and desire to be at school.

Something we also touched on in the submission is Tony Vinson's paper he presented at the Cornerstones Conference, that there are a lot of administrative procedures that principals, in particular, feel are essential for facilitating a smooth transition, but for one reason or another they are not really being implemented. With regard to simple things like the transfer of student records, the papers and notes are handed over from the primary school to the high school but a lot of high schools choose to disregard that information, in the interests of giving students a fresh start. However, they are losing the wealth of knowledge they could be learning in terms of what the students' learning needs are, the best way to teach them, and that sort of thing. So he recommended ensuring a good transition of those sorts of notes and documents and not setting up any sort of self-fulfilling expectations as a result of those notes.

Ms GIBLIN: We have to remember when children make the transition that parents make the transition often as well. We find there is a major difference between the ability for parents to be in contact with the local school and their child's classroom teacher from K to 6 to when they move their child into 7 to 10. First and foremost, we are really not meant to be there anyway, according to I am not sure who. Also, when you walk up

to the school, if your child is facing some issues and disengagement, you actually do not see the classroom teacher. You usually come to a wall of suits. I do not mean to be offensive. You usually have to get through the principal, the deputy principal and the head teacher before you can actually talk to the person who has that one-on-one relationship with your child. You want to develop that relationship with your own particular child. You two are the most significant people in their lives. That relationship breaks down from K to 6 to 7 to 12. High school is also divided up into faculties. So it is not just one person working with your child now. It could be up to eight or nine, depending on how many teachers they have for any one particular subject. There is that transition for the family as well and that loss of information from a parent to the one classroom teacher to a parent and a number of teachers. When we do go up to talk about our children it is usually for 10 or 15 minutes. If it is on an interview evening, a bell rings you around every two minutes or so. So there is absolutely no depth and broadness of knowledge that you can relay about your individual child in a time of their life where they may be processing other things or even in your own home life there are challenges that the teachers need to know about.

Ms WILSON: Building on that partnership is foundational to what the Federation Parents and Citizens is all about. Building on two-way communication in terms of being able to have a relationship with a teacher, to know what is going on, to know what news there is of the student, and being able to give information on the students so that teachers can be equipped as well. Especially with what we heard from previous speakers, building on that connection with the wider community as well. Parents and citizens organisations are a fantastic way to be connected with those sorts of community organisations to distribute information to the parents of the school community, as well as getting information from the school community and being able to relay that out of that community as well.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: The word "resilience" has been mentioned a number of times today. Would either one of you like to discuss for the purpose of the Committee's information any additional interagency involvement to promote resilience in the middle years? Why do you see this as being the main body of aid to promote resilience in the middle years, as suggested in your submission?

Ms GIBLIN: The evidence points to the more supported families and young people are the more resilient they are. Schools are a centre of the community and often a place where we go for answers for our children. But they are not the only place that we can receive answers. The whole-of-government approach that we have seen specifically in schools as community centres and also projects such as Youth Excel and Primary Connect, those interagency projects support not only the family and the child but the school as well. That whole-of-government approach and that well-supported family and child is where we believe the resilience can be built.

Ms WILSON: To add to that, the family has been noted in some of the research as one of the primary environments where young people can be exposed to conditions that promote resilience. Through this additional interagency support, it is equipping and supporting parents and families to have the tools they need to be able to create that sort of environment at home. It relieves some of the burden and gives them the tools that they need. That then fosters resilience and brings it about in young people's lives.

Ms GIBLIN: Some of the issues that our young people face are issues that we did not face during our own adolescence. This is just an aside, but with the increase in the use of technology, be it mobile phones or computers, we are now facing a new sense of bullying, I suppose, or devaluing of some children by others with that technology. As parents, because we are fumbling with the technology as it is, we also need that support of how to support our young person when they are facing those forms of bullying.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: One of your recommendations on page 7 caught my eye: the development of a multitude of values in students through education. What would be the value of a multitude of values as against promoting a core of common values to help promote a sense of belonging? Would a multitude of values work against a feeling of belonging?

Ms WILSON: In the submission it is not just about how this age group breaks down according to gender, age and socioeconomic class. There are so many factors that play into it—whether someone has a learning disability or the cultural background they come from. A myriad of different factors play into that. In order to have a sense of belonging we promote a sense of acceptance and the forming of a sense of identity and expressing it in different ways. We must make sure that there are avenues and outlets to tailor specific and unique education that allows that sort of identification process to occur over those age years, so that students can

have the space within the curriculum and the class and also their extracurricular activities to explore, define and develop a sense of self.

Ms GIBLIN: Our public schools in particular—and that is where we are coming from—are finally inclusive but very diverse in the many cultures and values that underpin them. It is the opportunity for people to have a sense of belonging and to have a common understanding of other people's beliefs and an acceptance of that. Obviously we are not asking people to change beliefs or to believe in other people's systems but to understand that there are a myriad of them and that that is an acceptance within our society.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: In relation to the last dot point, Increased recognition of the role of parents in the education system, you spoke about issues at high school and the difficulty being able to speak to specific teachers and so on because of the way high school is set up as opposed to primary school. Has your association addressed issues in relation to children who are in out-of-home care and some of the problems related to the suspension of young people from school?

Ms GIBLIN: In relation to out-of-home care, we still need to find some sense of belonging for those children out of school hours and reach out and support, whoever the carer is. That is why our organisation is broader than just parents. It is the people who relate and the significant others in those children's lives. It may be the youth worker at the local youth centre who needs to be part of the communication channel with those young people. I am sorry, I have forgotten the second part of the question.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: A comment was made previously in evidence today about school suspensions. When young people are suspended, obviously it is not productive for their education. What measures are in place or could be implemented before a child is suspended? The comment was made that a child could lose up to two months of school.

Ms GIBLIN: We are not keen supporters of suspension; I have to say. We see that a short time frame is a possibility, but the longer we suspend a child the longer they become disengaged in schooling and we are nullifying the reason. Often there is risky behaviour or outstanding behaviour within a child because they are disengaged. Then we remove them from the school for a period of time and complicate the matter by disengaging them even further. We also need to look at the reasons why we suspend. Some of the evidence that we have looked at over the years is that the suspension varies for reasons. Someone may be suspended for throwing a ball in the classroom, which could be seen as a violent act, but in another school it might be for something a little more perpetuated. We need to see some consistency across the education system as to why children are suspended. We have not been happy with the support that these young people get while they are out of school. Schools continue the education process while the young person is out of school. Whilst the belief is that while the child is on suspension there will be work provided, are Mum and dad home to support that work? Have they got the skills to work with those children on the subject areas? Is that being followed up by the school? So we see it as a totally unproductive time for young people. The suspension centres that have been set up do provide some support in that way but I think we need to see about other ways of working in addressing those challenging behaviours.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: You talk about suspension centres and how they are not working adequately. Do you support the suspension centres themselves but do you think that possibly they need to work stronger so they encourage or force the children and parents to get involved in those centres so the child can come up to scratch before he or she goes back to school?

Ms GIBLIN: They are only there for a short period of time, and it can be only the two-months time that young people are out of school. It then looks at things like stigmatising that young child and isolating them from their own peer groups. Parents themselves—you do not feel comfortable if your child has moved to a suspension centre so you yourself need some form of support because you are seen as having failed in your role in supporting your young child. I think there is still a lot of work to be done. I think it is a place where young people can be when they are having that time out from school.

I am not necessarily sure whether our organisation supports such a large period of time out of the home and school for the child. I think there needs to be more work done internally within the school and more support in that way. We could probably bat our drum here for school counsellors, as we often do, but I think it is probably even more than that; I think it is also the support for the family, because that challenging behaviour is not only happening at school, it is possibly happening at home and we may have parents who do not feel confident to say, "Hey, this isn't working for me either. I need some help."

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: How could strengthening parent participation in the education system assist children in those middle years, and what suggestions do you have for achieving that goal?

Ms GIBLIN: Strengthening the parent participation in any sort of school life of a child develops an understanding of what the young person is handling at school as well as home. I think the two places need to have a common understanding of what happens and the partnership between home and school is important for that. I am sorry; I have missed the rest of your question.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: Just how could you help strengthen parent participation in the school process to help in the kid's education and understanding, I suppose, more than anything?

Ms GIBLIN: The department has a number of positions that support that and I think we need to look at those positions. They are school-based community officers, community liaison officers, and community development officers or partnership officers through the Priority Schools Program. Currently, they are basically only through our priority schools, which are our schools that serve as our lowest SES schools within the State. That needs to be broadened, I believe. One of the difficulties is that the teaching staff—and do not get me wrong, I have the highest opinion of teaching staff—have a lot of difficulty accepting additional help that is not quite curricular or school-based.

So, receiving that additional support through community-based liaison officers would be a way of strengthening community partnerships. It is something that cannot always be done via the P and C because we are unique and we have some things that are not particularly favourable for developing partnerships, but also there is not a timeframe for the principal or the teachers to develop those partnerships either. So, school-based community liaison officers often work in helping strengthen partnerships.

Ms WILSON: I would just add that, I do not know if you have heard this from other speakers today, but it has really been shown that the role of parents in participating is crucial to fostering student engagement and helping them develop that sense of resilience, especially in the case of students with learning disabilities. Something like 98 per cent of principals views it as vital or crucial to have that parent participation to give feedback and that sort of thing. So because it is so important there needs to be a real aim of additional flexibility around the sort of opportunities that are being communicated and opened up to parents.

So we want to see additional opportunities for parents to get involved, especially with the change in workplace practices, and where if there are more two-parent families where both parents are working it is increasingly difficult then for them to be coming to school activities and to be able to participate. So, just looking at the timing of events—when are things happening—to try and work that around a typical adult working schedule; and also just making sure that things are being very clearly communicated as well so that people are very aware of what is going on and so that they have every opportunity to get involved, and even through the formation of additional advisory committees and things that parents can jump in and participate and give their feedback as well, so they have that sense of efficacy, that sense of connection with the school, that their feedback is valued, that they are part of that community, that they are able to make a difference and that their student then seeing that feels supported and feels backed in that way.

CHAIR: Any final questions?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Following up on what you were saying, you gave a good description earlier about the high school and how it was not parent friendly.

Ms GIBLIN: Personal experience I can tell you.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Many of us have had the same experience. I was just wondering for that first year of high school whether there could be some change in the education department's policy to be a bit more open to the parents seeing the teacher and so on in at least the first year of high school, to have a similar attitude to the primary school?

Ms GIBLIN: Success in schools is built on positive relationships and it is not just the positive relationships between the child and the teacher, it is the positive relationships between the home and school. My recall of taking my youngest child to high school was that I actually stayed after he left a class, just to walk off and basically got ushered out the door really quickly. It was very much seen as an unwelcoming place for

grown-ups to be, I suppose, for want of a better word. I think there needs to be some breaking down of those barriers. I think there needs to be more communication between the high school and the primary school parents—I suppose, not so much the high school parents but the high school and the primary school parents—so the partner schools, as young people are moving in, that relationship needs to be built prior to going on to high school.

The department has already started that with young people and they have seen the success in teachers building up those relationships before the child actually enters high school. I think that is a definite support mechanism for families because it is a transition for them as well.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Di and Mari. The views of parents are really important to the Committee's inquiry so it has been great to hear what you have to say and also your comprehensive submission.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.30 p.m.)