HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Reference: Aspects of family services

CANBERRA

Thursday, 7 November 1996

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Members:

Mr Andrews (Chair)

Mr Andrew	Mr Mutch
Mr Barresi	Mr Randall
Mrs Elizabeth Grace	Mr Sinclair
Mr Hatton	Dr Southcott
Mr Kerr	Mr Tony Smith
Mr McClelland	Mr Kelvin Thomson
Mr Melham	

Matters referred to the committee:

To inquire and report on:

the range of community views on the factors contributing to marriage and relationship breakdown;

those categories of individuals most likely to benefit from programs aimed at preventing marriage and relationship breakdown;

the most effective strategies to address the needs of identified target groups; and

the role of governments in the provisions of these services.

WITNESSES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Aspects of family services

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Thursday, 7 November 1996

Present

Mr Andrews (Chair)

Mr Andrew	Mr Randall
Mr Barresi	Mr Sinclair
Mrs Elizabeth Grace	Mr Kelvin Thomson
Mr McClelland	Mr Tony Smith
Mr Mutch	

The committee met at 9.47 a.m.

Mr Andrews took the chair.

BAGSHAW, Ms Dale Margaret, Chairperson, Family Services Council, 15 Napier Close, Deakin, Australian Capital Territory 2600

BEYNON, Ms Rose, Executive Officer, Family Services Council Secretariat, Attorney-General's Department, 15 Napier Close, Deakin, Australian Capital Territory 2600

CHAIR—Welcome. This is the second day of hearings in the inquiry. We have received 127 submissions to date and more are on their way. I take this opportunity of thanking those who have been prepared to come and provide some further input to the committee. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I am obliged to advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament.We have received your submission dated 31 October and have numbered it 113. Would you like to make an opening statement or make any further comments in relation to your submission?

Ms Bagshaw—I would just like to make some brief statements which give an overall summary of what we have said in our submission. I will respond to questions after that. The Family Services Council is a non-statutory body which provides advice to the federal Attorney-General on the Family Services Program, Legal Aid and Family Services. Given the size of the Family Services Program budget, only a very small amount is committed to consultation with the community and service providers. Currently, this is done by two mechanisms, one of which is through the council and the other is through the three peak bodies of Relationships Australia, Centacare and Family Services.

The council is a non-statutory policy advice body. It provides a wider viewpoint than can be provided by the department. Through its membership, it is a conduit for consultation with and among the department, the service providers in the family services field, experts in the field of family and social policy, and academics. It is relatively new; it has only been going for two years. It has provided in that two years a good deal of advice to both the Attorney-General and LAFS. We have offered advice on family mediation standards. We have made a lot of representations and submissions on the Family Law Reform Bill and family law regulations. We have recommended and had support for a quality strategy for the family services program generally. We have prepared numerous responses and submissions to reports and inquiries. We have prepared advice to LAFS on many aspects of their work, including proposed aims and outcomes of the Family Services Program.

We have had a number of working parties looking at many issues. We are looking forward to providing further advice in areas such as developing guidelines for working with children, now that we have had major changes to the act. We are concerned to make

sure that service delivery in the family services area is flexible, so we are looking at providing advice on ways of perhaps changing funding so that there is more opportunity for integration of the subprograms. We are looking forward to providing advice on marriage and relationship education strategies, on rural and remote service delivery and on issues to do with access and equity generally. I believe the Attorney-General has outlined his support for continuation of the council recently in Tasmania. The council waits his approval for future directions.

This committee is asking us to talk about three areas. First is the range of community views on the factors contributing to marriage and relationship breakdown. In summary, the council stresses that there is a need for the committee to consider that relationships today are diverse. The government needs to be responsive to diversity in relationships. Relationships do not operate in a vacuum. They are very much affected by the social, political, economic and cultural environment within which they occur. We are really concerned to see that family friendly workplaces and work practices are fostered. The committee needs to consider and recognise that relationships go through periods of transition throughout the whole family life cycle. Relationships have different needs at different stages. We are concerned that more research is needed on why some relationships survive and others do not. More research needs to be done on the reasons for relationship difficulties. It has been found that many people will actually cite reasons which are more symptoms than causes. There is a dearth of research in this area.

In terms of who is most likely to benefit from programs aimed at preventing breakdown, we are of the opinion that all age groups benefit from early intervention. We cannot stress that enough. Individuals are likely to need assistance around the key points in the life cycle transition stages. Examples include leaving home, when couples get married or when they form relationships outside of marriage, families with young children, families with adolescents, families that are launching their children and moving into a different stage in their life cycle and families in later life. They all have different needs at different stages.

We also need to stress that individuals and couples are much more stressed and are more likely to need assistance in times of divorce, remarriage and step-parenting. Unanticipated factors interrupt the life cycle, such as unemployment, illness and the death of a child. Considerable evidence suggests that these place further stress on relationships. Stress may be further exacerbated for disadvantaged persons, such as people on low incomes, those of culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds, those in rural and remote communities and those who are socially isolated.

We are of the opinion that holistic, integrated approaches to service delivery should be adopted. At the moment, funding is provided to discrete services. It is not easy for the family services area to adopt the more holistic, integrated approaches. The council has been reviewing possible ideal model approaches. We hope that the government gives consideration to changing the funding accordingly. However, in looking at the evaluations of the various subprograms of the family services program, we have outlined in our submission that these have been evaluated favourably. They appear to be relevant and appropriate in the way that they address the life cycle transition stages.

The third area covers the most effective strategies to address the needs of identified target groups. We consider that programs that assist the formation of relationships, the maintenance of relationships and the reformation stages of the relationship life cycle—because relationships change—should be supported. However, as I said before, prevention and early intervention are fundamental and should be supported to a greater extent.

Education, be it school based or community oriented, should be supported. There should be education at primary schools, secondary level and at tertiary level and education for the whole community. I do not think enough is being done in schools. There is evidence to suggest that, if there is education provided in schools, a whole school approach should be taken and it should be a fundamental part of the curriculum. The

sort of education that could occur in schools and in tertiary and secondary areas is education around communications skills, conflict resolution strategies and those sorts of things. Again, there has been a dearth of research—in fact, very little—into why conflict occurs in schools. There has been very little research into effective strategies. So we would recommend more research there.

We also stress that, apart from relationship education, counselling, therapy and mediation all have a role to play in assisting couples and families, because they have different needs at different stages of the relationship life cycle. It has been demonstrated that education on its own does not work. It needs to be integrated with other approaches. A holistic, integrated whole-of-relationship life cycle approach should be adopted and fostered through things such as the more flexible allocation of funds so that more innovative models of service delivery can be adopted. You could have, for example, the pilot integration of marriage and relationship counselling and marriage and relationship education. There should be further investigation of the integration of adolescent mediation and family therapy as well as family skills training with counselling and mediation, particularly in light of the changes to the Family Law Act and the emphasis that those changes give to the best interests of the child.

The council fully supports all the subprograms and projects of the family service programs: marriage relationship counselling; marriage relationship education; family mediation; adolescent mediation and family therapy; family skills training; changeover and visiting services; the community development officer project (which I would like to talk a little more about), the family violence research intervention project; and the rural family counselling project. I refer the committee to attachment No. 5, which outlines the various transition stages in the life cycle and the various services that the family services program offers. It looks at the full range of services and where they fit in terms of the various transition stages of the life cycle.

Another important point is that not all relationships can or should continue. The council calls for strategies which encourage couples to attend services earlier, increased community education, investigation of the role of marriage celebrants in promoting marriage and relationship education, and increased access to services by Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders. We suggest that, in looking at increased access, you could investigate using an approach similar to the community development officer project approach, which has been used with ethnic communities. In this regard, a community development officer of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background develops more appropriate responses to the needs of the community through consultation with the community groups. The community development officer project that has been developed as a response to the OMA report should be implemented nationally. This project—you can ask me more about it, if you wish—is currently in six states. We recommend that it be extended to the Northern Territory and Tasmania.

We would also be recommending that the committee look at the Morris report in terms of adolescent mediation and family therapy. The Morris report recommends that those services be extended nationally, that they remain voluntary and that DSS and DEET funding be used to support the programs that currently exist. Consideration should be given to appropriate school-based programs, again stressing that a whole school approach needs to be taken, that attention needs to paid to putting approaches into the curriculum and that attention needs to be paid to research. We would also be looking at increased marriage and relationship counselling and education.

The council fully supports family mediation as a viable alternative to litigation through the courts. We have been very active in developing family mediation standards. We have sent very comprehensive standards advice to the Attorney-General. However, we are also mindful of the need to address the issue of violence, particularly in the context of mediation. Recent research funded by LAFS has indicated that more attention in the mediation services needs to be paid to violence matters. There should be more coordination and liaison between the Department of Health and Family Services and the Attorney-General's Department, in particular in relation to the adolescent mediation and family therapy services and family skills training. We are also very concerned that a nationally consistent high quality of service be provided. The quality strategy that we have recommended would assist with that. Services should be provided by appropriately trained and qualified service providers.

In terms of the role of government, we would like to point out that Legal Aid and Family Services contracts service providers and has a regulatory role, whilst the funded organisations have a service delivery role. This complies with recommendations outlined in the Industry Commission's report entitled *Charitable Organisations in Australia*.

We are also concerned that the subprograms maintain linkages with their legislative bases—the Family Law Act and the Marriage Act; that there is national consistency of service delivery; that there is quality control; that there is continuity of policy and service delivery nationwide; that there is a coordinated approach to developing and implementing access and equity initiatives; and that there is better coordination between Commonwealth government departments.

The council considers that Australia must meet its obligations as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and to the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. The council also calls for a consistent national data collection on families and children—we have highlighted a number of deficiencies with the ABS collections and Family Court collections in that area—and for the development of coordinated national family policy and family impact statements.

I would also like to draw your attention, by way of summary, to that diagram, which will perhaps help you to understand the complexity of what you are looking at when looking at family relationships. Just to recap, you are looking at relationships within the context of the broader social, cultural, political and economic environment, the community, the extended family and the direct neighbourhood. You are also looking at relationships which have developmental changes occurring and which have unpredictable changes occurring, such as untimely death, unemployment, chronic illness and accidents. You also have a lot of different stresses that occur within cultures and within families. It is a very complex area. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to that complexity and to that diversity when you are considering anything to do with relationships.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for that summary and a very comprehensive submission as well. I will start off by asking a few questions and then other members may well want to ask questions.

These programs have grown up in an ad hoc manner as a response from time to time to particular issues. Marriage counselling commenced with the Matrimonial Causes Act and the Marriage Act back in the late 1950s and early 1960s; marriage education, I think, was a response to the Family Law Act in 1975; you

have a response to youth homelessness in one of the programs and a response to violence in another, et cetera.

One thing that we would be interested in seeing is the extent of the use of these programs. Your submission says, in effect, that these are very useful programs that meet particular needs within the community, but one thing which interests me is how widespread their use is and how we measure that. I am interested for a number of reasons. One is: are they meeting the demand that is there? If there is a call, as there is from agencies from time to time, to expand the program and for more funding, then on what basis should we be doing that?

I see in your submission a reference, for example, to a census taken of marriage and relationship counselling back in 1993 or 1994, which presumably gave some indication of the numbers of people who were using marriage counselling. Does the council have available to it—or is it aware of where we could obtain—some sort of overview of the total use of all the services?

Ms Bagshaw—Rose, in terms of the counselling, you have got the hard data.

Ms Beynon—Yes, I have the marriage counselling census here, Mr Andrews. This census was taken over a three-month period in 1993. For that three-month period, there were approximately 20,200 clients. Over the year, there are around 80 to 100,000 clients accessing marriage relationship counselling services across Australia. This data is available from the department and I believe the department will be issuing the census figures in the next few weeks.

In terms of the allocation of funding, that is allocated on a needs based planning approach. Again, the department would be best placed to provide further information on that model.

CHAIR—So looking at the overall figures is not something the council has done itself in terms of use?

Ms Bagshaw—The council does not have a research role, it is not funded. It only meets three times a year to provide policy advice but it does advise on research that is needed. There has been a lot of research done since the council has been in place. For example, the family mediation programs are relatively new, but the evaluation of those indicates that the outcomes of those services are extremely positive, more than 75 per cent of couples reporting that their agreements are satisfactory, at least in part if not all.

In terms of numbers coming to family mediation, building on the counselling, that is still a very new service. A recent census indicated that very few members of the Australian public know what it is. We would be recommending that there would be a massive re-education of the Australian population so that they can move away from adversarial, litigious ways of thinking, more towards cooperative ways of thinking. But the average member of the community does not know, to this day, what mediation is. Given that, the services that are in place are providing a comprehensive service to increasing numbers of people in Australia—I do not know the exact numbers.

Mr McCLELLAND—In your report, you say that only 2.4 per cent of those using the service are

from non-English speaking backgrounds and about 0.6 per cent from Aborigines. So that would be consistent with what you are saying, that there is a lot of ignorance as to the services available out there.

Ms Bagshaw—Not only a lot of ignorance. We really believe that, in terms of people from indigenous backgrounds and non-English speaking backgrounds, there needs to be perhaps some research into the way we need to modify those services so that they are more relevant. The OMA report has highlighted that. The Family Services Program has paid attention to what the OMA report has said and the community development officer project is addressing that issue with ethnic communities at the moment.

It needs more funding, it needs to be more comprehensive. The role of the community development officer is to work with the particular communities to find out what their special needs are and to be a conduit, in a way, between the communities and the services to make sure that the services are provided in an appropriate way.

There needs to be a lot more work done on that, particularly with services to indigenous people. At the moment what you are looking at is services that are set up for your white Anglo-Saxon community. There is a good deal of attention that the council has paid to that very issue, that the Family Services Program is very aware of and wanting to address. But I think that we would be recommending that a community development officer role be an appropriate one and that the community development officer be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. It is a very important area in terms of access and equity.

CHAIR—There are two things. One is that we need to have some idea of what the level of service is at the present time, if we are looking at a national review of it, given that there has not been one ever from a parliamentary point of view. There may not be another one for another 20 years, who knows? So it is a useful time to actually say, 'This is the level of what is being provided.' As I understand the answer, we have to go to the department to get that sort of information. I was going to build on what Rob was saying. Given that the thrust of your submission is to say that these services are worthwhile and that, where they have been evaluated they have been shown to be efficient and effective, we also know that there is a widespread ignorance in the community about the existence of them.

Ms Bagshaw—There is.

CHAIR—Therefore, can one conclude from that that the level of use of the services is lower than what is optimal?

Ms Bagshaw—That is true.

CHAIR—So is your response to changing that situation to have community development or education officers? Are there other ways which the council has contemplated that might increase the knowledge of, and subsequently access to, services?

Ms Bagshaw—At the moment, the services are provided in discrete subprograms; some of them are together and some of them are not. The thrust of our submission also suggests that if we offered more holistic, integrated service delivery models that were more locality based—in other words, that a number of

services were provided within the locality where people lived—people would then perhaps be more aware of them and, when they are coming for one type of service, be more readily able to access another type of service. This would mean that the integrated holistic approach would be more relevant, particularly in rural and remote areas, and make access easier. Further, if services are provided where people are—in their community—they are more likely to know about them and access them. At the moment, the funding is restrictive; each subprogram is separately funded from the other. But if funding were more flexible, and service delivery was able to be, perhaps, more innovative, so that it could more readily cater to the needs of a particular community, the outcomes would be more favourable.

CHAIR—You mentioned funding being more flexible. A hypothetical agency that runs a range of programs may gets X thousand dollars for marriage counselling, X thousand for education and X thousand for mediation et cetera. Are you suggesting that that be pooled and that they have a choice of how they use it, or are you saying that it should be—

Ms Bagshaw—Yes, because each community is different. Each community has a different set of needs; it might be at different stages of a life cycle. Also, people have more than one set of needs. They might want mediation and counselling and something else, such as family skills training. So if agencies were able to combine that funding and provide a service that was relevant to the particular community they were servicing in a truly innovative and consumer-oriented way, the outcomes would be better, both for the agency and most particularly for the consumer.

I know of at least two agencies that are experimenting with these models. These models have been tried and demonstrated to work overseas and here. In Adelaide, I am sitting on the advisory committee for one, which is experimenting with that sort of service delivery model. At the moment, access to funding for it is restrictive. Another thing is that, with the integrated flexible service delivery, you are more readily able to do it within a particular locality. As you know, the needs of one community and suburb or city will vary enormously from the needs of a community in another suburb in another city.

CHAIR—Can I be the devil's advocate for a moment. The submission from Relationships Australia, which we will hear from shortly, states in part that there is a danger of agencies picking winners. I understood that to mean that if it is easier and more convenient to provide a service which they are comfortable with providing, that is what there is a natural tendency to do. If that is true, assuming that it is for the moment, would not that be more likely to occur if we pooled all the funding together?

Ms Bagshaw—Not necessarily. I think what they might be referring to there is the fact that if we make funding conditional on outcomes—in other words, if we make funding conditional on success—then of course people are only going to intervene with groups that they know they can win with, that they can have an obvious outcome with. With many people living in poverty or many people who are highly stressed, all you can expect to do is maintain them. A lot of what you do is not seen to be a winner—in other words, is not seen to be successful.

One of the things I know is that, with this type of funding that is attached to outcomes, workers will put the too-hard cases in the bottom of their drawer and forget them because it will not reflect well on their performance. I think that is why so many groups in our community are not getting serviced, because of the

way funding is attached to outcomes. 'Winning', in terms of getting positive outcomes with clients, is the criterion, without looking at the sorts of needs that people have in our community, and particularly our most disadvantaged groups, where often all we can do is maintain them at a level of functioning, which is not seen to be a winner in terms of what you are doing. I, as a social worker, am particularly concerned about those groups. I talk personally about that, but I know that the council has also been concerned about the most disadvantaged groups in our community and the fact that often the services are not funded in a way that can reach them, that not enough acknowledgment is given to the particular nature of the circumstances that those people are in, particularly people in poverty.

CHAIR—Given that services have largely been provided by major organisations—Relationships Australia, the Centacare agencies, the other major church agencies et cetera—has there been any discussion between those agencies at that level about how they could integrate programs more?

Ms Bagshaw—Yes, there has, and one of the advantages of the council is that the three peak bodies are represented on the council, and they also meet regularly outside of the council meetings. We have been considering, as a council, and the peak bodies have also been talking between themselves, about more flexible, innovative ways that they could integrate services and deliver services. It has been very much on our agenda, yes.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—You said something earlier in your overview about early intervention. I know it is necessary, but I have problems with it. How and when do you decide? How do you find that need in the early stages rather than at the end?

Ms Bagshaw—It is very hard because people themselves often do not acknowledge that they need help until it is actually too late. I think there, again, I go back to the need to perhaps look at education at all stages of the life cycle, particularly from an early age at school right through. That is not necessarily going to stop certain things from happening, but it may help people to more effectively manage the stresses and the strains of relationships when they occur.

It has been well documented that children of divorce, for example, do better if their parents are able to minimise the conflict when they are engaging in divorce, in other words the outcomes for children are reasonably positive, particularly if the marriage has been a high conflict marriage. So it is the way people deal with conflict which is important and I think it is a preventive approach, even if the relationship breaks down, because it prevents all of the trauma that goes along with that breakdown and the trauma that particularly children experience.

It is hard to say, but I think that the more we can educate people in our community about communications skills, conflict resolution skills, conflict management skills—because you cannot always resolve conflict—assertiveness skills, all of those essential skills, then the better able they would be to handle all this. Life is about stress, strain and conflict, let us face it, and some people manage it better than others. I am not sure that there is any hard evidence at all to suggest that there is any one point for any one person that is going to be more effective than any other point. So it is a very difficult question to answer.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—I know that Mr Sinclair has got some things to say in that area too.

But let me change the direction slightly. The community relies fairly heavily on volunteer workers. Do you think that applying training strategies to these service providers will keep the volunteers, or do you think that it might frighten them away?

Ms Bagshaw—I think volunteers are a very important part of our community. It is very important to respect volunteers as being people who are worthy of the same sort of training and supervision assistance that anybody else gets. Training can be helpful not only to the volunteer but also certainly to the people who are the recipients of their service. But training takes time and funding, and funding is not always available for that. People talk about volunteers as if it is something that occurs without any money attached to it. A considerable amount of funding is needed to provide not only the appropriate education and training for volunteering but also the appropriate support and supervision. I think most volunteers would report that they have more work satisfaction if that sort of assistance is provided than if they are working totally without support or in a vacuum or without any knowledge of what it is they are doing.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—So, with those things in place, you feel that we would retain the volunteers?

Ms Bagshaw—I think there is a valuable role for them. Nonetheless, the more complex the problem, the more professional the service provider needs to be. For example, the visitation and changeover services, that I observed in England, make very good use of volunteers, particularly the grandparents who have been, effectively, parenting. They offer them special training, special support and special supervision, and they get a lot of satisfaction out of the work they do. But we do not make enough use of them in Australia.

Mr RANDALL—This might be a little bit at left field and not exactly about what we are on about. In item 39 of your submission, it says that more women than men use counselling. From what I can see today, for example, it seems that this organisation—not yours particularly but the whole industry—is dominated by women. So far, I have not seen a male involved in this process. Is this is an indication that the sisterhood has taken over the industry—

Ms Bagshaw—It is a good question.

Mr RANDALL—And that this further reinforces the sort of isolation that men have? We have groups like men's confraternity coming to us in our electorate offices and saying that they are not getting a fair go out of this sort of business. Obviously, from what I have seen so far, men do not have much of an input into your side of the counselling service as an industry. I think it is pretty obvious from the people who have turned up so far.

Ms Bagshaw—Thanks for asking that question. There are roughly equal numbers of men and women on our council.

Mr RANDALL—But it does not seem to be at the hierarchical level.

Ms Bagshaw—Yes; but also, in terms of directors of agencies and the people who are in management structures and workers, there are a large number of men. I do not know exactly what the breakdown is. Let

me cite one of the difficulties. I run a mediation course. Although we advertise it widely, we usually end up with three or four men out of 30 people who are coming. So a part of it is to what extent men are attracted to this area as an area of work. We are always scrabbling for more men in the mediation agencies. They just do not seem to be as attracted to the area as women are.

In terms of service delivery, I think it has also been a factor that women in families in Australia take on the role of being the caretakers of the relationships. Men have tended to leave that to the women. When there is a difficulty, it is the women that appear at the agencies asking for help. We have done a lot of research on how to involve men more in that process. There has been an historical factor there. It has usually been the women who present for assistance. It is women and children who are living under the poverty line. So their needs are more obvious and greater than the men's.

I think that we need to research ways of getting men to come for help. There have been small research projects done, and there is a lot of concern in the community about that issue. But, it is a very complex one. Again, part of it is the attitude of men, in that they find it harder to ask for help, to admit to having problems and to come for help. Men are probably more likely than women to be in a position to buy help if they need it and to go to a psychiatrist or somebody whom they can actually purchase the service from. Women tend to be the group who are more represented under the poverty line.

I think there is a general community attitude which says, 'If you are a man, you ought to be able to cope. You do not come and ask for help.' There is a whole heap of things we need to do in terms of educating men about recognising that they have a problem, asking for help and coming to the services. Also, maybe there is a need for a more conscious effort to make the professions that are represented in this area more attractive to men. When I first studied social work, back in the 1960s, I had one male in my class. Now in classes—we almost got to the point of 50-50 one year—we probably have about 30 per cent men and 70 per cent women. So men are increasingly coming into these professions.

Mr RANDALL—We might have to look at an affirmative action program for men in your industry.

Ms Bagshaw—Part of it is that the industry is not well paid, so it does not attract men. It is interesting that, when men came into the industry, the pay went up. So part of it is that too.

Mr BARRESI—As someone who did family therapy for 12 months and who was the only male in the group, I can attest to what you are saying. In terms of research that you may have done in the economic circumstances that people are in and also the economy in general. Is there a relationship between the highs and lows that we, as a country and a society, go through and the patterns of those who are seeking family services?

Ms Bagshaw—There is.

Mr BARRESI—I am trying to relate that back to the 1980s with the me-too generation, to see whether or not there have been patterns which have emerged out of that.

Ms Bagshaw—It is interesting. There has been research done that has shown that patterns of

relationships alter with economic circumstances. So does service delivery alter. When we live in affluent times, you are more likely to have more money for community-based services and much more of a community orientation to service delivery. In times of economic hardship, you tend to have more individually focused service delivery. Residual problems only are dealt with. So the patterns of service delivery differ. But also there is some indication—I think we have quoted some data in our submission—that people are more likely to marry and marriages are more likely to last in times of affluence than they are in times of economic hardship.

There is no doubt that factors like poverty and unemployment wreak havoc with relationships. It is not easy for the average family to survive with children in this day and age, especially where two people are working or one person is bringing up children on their own. It is particularly stressful, but it is exacerbated by poverty, unemployment and those sorts of factors.

Mr BARRESI—You can also look at that in terms of the relationship with geographic regions.

Ms Bagshaw—Most definitely. There are regional differences. You will find that rural and remote areas have a particular set of needs. People in rural and remote areas not only live in poverty, but also live in isolation. They have enormous community pressures on them. If you are a battered wife in a rural and remote area, it is much more difficult to admit to that, to get help. There is still a culture of dobbing. If people actually do report on matters of violence in a community area, then the person who brings it to the attention of the authorities is often labelled a dobber. It is an extremely difficult thing to do. Yes, there are very distinct regional differences.

Mr SINCLAIR—Ms Bagshaw, I found your paper interesting, but I think you have a far too gloomy-doomy approach to the world. I do not see life made up of stress, strain and conflict. It might be in politics, but we do also laugh occasionally. I think it is also true that you have ignored in your paper a couple of the implications I see of facts to which you have drawn attention.

For example, in paragraph 16 you talk about women in the labour force. There are two factors of that that you have not addressed that I think are particularly important. One is the degree to which women are now tending to marry a little later, have their children later and have fewer children. The other is that a lot more married women with children work and they need to reconcile their commitments to the work force with their family and their commitment to the children.

My worry about your presentation is—and I know it is inevitable, given the emphasis on social welfare—that you place a lot of your attention at that stress end of the spectrum. My concern is that we do not start the whole approach in this field the other way around. We ought to be looking at how families who are together stay together. We ought to approach it from the positive rather than the negative. More families stay together than break up. More children are raised with their two normal parents than those who are raised in single families or in any other circumstance. I think we have to look at how we can maximise that.

I was interested that, in your paper when you talk about education for example, you do not look at ways by which you can lift the importance of subjects that I think might help such as cooking or home maintenance—the essentials of elevating the importance of family life instead of denigrating it. Our whole

social welfare system and our whole financial system have all tended to play down the fact that being in a family is important. You are all now encouraged to do a career and do things instead of thinking that a family can also be a career.

Has your council looked at preventative programs and at school-based programs? Instead of looking at resolution of conflict, have you looked at how you can live together, how the men might be able to cook and how you might be able to encourage children to do a bit of child rearing? It seems to me that the emphasis in your paper is far too much on solving the difficulty after the horse has bolted. I would like to look at how we look after the horse in the stable first.

Ms Bagshaw—Okay.

Mr ANDREW—I am always happy to follow Ian and even happier when I find him saying the same thing. I have written down: 'Surely life is not about stress, strain and conflict.' That was my view as well. In all of your research you must know what it is that makes a marriage work. That is the vast majority, so why are we not saying, 'Wow, this is the way to make life hum'? Most of my friends have marriages that are just fantastic.

Ms Bagshaw—You are amongst one of the lucky group.

Mr ANDREW—No, not at all. I am amongst the majority.

Ms Bagshaw—We have said in our submission that it is the majority and we have quoted those statistics. One of the things that our services are set up to provide is assistance to those who are not amongst the group you are talking about. I guess that is why the emphasis of our paper has been on the sorts of services we deliver to people when relationships change. I would rather avoid that word 'breakdown' because relationships do change and people need assistance when they do. Sometimes it is only temporary assistance, then they move on and they are okay.

You have tapped into one of my beliefs. I believe that we need to look at the group that is doing well and look at researching what it is that contributes to that group doing well. Then we should work across and look at a group that is not doing so well and get some benchmarks or some indicators. I think the thrust of all research has tended to be problem-oriented. I think you are tapping into the need to look at strengths and ask, 'What strengths are in this situation and how can we build on them?' rather than, 'What are the problems here and how can we fix them?' With a problem focus you tend to get a different sort of outcome.

Many of the models practised—again, we have discussed these in the council—are now what we call strength oriented or competence oriented. In other words, you look for what people are doing well and you build on those strengths. If you look at some of the family preservation programs and other programs, that is exactly what they are doing. If you have a look at the way the services are provided, many of the service providers are now working with those types of models.

We need to address in research the issue of what it is that people are doing that assists them to have meaningful relationships. I think we did mention that; it probably got buried in all our points, but we have

said that there needs to be research done on that. We also need to look at ways of building on things that people are doing well, rather than labelling them and stigmatising them. At the moment, the way our services are delivered they label and stigmatise, and when people are labelled and stigmatised they do not feel very competent. We should avoid labelling and stigmatising people—putting a label on people does not help. If we focus very strongly on what it is they are doing well, and build on that, we are likely to get a much better outcome.

Mr SINCLAIR—If I could just pick up on a particular point, and it is where I tend to worry about your recommendations. Recommendation 35 in your submission has two dot points and the second says:

.contribute to our knowledge about the effectiveness of school programs and processes which address issues of violence in schools and the development of prosocial behaviours in adolescents.

One of the real problems there is addressing the cause of violence in children. A lot of the cause is to do with proper parenting. A lot of difficulty is the degree to which you have to look at ways by which you can help to give confidence in that individual in their own ability to succeed, and not only look at a breakdown and stress, strain and conflict within the domestic environment.

I think a lot of it goes back to what we can offer in schools, and preventative programs based on the emphasis of what works rather than what does not work. This is even more so because we now have so many more people in schools who are not Australian born, who are of different ethnic origin. The degree to which you have to cater for their cultures makes the pressure on trying to encourage that good parenting concept in schools more important. Again, there is this emphasis on anti-violence instead of looking at how you can find other ways by which you can encourage proper, if you like it that, behaviour in children.

Ms Bagshaw—Can I just highlight that there has been very little research done on the cause of violence in schools, and the *Sticks and Stones* report from the Australian government stresses that. There has been very little comprehensive good research that has been done on that. The only comprehensive good research that I am aware of is in the area of bullying. We do need more research on the causes of violence which I think are complex. To just put the causes at the hands of the parents and the family is too simplistic.

There are many different causes. I think the effect of general attitudes in the community is not to be underplayed. There is the effect of violence on television. A lot of violence between kids is picked up outside the family and I think it is important that we recognise that. But it is also extremely important that we do a lot more research. We do not do enough research. We tend to think we know the answers—that violence is caused by XYZ. We do not know. We need a lot more thorough research in this area before we can be sure, then we can come up with programs that are effective.

CHAIR—On the question of research, if you read, for example, the journal of the Institute of Family Studies over a period of years you would have to conclude that the focus is on the dysfunctional—if I can use that description—rather than healthy families and relationships. There are only two books I can think of that deal with healthy families: one by Delores Curran, which was published about 10 years ago, and Moira Eastman's book *Family, The Vital Factor*. There may be some others but they are the two I can think of. The preponderance of research, to take Ian's point, has been all about when things have gone wrong. Why isn't

there more research into how things work? And, perhaps more importantly, if research is important to do that, how do we stimulate it?

Ms Bagshaw—For a start, research money is becoming increasingly scarce, as you know. And often research money is attached: people will advertise, 'Here is a bit of research; here is some money to do it,' and it is often attached to the problem orientation. I think if there was more money available and more encouragement to do a different type of research then it would occur. It also has been a factor historically that research, particularly in the social sciences, has tended to be problem-oriented research. I think we just need a major shift in thinking, but the shift has occurred.

At a recent conference in Melbourne that our council participated in—between the Australian Institute of Family Studies, our council, the Family Law Council, the court and a whole heap of research bodies—one factor that was identified very strongly was that we needed to look at the research indicators that would assist us to know why it is that some relationships, I will not mention couples because it is more than couples, do better than others. One way to do that is to look at the relationships that are doing well. That has been on the agenda, but money is a problem. It takes money, and it takes money that is allocated flexibly.

Mr TONY SMITH—I am just looking at your executive summary here, the further research point: a constituent in his late twenties came to me—he was a reasonable person—and he said, 'I thought I had a fairly good marriage. I have a child, and we've had our ups and downs, but I came home one day and the house was totally empty and for three or four months I didn't know what had happened. I finally tracked down what had been going on. I found out that my wife had been having an affair for two years. Now the system punishes me. My wife has breached the contract of marriage and the system punishes me, because I have to pay child support of quite massive proportions. If I progress in my job, my child support goes up. So if I work harder, she gets more. She has an unencumbered house; I have a rented house.'

I am getting to the point about the ease of break-up of marriage. If you breach a normal commercial contract there is a punishment. My colleague here reminds me, of course, that both generally lose in marriage break-ups. But, really, we are working within a system, are we not, where marriage is pretty easy to walk away from and there are no punitive consequences. There are emotional ones and so forth, but there are no punitive ones. It seems to me that when a social security and a child support system can support the wrongdoer, we have something terribly wrong with the system, have we not?

Ms Bagshaw—Just to answer you, if you saw it from the point of view of the wife, she probably would have had her own set of reasons for the relationship breaking down.

Mr TONY SMITH—I do not think that answers the specific point.

Ms Bagshaw—Why relationships break down is a very complex issue. There are usually rights and wrongs on both sides, and if you are advocating going back to the fault clauses in divorce, which we had before, that system was fraught with difficulties. While people are in the business of blaming each other they often are not looking at the realities of the situation and making constructive plans to move forward in a way that is helpful to the children in particular. All couples, when involved in a relationship breakdown, will get into the business of blaming each other and of feeling wronged and all of those sorts of things and there is a

role for counselling to help people through that process.

But to move back into the area of fault and blame, brings with it a whole set of other difficulties. If you look back to the pre-Family Law Act days, people employed private detectives, there were acrimonious fights with long expensive battles being fought in court and children being caught in the middle of that—

Mr TONY SMITH—Can I just stop you there. I am a barrister by profession. A judge of great experience who practised in the matrimonial causes jurisdiction said to me that the old system involved one where there was a dirty great fight about fault and the moment that was sorted out and a judge made findings, children and property went like a breeze; no problem. In those days we did not have family court judges being blown up, we did not have the preponderance of suicide, including murder-suicide, and we did not have the enormous heartache and problems. I do not think you can necessarily dismiss the old system as being no good because we now have a new system.

Ms Bagshaw—There are pros and cons with all systems and nothing is perfect. Relationship breakdown is not easy for anybody and we need to offer appropriate services to make sure that the relationship change is as painless as possible. But unfortunately, it is not possible to ease it all.

Mr TONY SMITH—Getting to Ian Sinclair's point, surely the preservation of relationships that are existing has to be a very high priority. If it can be demonstrated to people that there are pretty terrible consequences of following through what they might be intending to follow through, maybe we can forestall courses of action. Once those courses of action start, it sets off an almost irreversible trend of separation. In fact, it almost entrenches it. You have domestic violence orders flying around, which are issued like confetti these days. One side gets an order, the other side gets an order, so the system keeps the parties apart. All of the systems seem to be geared to this sort of thing so I am just saying, maybe early intervention.

Ms Bagshaw—One of the things that the Family Services Programs are geared towards is prevention. We are advocating early intervention when relationships are in difficulty. We do offer reconciliation counselling services and family skills training services, a whole range of services that would be designed to assist. The big problem is to make sure that people get there early enough, before they get to the stage that you are talking about.

Mr TONY SMITH—Maybe you have not thought about this, but is there a duty which should be spelt out to a greater extent in the Family Law Act upon practitioners that is almost a requirement to notify an agency like yourself, almost a condition precedent to going to court, so that there is that almost compulsory intervention very soon?

Ms Bagshaw—One of the things that we have recommended—I do not know if it is in here, but we have noted it—is that we would be encouraging practitioners, particularly legal practitioners, to refer much earlier to the community based services than they have been doing. They tend to refer when people get to the court to the court based services. They are more likely to refer there than they are to the community based services. The community based services are much more oriented to prevention. I think that better education of the legal profession and other professions to refer to those services earlier would be required.

Mr McCLELLAND—Just on Tony's two points there, I do not think you can underestimate—I am a lawyer by trade as well—the greed of lawyers, particularly in hard times. They will hang on to a case and follow it through. Suburban lawyers make a lot of money out of family law, so I do not think you can assume education is going to be sufficient.

The second point is: I think Tony is dead right. It is easy to be intoxicated by a new romance, the excitement of a new challenge and so forth, but if it is drummed home to them that it will cost them a couple of hundred thousand dollars when the assets are split up, that is a very sobering thought in the intoxication. Is there some thought of taking people to discuss with others who have gone through divorce the quite often financial devastation and social devastation it has caused, if only to scare the pants off them, and say, 'There are some very good reasons why you should try and work this out'?

Ms Bagshaw—I guess lawyers often do not tell their clients up front what it is going to cost them, do they? I was just asking, but maybe that would be helpful. I know there is an interesting program that is being trialled in the Wollongong Family Court where, in fact, they are grouping divorcing couples together. They have them in groups and they have their children in a separate group. They actually video the children talking about the experience they are having during the divorce process. Then they show the video to the parents within the context of the group and it gives the parents very powerful feedback about what is happening to their children. I think there are numerous programs like that that we could try that are creative and innovative.

Mr McCLELLAND—It is a bad analogy, but young offenders are taken in to talk to prisoners about what the road of crime has done. I am not imputing that crime has caused marriage breakup, it is too strong an analogy, but it seems it may not hurt to show the financial devastation and social devastation that can often occur with marriage breakdown. I think we have been too gentle.

Ms Bagshaw—I think even earlier than that, though, we should as a community be offering more support to people in relationships. The desirable place to do it, or to put the money and the emphasis, is in the earliest stages, because once people get into the hands of lawyers and court systems, as you know, the adversarial process sets in and it is very difficult to move people back.

Mr McCLELLAND—I agree entirely, but I think you have got to introduce an element of scaring the pants off some people to get them to come together.

Ms Bagshaw—Yes. So maybe if lawyers could share more of their information earlier, it would be helpful.

Mr RANDALL—Mr Chairman, can I intervene there?

CHAIR—I am about to move on.

Mr RANDALL—I know you have got to wind up, we are well and truly out of time, but I have got to say for the record, on trying to say that the legal profession is going to involve itself at the early warning stage to try and help, the feedback I get is that it is just not true. They will milk it for all it is worth to keep

it going from a commercial point of view. It is not a cynical point of view; it is a fact.

CHAIR—We will not have an argument between the lawyers and the non-lawyers—not in public, anyway.

Mr ANDREW—Can I briefly add to the Sinclair-Andrew line here. Can you actually identify a group in the Australian community which has less relationship breakdown than other groups?

Ms Bagshaw—I do not know. We can investigate that for you and get back to you on that.

Mr ANDREW—It is related to this emphasis on the positive, of course.

Ms Bagshaw—Yes. Are you talking about married couples in particular? Relationships are more than about marriage.

Mr ANDREW—I just want to know what it is that makes a relationship work and what disciplines are common to all the successful relationships. In that sense, I would be saying why are not we encouraging people who have got a successful relationship to talk to people who have not got one?

CHAIR—Just on that, would you have access to the literature that refers to what makes relationships, families, marriages, healthy, if I can use that expression?

Ms Bagshaw—We could certainly look up the literature and get back to you on what is available.

Ms Beynon—I think perhaps the Institute of Family Studies would be the most appropriate body to address that.

CHAIR—We are talking to them next week.

Mr ANDREW—But, with great respect, it is a bit of a reflection that you cannot say to me, yes, the Calathumpians make it work.

Ms Bagshaw—We do know that in certain ethnic groups where marriage is heavily frowned upon there is a lower rate of divorce, but that does not mean that relationships are healthy. It is very difficult to access that sort of information.

Mr ANDREW—I guess you mean where marriage breakdown is frowned upon.

Ms Bagshaw—Just because people are together does not mean they are living in a healthy relationship. So it is very difficult data to access. But I guess the Australian Institute of Family Studies would be a good group to ask, actually.

Ms Beynon—And also perhaps the Australian Bureau of Statistics in terms of their data collection on divorces and marriage by region.

Mr BARRESI—Could I suggest that the Mormons have a very high success rate. I am not a Mormon, but you may want to look at that.

CHAIR—What makes them work?

Ms Bagshaw—They have a very tightly knit community.

CHAIR—I must call this to a conclusion. We have gone well over time. Can I thank you both for the submission and for the opportunity of discussing it today.

Ms Bagshaw—Thank you for providing us with an opportunity.

[10.56 a.m.]

BATEMAN, Mrs Gail, National Projects Officer, Relationships Australia, PO Box 313, Curtin, Australian Capital Territory

SEDDON, Ms Elizabeth Irene, Director, Canberra and Region, Relationships Australia, PO Box 320, Curtin, Australian Capital Territory

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you for coming along this morning. I am obliged to inform you that, although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as the proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the parliament.

We have received a draft submission from Relationships Australia which has been circulated to members, and you have provided some further information to us. I invite you to make a short opening statement or to add to what is in the draft submission. In the interests of time, I suggest that if you could keep that to about five minutes we would appreciate that.

Ms Seddon—I think we can manage that.

Mrs Bateman—I will start by apologising for the absence of Helen Disney, who has had to go to Sydney on an urgent family matter. Helen is National Director.

Ms Seddon—We thank you very much for the opportunity to give some input to this inquiry. We would like to stress that, in the lead-up to the election this year, we developed a document called *Manifesto for families*, in which we called on the government to help families build better relationships—by, firstly, the development of comprehensive national strategies for relationship support and enhancement. We see this parliamentary inquiry as an opportunity to contribute to this process. We believe that a national strategy for relationship support and enhancement has a number of vital components. Very briefly, they are an overall framework for family policy and an integrated approach to support. The key elements would cover preparation, enhancement and maintenance, support through the end of the relationship—where this occurs—and recovery and reformation.

CHAIR—I have to interrupt and say there is a division in the House, and so we all have to go and vote. I apologise for this delay: it is a danger of having public hearings while the House is sitting. As soon as the division is over, we will return and continue.

Short adjournment

CHAIR—We have a quorum, so we will keep going. I am sorry for the interruptions.

Ms Seddon—Do you want me to continue with this now?

CHAIR—Yes, please.

Ms Seddon—We believe that it is important to realise that relationships are not static entities: they constantly face different challenges and have different needs at different life stages. The other factor that we would like to emphasise is that we see community education in a very broad way. We see it as operating at a number of different levels and as a process that needs to operate across all of the subprograms.

CHAIR—Thank you. I will lead off with a matter which I was asking the Family Services Council about. These programs have come into existence on an ad hoc basis over about 30 years in response to various needs that were perceived at the time, whether that was youth homelessness, violence, education as part of the Family Law Act, and counselling, back in the days of the Marriage Act and the Matrimonial Causes Act. Given that this is the first opportunity that the parliament has taken to carry out some sort of review of it, and given the questions of integration and all that, one thing that we would be very interested in ascertaining and setting out as part of our consideration of this matter is just what use there is of the services in the community.

Without going through your submission in detail or the other ones we have had, basically the thrust of the submissions has been that these are services which are effective and efficient. Are you able to provide us, on behalf of the various Relationships Australia organisations, with a breakdown of the use of the services, say over a 12-month period?

Mrs Bateman—Across service types?

CHAIR—Could you tell us how many couples and/or individuals use marriage counselling, how many individuals and/or families use adolescent-parent mediation or family skills right through the subprogram areas. One of the difficulties is, if we are talking about providing a service which is said to be efficient and effective, I certainly do not have, and I am not sure that anybody has, a notion of is the level of service delivery is in this area.

Mrs Bateman—We handed out copies of our annual report this morning and in that, under each of the program reports which start on page 18, it shows the number of clients seen. What might be more illustrative is the graph on page 13 that shows that 78 per cent of all clients in Commonwealth funded services are in counselling. So it is predominantly—

CHAIR—Do these figures in the annual report just refer to counselling?

Mrs Bateman—No. So you would see that of all the family service programs, the proportion of clients that are in marriage relationship counselling, is 78 per cent
and mediation is eight per cent, but growing rapidly.

CHAIR—So you have got those figures there nationally. I had not seen this report before. Could you give us a breakdown of those, say by state? Relationships Australia is an umbrella body for Relationships in each state.

Ms Seddon—Each state and territory.

CHAIR—So could we obtain a breakdown of those figures by state and territory?

Ms Seddon—There would be no problems with that.

CHAIR—Thank you, we would appreciate if you could in due course send them to us.

Ms Seddon—You would need to keep in mind that not all states and territories provide all of those services, because we are not all funded to provide.

CHAIR—That is why I am saying that if we break them down into each subprogram by state and territory that would give us a better idea of what the level of service delivery actually is.

Ms Seddon—Yes, we can certainly do that.

Mrs Bateman—The table on page 14, source of funding, shows which services are offered in which state.

CHAIR—It would be useful if you could provide that to us in due course. One of the things which you have made mention of in the draft submission on page 8, in paragraph 3.1, is the suggestion that there was not sufficient integration of services. Could you elaborate on that?

Ms Seddon—I think one of the problems that we come across, both in our administration of these programs and clients' experience coming into our organisations, is that each program is separately funded, needs to be accounted for separately, is administered separately and often employs different staff. Our experience of clients' needs is that they often need to have a number of these different types of approaches and that education, mediation and counselling are ways of delivering a service to give an outcome.

Some clients may need to be in relationship education, they may need to be in mediation, they may need to be in counselling, they may need a combination of services, but at this stage it is very difficult for our services to provide that combination with the way the programs are currently structured.

CHAIR—Is that a product of the structuring of programs or a product of the funding or both?

Ms Seddon—Both.

CHAIR—The suggestion was made earlier by the chairperson of the Family Services Council that there is a case for the pooling of the funding from the Attorney-General's Department. Do you have any comments about that?

Ms Seddon—We would certainly support that recommendation. What we believe needs to happen within these programs is that clients' needs should be the focus of the service; that we need to be able to have some assessment process which then actually enables them to go into one or a combination of those

particular programs; and that we need to focus on the outcomes of those programs, not the inputs.

CHAIR—To take up a point I made earlier—I do not know whether you were here—elsewhere in your submission you talk about the propensity to pick winners, which I understood to mean a propensity to provide programs which are more familiar to an agency or there is ease in providing. If funding is pooled, will that not contribute to picking winners?

Mrs Bateman—No. I think that reference to picking winners was more in relation to the interpretation of the term of reference—those that can best benefit. We are aware that in some of the labour market programs, for instance, there can be a tendency to pick the ones that are most likely to succeed in getting a job and the harder cases are left. We certainly were not supporting that. We were saying that that interpretation is a dangerous one.

Ms Seddon—Could I suggest that, if we were able to pool the resources and we were able to offer integrated programs, in fact, that would be of enormous benefit to the number of situations which we see as very complex, where there are a number of factors operating—such as mental health issues, domestic violence and a whole range of factors—the fact is that we are restricted at this stage in the way that we work with them by the fact that it takes time to get them into other programs and there is not the flexibility that we need. We actually believe that that flexibility—both integration within the organisation and integration with some other community services—will benefit those clients enormously. At the moment, they are to some extent disadvantaged by the structure.

CHAIR—Are those other programs, programs that are funded by other departments—

Ms Seddon—Yes.

CHAIR—And/or states and territories?

Ms Seddon—Yes.

CHAIR—Correct me if I am wrong, but is the thrust of your criticism that there is a lack of coordination between the Commonwealth and the states and territories?

Ms Seddon—I think we have seen a lack of coordination around certain issues such as domestic violence. We mention in our paper that we are very pleased to support the recent Senator Newman strategies around a comprehensive Commonwealth-state domestic violence strategy. We also believe that we need to link into mental health strategies and other health strategies, both Commonwealth and state.

Mrs Bateman—In compartmentalising services, I referred to the graph before. It shows that about six per cent of all clients are receiving relationship education. That is the number who are actually attending groups and courses. But we would see that relationship education is something that is across all programs. I could draw your attention for later to attachment A in the paper we have handed out. It shows how many of the technologies, I guess—or types of services, as they are known now—are spread across each of the stages of relationships. So there is a role for relationship education in each one of those stages, and for community

education.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Throughout the submission, there is an assumption that it is natural and inevitable that some relationships are going to end. Does this mean that that is the direction you take all the time, or do you have a preventive direction as well as a breakdown one?

Ms Seddon—I think that the majority of our services we have tried to orient towards prevention. Basically, we see prevention in a threefold manner. There is primary prevention. I think this particular committee is very interested in that and is looking in that direction. We are looking at secondary prevention and early intervention, where couples are coming in, identifying issues, identifying problems and wanting to do something about them. If you read our annual report—also the statistics from the Attorney-General's Department will bear this out—most people who come to our organisations want to focus on 'saving' their relationship and are committed to looking at it and doing something positive. The majority of our resources are actually concentrated in that area. A level of concern which we have is that we have long waiting lists and scarce resources to put into this level of prevention which is very effective. I guess I would have to say that, in my long practice experience, and I think the literature bears this out, people respond to help when they identify that they need it, when problems start to occur. There is not a lot of evidence to suggest that, if we intervene much earlier, in fact they will be able to use that help.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—It is just that you say here on page 2, dot point 4, 'that difficulties in relationship and in some cases the end of a relationship are natural and inevitable and not failure'. You are basically saying, are you not, that there is no hope?

Ms Seddon—I think we are basically saying that some relationships will end and it is inevitable they will end. With a number of those relationships where there is severe conflict, hostility, domestic violence, the negatives in the relationship far outweigh the positives. If you look at the literature on health and relationships, you will see that one of the things that actually contributes to good health is a good relationship; one of the things that actually contributes to bad health is bad relationships. We believe that, at that point in time where a couple have identified that they can no longer continue in this relationship, it is important to help them separate and separate in ways that will enable them, in particular if they have children, to continue parenting those children in the most positive way.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—So you feel that you balance or weigh the possibilities up?

Ms Seddon—Very much so.

Mr TONY SMITH—What do you mean by domestic violence?

Ms Seddon—Relationships in which there is a history of violence of one partner towards the other.

Mr TONY SMITH—Meaning physical violence?

Ms Seddon—Physical violence, emotional violence.

Mr TONY SMITH—In Queensland, domestic violence can be ringing up your partner and saying, 'Please can I see my children?' and orders are issued as domestic violence orders. That is regarded as harassment and orders are issued. Where there is physical violence there are criminal offences. Do you tell women they can go and complain to the police and their partner will be charged with assault? Do you tell women that or do you encourage women to go off and get domestic violence orders in your counselling process?

Ms Seddon—I think we would be encouraging a broad brush approach to domestic violence. Where there is violence in a relationship and we do hold grave concern for a woman's safety, we will be encouraging them to take out domestic violence orders because we know from the literature that, in fact, legal intervention is one of the main ways of stopping violence continuing in a relationship. But we go one step further than that. We actually support programs for men to look at their violence and to look at ways in which they can change that behaviour.

Mr TONY SMITH—Do you support programs for women in relation to what can be quite violent language which can provoke? Violence does not just happen; it happens because of something. So it is a two-way street.

Ms Seddon—We need to be very careful and we need to refer back here to the literature on domestic violence and the research that has been done in that particular area. There is no doubt that domestic violence is a very complex situation, and I think we need to be very careful not to simplify it.

There is a wealth of literature on the domestic violence area and very frequently—I am still a practitioner, and I still work in the area as well as running an organisation—we do see women in very difficult situations who have no options. The men are not willing to look at their behaviour at that particular stage, and there is no other option at that particular point except for the women and children to leave the relationship. So I think we need to be very careful because it is a very complex area.

Mr TONY SMITH—There is no question about that. When you speak about advising people, is that because they have been bashed to within an inch of their life, or because there are all sorts of threats going on and the usual malheur that occurs when relationships break down? Do you distinguish between the two? In every relationship that is breaking down, people threaten each other.

Mrs Bateman—Are you distinguishing between the difficulties, or between a threat and actual harm?

Mr TONY SMITH—Yes.

Mrs Bateman—What really got to my—

Mr TONY SMITH—Sorry, but I want to clarify this, because it is important. I gathered from what you said, Miss Seddon, that you counsel women to take out orders. If they have been physically assaulted, they are entitled to complain to the police of a criminal offence.

Ms Seddon—Yes.

Mr TONY SMITH—I mean to distinguish between that situation and one of threats or annoying things or other types of things, which—in the all-embracing domestic violence definition, in Queensland, anyway—covers almost anything from blinking twice at your partner.

Ms Seddon—I would have to say that, from my experience in working in this area over 20 years, most women who resort to taking out orders or going to the police are in very difficult and very powerless situations, and they have suffered physical and often great emotional damage. They do not do it lightly. Many of the women that we see, in particular, want the violence to stop but they do not want the relationship to end.

Mr TONY SMITH—Have they been to the police?

Ms Seddon—Many have been to the police; yes.

Mr TONY SMITH—Have their husbands been charged?

Ms Seddon—Many have been charged. I am talking about ACT experience here and Australian experience.

Mr BARRESI—You are covering a subject in your submission which I have not seen in any other submissions. Maybe that has got more to do with the fact that I have not read everything yet. The subject is sexual incompatibility. As part of the changing expectations of marriage, particularly since the 1960s, when the so-called revolution took place, how dominant is that issue? Do you have an accurate handle on that as an issue, or is that more a presenting problem—a symptom—rather than something deeper?

Ms Seddon—It is both, if I understand your question properly. For many couples, it is a presenting issue. Often, it can range from lack of desire for sex for one partner or the other in the relationship down to physical difficulties that are exacerbated by medical issues. In relation to that, a number of our agencies are linked up with and working with medical practitioners in this area. On the other side of the scale, it can be very much a symptom of underlying problems in the relationship which have not been dealt with. One needs to go back one step further and look at those problems, and then sometimes the sexual difficulties will resolve themselves. So, it is a bit of both.

Mr BARRESI—Yes. You often hear the term that there is no 'spark' in the marriage, and I am not sure what that refers to. This is the first time that it has actually been mentioned in a submission. You have obviously noticed it.

Ms Seddon—Yes, it is a significant issue.

Mr BARRESI—Right. The other question picks a little from the comments of Ian Sinclair and Neil Andrews, and I thought that perhaps you might have heard their questions with regard to this: if you are going to do research, what about researching the positive relationships? In 1.17 on page 6, you talk about a

paper presented to the Rotary Research symposium calling for research on 'characteristics which strengthen relationships . . . which suggests that a significant factor in maintaining a satisfying relationship is a ratio of positive to negative interactions.' What does that mean? Is that really referring to what Ian and Neil were referring to, in terms of the positive aspects of a relationship?

Ms Seddon—Yes. This was a piece of work that was done in America, and we have to be careful not to generalise from America to Australia. Part of what we were doing in that particular paper was calling for more research into this area because of the dearth of research in Australia on satisfying relationships. Gottman's work actually suggested that there were a number of different types of relationship that people could have. We all know of the couple who live next door who fight all the time, yet stay together for 30 years until one of them dies. Looking at that from the outside, we may be saying, 'What is going on in this relationship?'

We all know of couples where there does not seem to be a huge bond, or of couples who perhaps more fit the norm of communicating, problem solving, and dealing with conflict in the way which many of the popular books would suggest. What Gottman has come out with is that there are very many different styles of having a relationship. What matters is, over time, how many positive interactions there are in that relationship in balance with negative interactions.

Mr BARRESI—Do you counsel people who come to you in that regard?

Ms Seddon—Yes, we are certainly looking at that research and using it in our practice—very much so.

Mr BARRESI—Right.

Mrs Bateman—We were using that as a point, though, to say that we believe we need more of that, that there is not a lot of that sort of research around.

CHAIR—Could you forward us a copy of Gottman's paper?

Ms Seddon—Yes.

Mrs Bateman—Since we put this paper in, we have heard that there is some more recent research which we will also forward.

CHAIR—If I can pick up on one aspect, in looking at perceptions about relationships it seems that, in some areas at least, there is a gap between popular perception of relationships and some aspects of them. I will take one area as an example—the area of co-habitation. The ABS statistics show that co-habitation is now the major pathway to marriage. I think the figure is 57 or 60 per cent of couples co-habit for a period prior to marriage. I saw an opinion poll somewhere in the last 12 months that suggested that that was accepted. Yet, increasingly, the research seems to me to be showing that that is not the case and that, in many respects, co-habitation can be a troubled pathway to marriage in terms of the outcomes from it.

Research can always go off in different directions, and more research might find something different. But assuming for a moment that the research which seems to be coming out suggests that the popular perception could well be totally the opposite of what actually helps relationships to work, are there aspects of your work that deal with that? If the research is right, how do we deal with it? Assume that more research comes out and keeps saying that co-habitation, whilst it might work for some, is not necessarily an ideal pathway into relationships for a lot of others, because it can mean that they are more likely to be dysfunctional or that there are higher levels of marital dissatisfaction. If that is true, how do we respond to that and deal with it? I do not mean this committee, I just mean generally.

Ms Seddon—I think there is still some debate about whether the research is demonstrating that or, if it is, what that exactly means. If the research were demonstrating that, I think they would become a target group for us, one that we need to direct services at. In our paper we suggest that statistics only capture what is happening at one point in time and that, particularly in the 24- to 35-year age group, there are a number of trends that are happening that we really need to get in touch with and look at on an over time basis. So, if what you are suggesting is true, that is what we would be suggesting—that we begin to target programs to meet the needs of that group.

CHAIR—In your statistics for marriage and relationship education, on page 20 of your annual report, you have 4,060 participants, roughly three-quarters of whom attended as couples, so presumably that is both and we are looking at a total of about 2,500 if you break it down to couples. Forty-two per cent of marriages are celebrated by civil celebrants in Australia at the present time and there is another group that go to registry offices. So let us say for round figures that about half the weddings that occur in a given year are civilly celebrated, not in some religious church setting; we are looking at something like 55,000 to 60,000 weddings in a year that are celebrated civilly in one form or another. Given that I suspect that very few of those couples would attend relationship education programs conducted by church affiliated agencies, we have a success or a hit rate, if I can use that expression, of about 2,500 out of roughly 55,000 or 60,000. That is pretty low. What can we do about that?

Ms Seddon—I need to clarify one thing there: that 2,500 to 60,000 statistic that you are quoting, you are not quoting that from the couples we are seeing in our annual report?

CHAIR—In your annual report you have a total number of 4,060, 75 per cent of which are couples and 25 per cent are individuals. If you count couples and individuals, you have to take some off. Call it 4,000. I am not fussed on the figure.

Ms Seddon—No, that is fine. I just wanted to clarify that.

CHAIR—Four thousand out of 60,000 or 55,000 is still a very low rate. If these programs are useful, as all the evidence we are being told says is the case, how do you attract more couples? I am asking particularly about those who are being married by civil celebrants because it seems to me that Relationships Australia is not the only agency that is non-religious, non-church in its affiliation but it is certainly the major one.

Ms Seddon—Yes. I think the first thing is that all of our relationship education programs are not

targeted at that particular group that are actually coming up to marriage or preparation for marriage. In fact, I think it is quite a small target group of the programs in our organisation. We believe that it is a useful process but we also believe that pre-marriage education or pre-relationship education, whichever couples are choosing, is only a small element in what needs to happen in the life stage of a couple's relationship. It is almost that we find that some people cannot respond to the answers until they know the questions, and sometimes it is not until they are married that they know the questions that they want to ask, even. So, while we would support pre-marriage education, we would say that is only one element in supporting relationships across that life span. Indeed, if we want to attract more people into pre-marriage education, the very simple answer is that we need to put more resources into it.

CHAIR—I understand that. If you are saying couples do not know what the problem is until the problem arises, which is in a sense what you are saying, and given the average length of those relationships which break down these days is about 10 years—

Ms Seddon—Yes.

CHAIR—And we also have other evidence to say that people do not turn up to counselling until there are real difficulties. Assuming people don't just wake up one morning and say, 'It is a lovely spring morning, I am going to separate or get a divorce,' that this is something which has happened over a period of time, then surely if we were aiming to be preventive in our orientation and even it is post-wedding we would be wanting to do a lot more in the first, say, five years of the relationship after the wedding rather than waiting till they turn up because somebody has packed their bags and left.

Ms Seddon—We would totally agree with that proposition and we would, I think, ask the committee to look very closely at a program that is operating in WA called building better relationships, which is targeted towards the 25- to 35-year age group and exactly looking at those particular sorts of issues. Expanding on that, we would also suggest that we need to have a broader definition of relationship education. We tend to think of it in terms of groups and programs and our understanding and our experience would suggest that, in fact, we need to be looking at broad brush community education programs that are media campaigns, that are novel and that are new ways in which people can access information about relationships, and which are directed at helping people gain more information about relationships and how they work and how to access services if they need to access services.

I suggest to you that the success of the building better relationships program in WA has been because they have been able to have this broad based community education program on which to base their latter community education groups. We believe that
the two need to go together.

CHAIR—We will endeavour to look at that when we get to Perth.

Mrs Bateman—I think they have a flow-on effect into all of their services.

Mr RANDALL—I have three questions or observations that I want to deal with quickly. You talked about primary prevention being the best way and we have heard before that maybe we can get lawyers to put

people in—for want of a better word—earlier. Tony Smith, what is the statutory obligation for lawyers in this?

Mr TONY SMITH—It is an obligation to have regard to the need to preserve the relationship where possible, or something to that effect. It is an obligation to keep them together, in a sense; a statutory duty to see if they can be kept together rather than embark on the consequent—

Mr RANDALL—Given that legal obligation on lawyers, firstly, what other primary prevention areas do you think could be helpful for early identification? Secondly, getting back to Mr Smith's point about assault and the legal obligations there—and I am glad to see that the next group from Centacare has a well balanced male ratio—it obviously works in reverse sometimes and men suffer mental and emotional trauma. Do you try to help there? Thirdly, your organisation is obviously housed in the suburbs, but we have had a fair lobby that some of these counselling facilities should be housed in the courts so that they can be more legitimately applied to head off legal action further down the track. Could I have a quick response to those questions?

Ms Seddon—Early identification: we would respond by referring back to the broad brush community campaigns that give people information about relationships that state that it is okay to seek help.

Mr RANDALL—Can I just interrupt? It is all right talking about broad brush but that is just pie in the sky stuff to me; you have to be more specific, if you can be.

Ms Seddon—We can look at the anti-violence campaigns; we can look at the anti-smoking campaigns. What we are saying is that we need to create a culture in our society where people learn about relationships and the sorts of ways in which they can be promoted, that it is okay to seek help because problems in relationships are usually inevitable, and where they can seek help.

Mr RANDALL—So from the point of view of the lawyers' obligation, do you think they should be more forthcoming in trying to push these people towards your organisation at an early stage?

Ms Seddon—If it is at an early stage. It would really depend upon where and if and how the couple had decided to separate. I cannot quote to you the exact form, but couples are required under the Family Law Act to come to counselling if they want to separate before, I think, two years. Our experience of those couples who come is that they come because they have been made to come. Very rarely have there been reconciliations from that particular process.

So, if you are talking about lawyers, my suggestion would be not to try to get couples to come for reconciliation, but to get them to come for mediation. They can then look at how they might be able to work with their relationship and dissolve their relationship in a way that is respectful and helpful for all the children involved. I think that is where the lawyers will begin to play a very strong part.

Mr TONY SMITH—That is what some lawyers do now. Part of their legal training is to actually mediate problems. I know some lawyers obviously take advantage of the system, but mediation is a big part of being a lawyer. In fact, it is a 70 to 80 per cent part on the Commonwealth side.

Ms Seddon—Yes, I would think the mediation processes and models that are being used within the family services program differ quite significantly from the actual legal processes that are involved in separation administered by lawyers.

Mr TONY SMITH—If lawyers in carrying out their duties were to have regard to these things, perhaps your job would be that little bit less onerous.

Ms Seddon—I can give you only an example of what is going on in the ACT. We have a mediation service, which is a service of the Family Court Counselling Service, ourselves and Centacare. We are joined together in a cooperative program. It is highly supported by the Canberra lawyers who are on the advisory committee of that service and they are working very well together. In fact, that is where I would see the legal people making a contribution. In our experience, by the time people have got to lawyers, very few of them are going to come back to reconciliation. We really need to be practical and look at how we can help them separate in a way that is respectful and fair and going to prevent problems further down the track.

CHAIR—So I want to pick up on that point. If that is the case—which commonsense and experience over a long period of time suggest—there is a clear dichotomy that you can draw between those clients for whom reconciliation counselling can be useful and those for whom conciliation and mediation can be useful, where separation and divorce are really the outcome. As I understand you, you are saying that, in effect, once people have visited a lawyer, that is in most cases crossing the line. So if—

Ms Seddon—We do have some people in between who are in the counselling program who are looking at separation and who go to lawyers. They are still looking at whether, in fact, they will stay together or they will separate. Once people are separated‘ and they are actually in the legal process, the chances of reconciliation are very small.

CHAIR—What proportion of your clients can you say roughly fall into reconciliation counselling and what proportion are conciliation?

Ms Seddon—I would have to get back to you on that one. We would have to go through our stats and pull it out for you.

CHAIR—Could you give us some indication of that? We do not have time to explore it now, but it does also have some ramifications for the proposal which the Attorney-General has floated in terms of possibly taking some of the counselling services from the Family Court and placing them with community agencies. Perhaps you might give consideration to making some further submission for us on that issue.

Ms Seddon—Yes.

CHAIR—In doing so, could you give us some indication of what proportion of clients in counselling are reconciliation versus conciliation? Also, you may make any comments—I will leave it as general as that—you would like to make about the proposal which the Attorney has announced only in broad terms. I should say out of fairness to him that he has not said this is definitely the direction but that it is on the table for discussion.

Ms Seddon—Okay.

Mrs Bateman—I want to bring in quickly some statistics from the AIFS evaluation of counselling some years back. It showed that 89 per cent, almost 90 per cent, of couples who were together who came to counselling wanted to keep the relationship intact, whereas for those who were separated it was about 30 per cent.

Ms Seddon—Can I also emphasise that the couples who come to the counselling program are not always coming about separating or staying together. That is not always an issue for them. They might be coming about a sexual problem. They might be coming about having difficulties with one of their children because they do not how to deal with it and it is causing some problems between them. Those are our couples that we are saying come with an early identification of difficulties. Separation, for them, is not even on the agenda yet. It is really important not to see all marriage counselling as that.

CHAIR—I have lumped them, unfairly, into the reconciliation side rather than the conciliation side.

Ms Seddon—I think that is a bit dangerous, because it is suggesting that all people are coming about separating and, in fact, they are not. They are not even thinking about that at this stage. They are wanting to address problems in their relationship.

CHAIR—That is why it would be useful to break it down into those statistics.

Mr BARRESI—That might be an answer to the question I was going to ask. On page 15, you have a bar chart showing the proportion of clients by gender. It disputes the common perception that those who seek counselling—those who make that initial contact—tend to be the females rather than the males. It is fairly even, in terms of counselling and in terms of mediation, which is good to see. But that might be reflective of what you are saying there, that they are not coming for separation but they are coming more for advice on family issues. That is one question. There is a clear difference, though, on a third one—which is family skills. It just stands out. Why is that?

Ms Seddon—I think we might have to get back to you about that one—

Mrs Bateman—The high proportion of females?

Ms Seddon—Yes, the high proportion of females—basically because that is not a program in which I have been highly involved in the organisation. My guess would be that we are dealing with a lot of—

Mrs Bateman—More about parenting skills.

Ms Seddon—More about parenting skills, but also a lot of women who come to those programs are separated. That would be my guess, but I would need to get back to you about that.

Can I go back to your question about men, which was: how do we attend to men's issues? I think I would like to suggest that we do attract a fair number of men to our organisations. We are highly concerned

with men's issues. A particular area of concern is men at separation point, because they do seem to be quite vulnerable around that particular time. We would think that more research needs to be conducted into how men deal with separation and how to support them through it, very strongly.

Mr TONY SMITH—I cannot see anything in these outcomes in relation to people who come for assistance with their marriage problems. Have you got any figures on that?

Ms Seddon—We can certainly give you what we have. I would refer you very much to the AIF comprehensive report on marriage counselling in Australia.

CHAIR—In what you provide us, could you direct us to that as well?

Ms Seddon—Yes.

CHAIR—We have to attend a division in the chamber now. We might say thank you very much for coming along and for your submission. We appreciate that and we look forward to what further you can provide us. There may be an opportunity for a further discussion about some of those issues as well.

Ms Seddon—Thank you very much.

[12.10 p.m.]

HARRIGAN, Mr Neil Patrick, Deputy Chair, Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission, and Director, Centacare Australia (Canberra and Goulburn), PO Box 112, Curtin, Australian Capital Territory 2605

McCORMACK, Ms Kathleen Vera, Director, Centacare Australia (Wollongong), PO Box 471, Wollongong East, New South Wales 2520

TYRRELL, Mr Paul Anthony, National Executive Officer, Centacare Australia, PO Box 112, Curtin, Australian Capital Territory 2605

CHAIR—I am sorry for the delays but that is the cost of sitting when parliament is sitting. I welcome you all and thank you for the submission. We received it today so you will forgive us that we have not yet had a chance to read it. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Ms McCormack—I also chaired this actual research for Centacare Australia.

CHAIR—I should inform you that, although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Having said that, can I invite you to make a brief opening statement to the committee on any matters that you would like to highlight and then we can have a discussion.

Mr Harrigan—We would be happy to go pretty well straight to questions from the committee. Can I just say that we did try to have a representative who has had a long connection with legislation and the relationship of Centacare and the Catholic Social Welfare Commission to represent us here. If you look at the preamble, we felt it would be useful just to indicate some of the points of connection that we have had over the years with regard to family issues.

We do understand that one of the much more senior people you will have an opportunity to speak to when you get to Hobart is Father Clem Kilby who has a long history there. In some sense, we are saying an apology and are also saying that some of the submissions that we would make at this point we hope that you will pick up during your Tasmanian visit.

The second thing is that we do speak through the text about the great need for a closer look at the way programs are delivered and the way that the sector interrelates with the life course of people in relationships. I think that is an issue we might develop further. That is really where we would like to start.

CHAIR—Can I ask you a question which I have effectively asked Relationships Australia and will be asking Family Services Australia as you are the three peak bodies. Because these programs have developed in an ad hoc manner over three decades, starting with marriage counselling and the Matrimonial Causes Act, right through violence and youth homelessness and all of that, there has not, at least from the parliament's

point of view, been a comprehensive overview of the field. Therefore it is difficult to ascertain what the level of service delivery actually is. If we are reporting on this to the parliament, given that the submissions universally to date, so far as I have read them, support these programs and say that they are efficient and effective and useful—in fact some submissions say there ought to be more funding provided by government for them—I think a starting point would be for us to try to make some assessment of what the level of service delivery is.

So it would be useful if you were able to provide us, in a further submission, a breakdown by way of subprogram and agency, the level of service provision in each of the areas. That would be a very useful starting point for us, because I think, in reporting on this, we ought to be informing the parliament and, through parliament, the general community of what is actually is provided in a way which people can understand. I think that would be useful in terms of a further submission. I know you cannot provide that now, but we would certainly be looking for it.

Mr Harrigan—It raises the issue of, say, volunteers. Are you looking specifically at it against the funding base of Attorney-General's funding?

CHAIR—No.

Mr Harrigan—Or are you looking at it in the broader sense?

CHAIR—The broader sense, yes.

Mr Harrigan—That may take us a little time.

CHAIR—At least in terms of the Attorney-General's funding, as I understand it, you are required to provide six-monthly reports—

Mr Harrigan—That is not a problem.

CHAIR—Presumably, that information is therefore readily available. Even that at the outset would be useful. But the broader sense would be useful because, as I understand the situation, there are a range of agencies and services which are provided, which are not funded by the Attorney-General's Department. I think, if we are having a comprehensive look at this area, we would not want to restrict our overview simply to those programs which are funded. We would like to look at the number and the incidence of programs which are unfunded as well. If we are taking a total picture of the area, the funded programs would be only part of it.

Mr Harrigan—Yes.

CHAIR—It may be difficult to provide some of those figures—I readily understand that—but it would certainly be useful to the committee, in terms of our deliberations, to actually be able to bring the information together in a way which does not seem to exist at the present time and have a look at it.

Mr Harrigan—We would probably have to run certain caveats about the robustness of the data.

CHAIR—We can set the caveats. I will pick up a couple of things that have been talked about this morning, just to get your comments on them at this stage. One of the suggestions that was made was that there needs to be more integration in terms of programs and funding. The suggestion was even made to us that there should be a pooling of funds rather than funds provided on a subprogram basis; that is, that you get a bucket of funding, as I understood the proposal, rather than small buckets for each program. Do you have any comments about that?

Ms McCormack—I suppose, if you are looking at an organisation like Centacare Wollongong, you have funding for the family skills training, the marriage education and the counselling. All of those programs are used to their capacity, but the thing is that sometimes we might need to do something else that is relevant to the client coming to the organisation. So it could be useful to be able to use it for something else, yes.

CHAIR—Is that an argument in favour of one pool of funding or some flexibility?

Mr Tyrrell—It is a generic question that you are asking, but there are some specific issues, particularly around the rural and remote areas—I am thinking of the staff supply side—where you are trying to attract quality staff to remote or rural areas and where the funding may only allow you to employ 0.3 or 0.4 of a full-time person. Often, across the programs, you can attract people who have a range of skills. If you could pool the funds, you have got a nice full-time position to offer, for example, someone in Katherine whom you may not be able to attract on a 0.3 or a 0.4 basis. But if you could broaden it and use some creativity, I think that would be a step in the right direction.

Mr Harrigan—I think, within the actual subprograms, there is the opportunity of having certain flexibilities on a needs basis—if we take a pooling but hold the same subprogram guidelines then that is obviously very helpful against the backdrop of the certain needs of particular clients, as Paul said, in the rural areas—but also a certain flexibility that is within the sector with regard to getting much closer to life course needs or critical points in people's relationships and things like that, accepting the fact that, at the end of the day, there has to be a program and there have to be some sort of specific guidelines. Just lumping those flexibilities into a larger bucket but not having certain interfacing of those programs with each other probably does not go quite far enough.

CHAIR—The current regulatory structure under which you operate, do you have any comments about that, whether it is adequate, or should we change it?

Mr Harrigan—Are you talking about the regulation against legal requirements or within the regulation of programs proper?

CHAIR—No, I am talking about the programs, in effect, through the funding mechanism. That is, your regulatory structure is basically the Attorney-General's Department through the parameters of funding.

Ms McCormack—We receive funding to provide programs. Often the funding we receive is not really enough to provide the programs, often we have to top up ourselves. Is that what you are saying?

CHAIR—No, I am talking more about are there constraints within which the funding is provided, that is, the level of accountability, what is provided by your contract with the Attorney-General's department in providing certain programs. I am just interested whether you have any comments about that, or you are happy with that.

Mr Harrigan—Because of the area of the work, there are pressures—community pressures with regard to quality assurance, for example. There is a whole state of movement that is going on with regard to Attorney-General's and their relationship with regulation against contracts and things like that. I must admit I feel quite relaxed about the way the movement is heading at the moment. General accreditation, agency accreditation; the interest and work that has been done on quality assurance in an area that has a whole lot of difficulties in terms of specific measurements. Outcome measurement is a very difficult one because of the long time frame and the sleeper effect that you get with problems in relationships and things like that. My personal view is that I would feel very relaxed about how those processes are shaping up.

Mr Tyrrell—Picking up on the quality assurance aspect, I think there are very exciting things in the near future, if we are able to progress that issue fairly quickly. I think there has been a development from, if you like, a monitoring approach, which has some paternalistic aspects to it, to what I believe will be much more of a dialogue between the regulatory authority and the service provider. In that particular area, I think there are some major steps forward about to be taken, if indeed we are able to proceed down that path. I think there is definitely an improvement which is occurring at the moment.

Mr Harrigan—I think there has been a history of partnership—as a small 'p'—in the sector, and that works in terms of the public sector as well and non-government sectors. I think that element, in its history, is worth preserving rather than to get into some sort of you-me type of environment. By the nature of the work that we are involved in, that has emerged as a good thing. My personal view is that that needs some sort of protection within change.

CHAIR—One of the focal points of this inquiry is, in a sense, some balancing up of the focus that has been on the breakdown, for want of a better description, of relationships over the last 20 years. From the Family Law Act on, there has been considerable focus, not only by the parliament but by others, on relationships that are dysfunctional. Part of our focus is on what makes relationships functional. Given that a number of your programs on strengthening relationships, such as marriage and relationship education, family skills in particular and other aspects of parent-adolescent mediation—if I can put it that way—I would just be interested in your comments about the strategies which you believe can be explored more or further in those areas which would help us to strengthen relationships?

Ms McCormack—I suppose we have done exactly what you have said. You are looking to what can strengthen relationships. We have said in our submission what factors contribute to relationship breakdown. The psychological factors, the relationship interpersonal factors and what is going on in society is what really causes great pressure on families.

We, as an organisation of Centacare Australia and the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission, are always looking at ways and means to enhance family life. But I think we also have to take into account that the pressures are going to be there, well and truly. If we had the secret, we would be very

willing to share it with you at this stage.

CHAIR—That is true. Presumably you have some ideas. If you are running programs that are aimed at giving individuals or members of a family, in whatever form we are talking about, some knowledge and skills to improve their relationships, I think there is a societal interest in knowing what is it. Just take one aspect, for example. I am not trying to be exclusive in terms of this relationship, but a common relationship is marriage.

People get married, it seems to me, with the aspiration, at least, that it is going to last, that they have something that they want to build upon. The great majority of them in fact do. Given that aspiration, given that desire which is borne out in the practice of people continuing to form relationships, I think there is some societal interest in what actually makes it work.

Ms McCormack—What we have tried to address in this submission is the fact that we are looking at a relationship in marriage. It really is a lifelong learning process. It starts in your own family. What we are looking at in Centacare agencies is the fact that it is the life cycle at different stages of development, that just before a marriage is not a time just to put in marriage education. It is about what sort of things we inject into the system to support families, that this is family life, to enable them to grow and survive. It is all about modelling and having other factors like the education system contributing to it as well. It is a lifelong thing.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—That is an area I was interested in. Are you putting in any of these sorts of programs? You have a fairly unique situation where you could, if you wanted to, have access to a very big spectrum of the education program through the school system. Has anything been done to put a program like that into the school curriculum?

Ms McCormack—I can just speak on behalf of Centacare Canberra and Centacare Wollongong. We actually run a school counselling or a school child and family program with the Catholic education system. Part of that program of the school counselling is really life education, looking at relationship education right from the outset, from the time the child starts school right through to sixth class, then going on to high school. That is part of our preparation for life, marriage and relationships.

CHAIR—In your submission and also in other submissions, there have been much reference made to the life cycles so that key transitional events in the lives of many people are identified, such as leaving home—

Ms McCormack—Having a baby and leaving school.

CHAIR—Forming new relationships, perhaps getting married, birth of the first child, and one can go on. The suggestions are made that it is around those life transition events that education can be useful. How do we actually encourage people to make use of the programs that are available around those events? Is there more that we can be doing? Let me, before I finish, go back a step.

It seems to me that the churches are in a unique position so far as pre-wedding marriage education is concerned, because couples attend relationship programs because the celebrant, in one form or another, either

says, 'Thou shalt go, if you want to get married in this lovely bluestone church,' or, 'It is highly desirable that you go,' which basically means the same thing. So there is a pressure there which—

Ms McCormack—Which is not a good arena for education.

CHAIR—It may not be a good arena, but it does mean that more couples are likely to go than otherwise would go. That pressure, of course, is not there around some other life cycle events, such as the birth of the first child. The pressure there is perhaps to go to an antenatal class. If these programs are effective, and if the research is showing that it is the life cycle events which are the important transitional points about which more knowledge and skill needs to be gathered in order to make the changes in the relationship, how do we encourage people to make use of that?

Mr Tyrrell—You talked about the points. That is just one way of looking at it. I wonder if it is a cultural issue. Maybe the way we are selling the product, if you like, is not the correct way. Maybe just running courses and letting people know about them is one way. You can stand in the marketplace and sell, and if the product is good enough word of mouth will get out. I have to say that it does get out. In the main, the people who do go to these courses really like them. But if you speak to people before they go, they do not want a bar of them. So there is this dichotomy. In one sense you have something that is working and not working: when they go they love it and they tell their friends; if they do not go you have to drag them kicking and screaming.

The other issue is the culture we are living in—and this is a bit of a hobbyhorse. The video culture grew up in, say, the late seventies and I wonder whether we have learnt from it properly. That culture has managed to get its message through to society, very powerfully, about a whole range of new ways of operating, a whole range of new models. I am wondering whether we need to be a bit creative; not to be aggressive, but to be positive about our message in selling what we have got to our community.

CHAIR—I understand in general terms, Paul. Can you give an example of what you might have in mind?

Mr Tyrrell—In terms of the second stage?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Tyrrell—I think popular culture has always been of interest to young people—it has for 50 years. I wonder if the wrinklies—that's us—use that popular culture properly, in the sense of using the music, the videos, the films and the venues that young people go to in order to at least give them a sample of what is possible. It has been my overwhelming experience that when they do sample it they really like it. The problem is not the product. It is getting them to it.

CHAIR—So there is a cultural barrier.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—It is creating a desire to want to know about it. That is what we have to do, isn't it?

Mr Tyrrell—You can create a need for yoyos. You can sell millions of them just by creating the need.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Yes, that is right; that is what I mean. You are saying that that should be one way?

Mr Tyrrell—Yes—doing it much more, and much more creatively and broadly, and into places where we have feared to tread.

CHAIR—If it is right that participants in programs generally have a positive outlook, even though they might have been negative before coming there, it seems to me that that does not translate into doing something else when the next stage comes along. To take one common example of couples who come to pre-marriage education programs, if they walk away from them saying that it was an enjoyable, informative and more useful than not experience for them, then why are we not doing something at time of the birth of the first child, in the early years of marriage?

As I was saying before, the average length of marriages that break down is 10 years, therefore, something is going wrong in the first four, five or six years. We do not seem to be providing anything there. Is that because we have not got the resources, because we have not provided the programs or because, despite the feeling that this previous program has been useful, there is still some reluctance we are not overcoming?

Mr Tyrrell—I wonder about the product—again, I use that word. The couple may have an enjoyable experience with the pre-marriage, the pre-relationship and really like it. However, I think married people are very busy. Where are the mental coat hooks for them in the first five years? They might forget about it. In the first two or five years they are paying off mortgages. The last thing they think about is going to some sort of course that will help their relationship. Maybe they should be thinking about it, but they are not thinking about it—I think that is the point you are making.

Do we need to build in something almost contractually or to at least offer much earlier on, in two years time or five years time—I would say between two and five—these courses? Should we say, 'Why don't you take the books with you?' or 'Here are the cards and the numbers. Come back to us because we would really like to see you again'?

CHAIR—I am not saying that it should necessarily be a course. Do couples at that stage go off to their CAE and do something about communication skills?

Mr Tyrrell—I would doubt that.

CHAIR—I am not suggesting that it ought to be done in some narrowly focused way, but do they do anything in that period of time?

Mr Harrigan—A crucial question for government, of course, is how far one wants to interfere in 'life course'. Against that background, I think Paul's model has some attractions. The key attraction is leverage from one point to the next point. I think that has been missing. I think that is what we were saying earlier on

in answer to a question about whether we should lump all the subprograms in together. I was making the point that there are gaps between them and other opportunities available. How does one continually lever into those future opportunities?

That is an issue because, in some sense, you are almost seeing if the package is a 'life course' package of key incidents or key points in people's relationship lives. How you lever from one to the next in terms of support systems becomes rather crucial in how you formulate a policy in practice. I like Paul's idea that the whole leverage is based on a needs point in terms of what they perceive as the way things are already marketed to them.

CHAIR—As I understand it, you are saying that we need to be much more creative in the way in which we market—

Mr Harrigan—And lever to the next point so that there is an assumption that, the next time the wheels fall off, there are options available to us and it is locked into the psyche of the developmental model.

Mr Tyrrell—Triggers.

Mr Harrigan—Yes, 'triggers' is probably a better word.

Mr TONY SMITH—This is probably going way off the point, but there are a couple of points I wanted to make, and one just occurred to me then. Do we have a bit to learn from our ethnic friends? I use as an interesting example a colleague of mine who is a solicitor. He was educated in England and was Fijian Indian, so he was very much ethnic Indian. He was involved with a European lass, was engaged and so forth, but that did not go ahead mainly because of his father's pressure. He came back in his mid-twenties and his father took him out to meet a girl and said, 'You have got five minutes to decide.' He said, 'Right; I say yes.' Fourteen years later, they are still together. I asked him, 'Did you love her when you married her?' 'Of course I did not.' 'Do you love her now?' 'Absolutely.' That is an interesting thing, isn't it? We seem to see figures that ethnic marriages and relationships seem to be stronger than our models. Why is that? Is that correct? Do you see that in your work?

Mr Harrigan—I could not give a hard statistic. Kath, could you comment?

Ms McCormack—Coming from the area I come from, which has about 67 different nationalities, I would say that the thing is that they do not frequent the services very much, and we need to put in more specialised services.

Mr TONY SMITH—Maybe that begs the question; maybe they do not frequent because—

Ms McCormack—They are often in the women's refugees, due to violence and things like that, too. You would really have to do hard research on that to get your answer.

Mr TONY SMITH—Are you aware that there are suggestions to that effect, and that they are far more disciplined in their relationships than we seem to be in ours, or than European people seem to be?

Mr Tyrrell—We have got to be very careful with hearsay on this issue. I have heard the same things you have heard, but all sorts of questions go around in my head, and I would like to get some solid research on that. What you are suggesting may be true. You have used the word 'strength' and I think there is probably a PhD in that.

Mr Harrigan—There is also the complex of what the relationship is, isn't there, in all of that and in the culture, as well? That would have to inform a good PhD, I would think.

Mr TONY SMITH—The example I quoted highlighted that. That case would not fit the models that people in this room have been trained in, in any way whatever, and yet it worked.

Mr Tyrrell—I have heard from Hindu people that we love and then choose to marry, whereas they choose to marry and then learn to love. That is very simplistic.

Ms McCormack—You heard from the husband that it worked. Did you hear from the wife? That is the thing.

Mr TONY SMITH—I did not, and that also raises an interesting thing that one seems to get from people in your field. You seem to assume automatically that, because one person says one thing, that may not necessarily be the case on the other side. That is not a criticism: it is just something that seems to be so. I guess that, in being objective, you have to be like that; but, from my observations of this particular person and what happened and the course of his life, it seemed that it was a very solid relationship.

Can I just take you away from that for a moment into another area? Again, it is a bit of a philosophical question. From my experience of having been in the courts for a long time in practice as a barrister, and also in my eight months in this job already, and even from some of the evidence here, there seems to be a reluctance to criticise where criticism is due in a particular situation. That raises another interesting question: do counsellors become a little bit circumscribed because of the financial consequences? Are there consequences such that they need to keep their system going, they are concerned about ensuring that they have people coming through their door and, if they do not follow a fairly 'neutral' technique, they may not get the sort of returns that they need? Is there a reluctance to criticise where criticism is due? Or is that totally wrong?

Mr Harrigan—By 'criticism', do you mean criticism of—

Mr TONY SMITH—If a certain mode of behaviour is occurring, the basic problem in a lot of these situations seems to be communication. I will tell you this story, too. that I heard. Two people were sitting with a counsellor. The counsellor asked one person for this. Then the other person came in. The counsellor stopped and said, 'Look, she did not say that.' That other person got offended and never went back to the counsellor. Yet it was quite a valid point that one person did not say that, and that was at the root of the communication problem. Is there a reluctance to criticise or to make comment?

Mr Harrigan—It is not an experience that I have of the counsellors that I have seen operate in the field. We are now talking about clinical techniques. I guess we could go through any number of discussions

about clinical techniques as they relate to efficiency, effectiveness, outcomes and the whole box and dice. There is a bit of a view, certainly in some quarters, that you are only as good as the question you are game to ask. That is a lay kind of response. From my own experience, I would have thought that the capacity to enter into quite direct, important and realistic dialogue is a centrepiece of relationship work, but it sounds like you may have had other experiences.

Mr TONY SMITH—This is again a personal experience. I once acted for someone with seven pages of criminal history, and he was only 31. I just got stuck into him. I said, 'You are a menace to society. Look at you.' He said, 'No-one has ever said that to me.' We became friends. I followed up on him. He managed to get a job and he managed to pick himself up. He said, 'No-one ever said that to me before.' I am sure he has been through a lot of counselling. You mentioned quality assurance. There are people who are not qualified in the technical sense yet are highly qualified in a robust experiential sense. They have been there.

Mr Harrigan—Certainly in our paper we draw attention to your point. It is one of the issues that need to be thought about, and I think it can be thought about against the background of some very professional work that has been done over the years, with regard to Attorney-General's and with agencies, in terms of a skill base of people delivering these services. But I still think it is worth reminding ourselves that it is a personal service. We are not into teller machines or anything like that yet. It is a person-to-person thing. That being the case, the human resource becomes an extremely important vehicle in the way that the service is delivered.

Certainly we felt that we needed to put it in our paper, just to remind ourselves that what you say is a crucial question. At the end of the day, you can have any number of programs, but if they are delivered in a human resource context then the skill of the operator is paramount, quite frankly.

Mr TONY SMITH—Are you looking to outcomes, particularly in situations where people come to you and say, for example, that their marriage is very shaky? Are you following those people up? Is that what you are looking for—outcomes?

Mr Harrigan—There are people in the room who could say a lot more than I could about this. We struggle in this field for robust measurement. It is just the nature of social policy and social service. But a lot of attention and time has been given to it. There would not be one agency that does not have some methods of measurement at certain points in the intervention, in terms of longer-term follow-ups. There is lots of research that one can draw on. But it is not a field where you can measure one intervention to one outcome. Particularly, if you are looking at sleeper effects with people, presenting problems may not appear again for many years. So there is all that tied into it. Certainly it is not something that we have not thought about. There is a lot of attention that has gone into it. Most therapists or counsellors these days would work in an environment of professional thought that says, 'Outcomes are what we are here for. We are not here for a happy chat or anything like that.'

Ms McCormack—The other way that we ensure that we are outcome focused for the client is that we have very good supervision put in place right throughout our agencies which really helps the counsellor to be very accountable to the client and to the organisation. A really good counsellor is not only about giving advice, it is about helping explore with the client what the possible outcomes are for them.

Mr TONY SMITH—Frequently to follow someone through is, I guess, beyond really your ability, but maybe the network through Catholic network can assist to follow that up. Do you call on that at all? Is there a physical directing sometimes of people to a parish priest?

Ms McCormack—Not really. We do not see the parish priest as equipped to do the counselling unless they are qualified psychologists or social workers. They would come to the Centacare agencies.

Mr TONY SMITH—But afterwards. I mean that little gentle, 'How are you going?' business.

Mr Harrigan—There is no national grid of long-term feedback that is available that we can draw on in Australia. But certainly there would be sufficient research through individual agencies and within peak organisations of studies that have been done. The Institute of Family Studies—there would be any number that you could pick out that have looked at some sort of longer term assessment of outcome. The bottom line is that it is a struggle and will always be a struggle, in my view, of what is an outcome, but that does not mean we should not have a crack at it, and I think that is something that is built into the system at the moment.

CHAIR—Is there sufficient research around about what makes relationships work?

Mr Harrigan—There is some quality around but, and this is a personal view again, there is never enough. It is such a huge part of human life and has all sorts of economic implications and a whole lot of things for a society that any extra dollars would be appreciated.

CHAIR—The obvious point is that the Commonwealth government spends somewhere between $3 billion and $5 billion on the consequences of marital breakdown or relationship breakdown. That is a huge amount of money. If it was some other program we would be having a royal commission into it and wanting an answer, but we accept it. The research, it seems to me, is largely about relationships that do not work. That seems to be where the thrust of the research is. There is not much about what actually in the first place makes them work. That is my observation. I was just interested in whether that is yours.

Mr Harrigan—I think there has been a perception in the community that this is a soft part of life—counsellors, caring and sharing, and it is not a sharp, business part of our society. I would be very interested in how your committee looks at that because I do not think that is an appropriate sense of a part of the community and a part of community life that can take its due place under that sort of perception. I think it has to follow every other profession in terms of level of research—building programs that are based on some realistic assumptions and expectations about life. The point that you make is a very valid one: what makes them work seems a very important ingredient in the whole library of information that we need. I think there is that perception that this is something for part-time social workers to just spend a few days on before we go for quiche and chardonnay, or something like that. It will not work that way.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—On page 5 of your submission, you have said that the government should ensure that relationship services are available to those who need them as a matter of course in the same way as health and education services are. Would you like to expand on that a little? I think it is a rather interesting concept.

Ms McCormack—I suppose that I speak generally, but the people who do access the counselling services are usually the people who do have the resources to go. They are people who, within themselves, are wanting to do something about their relationship. Often people who are in really difficult circumstances and have no extended family or support are the ones who would see it as a stigma to reach out to counselling. They also cannot afford it.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—So you could put it on the medicare bulk bill system or something.

Ms McCormack—It is really important that those people also have the opportunity to enhance their relationship. I would see that as important.

CHAIR—It is often said, fairly or unfairly, that the people who make use of these services are white middle-class English speaking, non-Aboriginal, reasonably well-educated Australians of more than one generation.

Ms McCormack—Because some of the funding is topped up by the church, we have been able to provide this service to people who are marginalised. We are trying to keep the door open for them. They are referred by other resources and encouraged, but we cannot always keeping doing that without the extra funding to do it.

CHAIR—So is it a product of funding, the culture or both?

Ms McCormack—It is the culture. It is the environment that the people are living in. It is also about the resources around them, where they can be unable to get to this service.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Would people take advantage of this if it were available?

Ms McCormack—It is about the way that they are referred to it. The important thing is their understanding of it.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Would they use the service if it were at a lower cost to them? Is cost one of the things that is keeping them away?

Ms McCormack—If the service were available at a lower cost, they would use it. That is our experience.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Or if there were some refund or rebate on their costs or something like that?

Ms McCormack—Yes. People often ring around to find out the cost of a service before they come. We always try, as a national organisation, not to exclude people. But we do have to really carry the load.

CHAIR—Most of these services operate on a supply oriented basis; that is, an agency in Wollongong advertises that it provides X, Y and Z services.

Ms McCormack—You do not have to advertise very much.

CHAIR—I mean in the broad sense, such as word of mouth or whatever. Is that the best way of doing it? We were talking about selling yo-yos and that sort of thing before. Is that the best way, given that we get a certain strata of the community attending and others that do not? Is there room for some demand orientation?

Ms McCormack—I will just give you an example of the way that programs are funded and how we can utilise that funding. For example, people who come into family skills training sometimes come in because they are having difficulty with their children and they are very isolated et cetera. They would be very afraid of counselling. Often, going into that environment, where they receive extra skills, and finding the resources themselves enables them to move into counselling. That often prevents a breakdown, because they start to explore for themselves the experience of how worthwhile it is.

CHAIR—So how do you get people into family skills training?

Ms McCormack—That is supposed to target people who are really isolated and marginalised. It is usually from other organisations, such as departments and refuges et cetera. So they are people who really would not normally come in touch with counselling services. It is about the organisation who receives the funding networking with the community and spreading the word.

CHAIR—So there is a lever there.

Mr Harrigan—Mrs Grace, I was interested with regard to lower income people taking advantage of the services. Once again, the leverage thing is something that we really do need to think about. The same goes for men: men do not come to counselling; they come so that the wife gets counselling. That is a glib assumption, but they will tend to surround you for a while, often before they start to move into the really serious stuff. How do we create those levers? I do not know whether 'commercialisation' is the correct word, but there are principles in commercialisation that need to be translated into the relationships setting. We need to think about a way of marketing, more than about whether we should market.

Mr Tyrrell—As an initial step, the community development officer program is targeting people from different ethnic backgrounds. That is just one weapon we have, and we need to really develop that model over here. There are about six or seven things that should be on the raft, but the CDO program is certainly a step in the right direction.

CHAIR—Just on that, I want to raise two things. Tell me if I am wrongly putting words into your mouth, but I understand you to be saying that, in terms of our task, we ought to be looking at what the levers are. That ought to be one of the things that we are asking people about.

Mr Harrigan—It is an undeveloped area in the sector. Certainly, there is a lot more research with regard to the efficacy of the subprograms as they now exist. There is a lot of hard information held by Attorney-Generals and other people, but it is the access and the continuation, and all those sorts of things—exactly.

Mr Tyrrell—The levers and/or triggers.

Mr Harrigan—And triggers: whatever word you want.

CHAIR—Secondly, on the community development officers, there is something that would be useful for the committee to do. Relationships Australia and Family Services Council are still here, but it would be useful for the committee to have the opportunity to talk to community development officers at some stage during our inquiry. Whilst I understand this is still quite new, I think it would be useful for us to get some input from people who are actually involved at that level. I will leave it for now. You do not have to answer now, but maybe there could be some liaison with the secretariat about where, in our travels around the country, we could at least talk to somebody there. That would be useful.

Mr Tyrrell—I think it would be a very important visit to make.

CHAIR—Another thing we have not yet done that we would like to do is to go to at least one regional area—if not more than one—where services are being provided. It is no good us going to a regional area where there are no services, because that is not going to be greatly useful. We can be told what people need, but it would be much better if we could go to some regional or provincial area where services are being provided, so that we can get from people on the ground some better idea of what their challenges, difficulties and problems are. Again, I am not asking for it now, but you might be able to suggest where we could go in our travels. We will also have to look at the logistics of that and how it fits into the program.

Mr Tyrrell—I know that you are travelling on the east coast and to Adelaide. You are going to a rural setting: is that correct?

CHAIR—We are hoping to: that is what I am saying.

Mr Tyrrell—Can I suggest that you take at least two rural settings? Take a regional centre, but also go somewhere 'remote'—as everyone is calling it—where the challenges are quite particular. I think that would be important for the committee to see.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Have you some ideas as to where?

Mr Tyrrell—I am thinking of places like Katherine, Broome and Alice Springs.

CHAIR—Broome sounds nice!

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Broome has come up a couple of times in this conversation.

Mr Tyrrell—Places of that ilk.

CHAIR—Yes. Mount Isa was suggested at one stage.

Mr Tyrrell—Yes. That could be another one.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Alice Springs was another.

Mr Tyrrell—Katherine is a very good one, too.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—Would there be much contact in Katherine with the Aboriginal population?

Mr Tyrrell—Yes: frequent contact.

Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE—That is an area I have some concern with, to do with this subject.

Mr Tyrrell—In fact, the overlay of services in Katherine is quite interesting: the way that community has pulled together.

CHAIR—Can I make a suggestion that you might like to think about a possible number, because we are going to have to choose. We will have to look at where we can fit it in and a whole range of other things. But if there were some suggestions that you could put forward to the secretariat, then that would be useful in helping us to make a decision about where we could go.

Mr Tyrrell—To Claressa?

CHAIR—Yes, to Claressa. I am sure that would be useful. Now there is something I want to take up. I know Dale is still here and I ask her to return to the table while you are still all here.

BAGSHAW, Ms Dale Margaret, Chairperson, Family Services Council, 15 Napier Close, Deakin, Australian Capital Territory 2600

CHAIR—Dale, I did not get a chance to ask this before. It was something in your submission that I was particularly interested in, and I am happy for any comments from anyone who is still here. I refer to paragraph 34 of the Family Services Council submission which, because the others probably do not have it, I will read. It referred to some work by Jacobsen and Johnson and the paragraph states:

> The Council refers to the work of Jacobsen, a longstanding exponent of relationship skills training, who has recently been forced, by the findings of its own research, to concede that standardised communications skills programs are of little long term benefit to couples. He now believes that change focussed programmess have to be applied 'contextually' by examining the functions of the particular communication styles for particular couples[41]. In his recent work he has focussed more on fostering partner acceptance of each other and on helping each to give up the struggle to change the other. These goals are much more easily achieved in couple therapy than in group education programs. There is also evidence that individuals who have learned communication and conflict negotiation skills find themselves unable to apply them in intimate relationships in which they are vulnerable[42]. People lose the ability to apply these skills when they are emotionally aroused. Where there is a deep emotion bond people are more likely to benefit from a form of help which is tailored to meet the specific requirements of the couple.

I have not read that research and I would like to read the paper, obviously. But I was just interested in some comments about that. If you take, not only marriage and relationship education programs but also, it seems to me, family skills programs, the notion of the group setting and couples learning from each other and the adult education principles that have been the basis of those sort of programs, according to this summary, some of that approach at least—I am not necessary saying all of it—would seem to be challenged. Dale, would you like to make a comment?

Ms Bagshaw—This is information that has been forwarded to us by one of our council members, Tom Patterson. I have not read the article myself either, but we can get the copy of the article for you. Every piece of research has to be taken on its own merit and you have to look at the quality of it but, if some of what that research would suggest is true, I would still be saying that probably alongside of the counselling you would need these other programs. A multifaceted approach is usually useful, which is why we are talking about providing integrated service delivery rather than isolated services. Because the nature of relationships is complex, the way you tackle relationships in difficulty needs to be multifaceted. It is always simplistic to say one approach will work. That would be my comment.

Mr Harrigan—I think I would support Dale, not against any amount of research but just in terms of a clinical observation. I think in some sense we are looking for a la carte approach to it. Rather than suggest that one is better than the other, it seems to me we are not looking at either/or but both, and how we move those ahead, at what points you have a broader packaged approach and how you support that against individual needs and things like that.

CHAIR—Taking all the qualifications—and none of us has read the article, which we will have to do—it did seem to me not entirely contrary to developments, even in marriage and relationship education, where you have got inventories like focus and prepare which are being used much more, which seem to be contextualising the position of the actual couples concerned. Maybe it is something which does fit in with

some of the developments which are occurring in terms of using those inventories, where the couples are looking at their own particular relationship rather than what you do in a group setting.

Mr Harrigan—It is the whole point about transference and continuation of learning, is it not—whether it has been picked up and applied into a general setting and all those sorts of issues that are brought to bear on it? The attraction of a packaged approach, of course, is that it is so much cheaper if you can have 50 people coming into a packaged environment rather than, as I say, an individually cast intervention.

Ms Bagshaw—I think there is always a temptation, though, when you look at relationships, to get into this cause/effect, blame/guilt mode of thinking. As I was attempting to say earlier, every relationship has many different factors contributing to its success or failure. I think to say that it is only one factor or that there is only one approach is dangerous. Also it needs to be stressed that every relationship is unique and has to be treated as such.

CHAIR—Is there anything else you want to add?

Mr Harrigan—Just one point. There has been a fair bit of publicity about a report that came out overnight about men 10 years down the track after their divorce.

CHAIR—This is the Jordan thing. I have only read the news clippings this morning.

Mr Harrigan—It is all around. It is in the news everywhere today. It reminded me of a point that I wanted to raise very quickly, and that is the fact that we talk about marriage breakdown as if that is the end. It seems to me that it needs to be thought of as well in terms of life course. In actual fact, there is a whole journey that goes on beyond that. It just seems to me that, if we focus specifically on some sort of marriage point—in the same way as we are now looking much more into preventive measures right back into, say, early childhood—and the points that Kath made and that have been made by a number of people, in terms of that total process, then the process obviously does not end in divorce.

In fact, the article, if you pick it up, talks again about the sleeper effect of a lot of this dysfunctioning occurring. This is 10 years later that this research picks up a whole stack of dysfunctioning and unfinished business in that relationship, despite the fact that it is well and truly seen officially as ended. I just wanted to make the point that there is a much more enduring debate one could put forward about care, in terms of a relationship, over a much longer time frame than perhaps we have ever thought of.

CHAIR—I thank you for your attendance and your forbearance with the contingencies of parliamentary life. This is obviously very early in the inquiry, and we will have an opportunity of hearing from others involved with Centacare agencies as we move around the country, as with the other peak bodies as well. We look forward to the further material that you can provide to us, and we may well want to come back to you a bit further down the track and be more specific about some further questions when we get to that stage. So I thank you for that and I thank *Hansard* for their services.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Tony Smith):

That the committee authorises the publication of the evidence given to it at the public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 1.12 p.m.