



# **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

**Reference: Aspects of family services**

**MELBOURNE**

**Monday, 25 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

<b>ANDERSON, Ms Diana Gayle, Acting Clinical Supervisor, Southern Family Life, 197 Bluff Road, Sandringham, Victoria 3191</b>	<b>445</b>
<b>BURNARD, Mr Don, Director, Family Relationships Institute Inc., 21 Bell Street, Coburg, Victoria 3058</b>	<b>435</b>
<b>CAVANAGH, Ms Jo, Director, Southern Family Life, 197 Bluff Road, Sandringham, Victoria 3191</b>	<b>445</b>
<b>CLARKE, Ms Billi, Domestic Violence Outreach Worker, Salvation Army Crossroads Project, 29 Grey Street, St Kilda, Victoria 3182</b>	<b>417</b>
<b>DALTON, Ms Delyce Terease, Project Officer, Healthy Families Project, Victorian Board of Studies, 15 Pelham Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053</b>	<b>404</b>
<b>EASTMAN, Dr Moira Bernadette, c/- Australian Catholic University, 383 Albert Street, East Melbourne, Victoria</b>	<b>391</b>
<b>FISHER, Mr Peter John, Executive Member, National Anglican Caring Organisations Network, 12 Batman Street, West Melbourne, Victoria 3003</b>	<b>483</b>
<b>GREELY, Mrs Jacquelyn Ann, Member—Liaison Team, Catholic Engaged Encounter Oceania, 10 Churcher Court, Mount Waverley, Victoria 3149</b>	<b>457</b>
<b>GREELY, Mr John Terence, Member—Liaison Team, Catholic Engaged Encounter Oceania, 10 Churcher Court, Mount Waverley, Victoria 3149</b>	<b>457</b>
<b>HAMLEY, Ms Margaret Joy, Manager, Housing and Crisis Services, Salvation Army Crossroads Housing and Support Network, PO Box 136, Moonee Ponds, Victoria 3039</b>	<b>417</b>
<b>KERIN, Reverend Tony, Liaison Team Priest, Catholic Engaged Encounter Oceania, 402 Albert Street, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002</b>	<b>457</b>
<b>KIRKEGARD, Ms Susan, Executive Officer, National Anglican Caring Organisations Network, 12 Batman Street, West Melbourne, Victoria 3003</b>	<b>483</b>
<b>LACEY, Mrs Denise Elizabeth, Coordinator, Marriage and Relationship Education, Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, 396 Albert Street, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002</b>	<b>475</b>
<b>MARYANNE, c/- Southern Family Life, 197 Bluff Road, Sandringham, Victoria 3191</b>	<b>445</b>
<b>MUEHLENBERG, Mr William John, National Research Coordinator, Focus on the Family Australia, 60 Carroll Road, Oakleigh South, Victoria 3167</b>	<b>378</b>
<b>PLANT, Ms Jenny, Manager, Crisis Services Network, Salvation Army Crossroads Project, 29 Grey Street, St Kilda, Victoria 3182</b>	<b>417</b>

<b>STIVENS, Dr Maila, Director of Women’s Studies, Hitsory Department, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3052</b>	<b>464</b>
<b>TESSA, c/- Southern Family Life, 197 Bluff Road, Sandringham, Victoria 3191</b>	<b>445</b>
<b>TICKELL, Mr William Gerard, Director, Healthy Families Project, Victorian Board of Studies, 15 Pelham Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053</b>	<b>404</b>
<b>TOKO, Ms Maggie, Manager, Youth Services, Salvation Army Crossroads Project, PO Box 136, Moonee Ponds, Victoria 3039</b>	<b>417</b>
<b>WILLIAMS, Mr Glenn Allan, Executive Director, Focus on the Family Australia, PO Box 5210, Clayton, Victoria 3168</b>	<b>378</b>
<b>ZIBELL, Mr Kevin John, Client Services Manager, Ballarat Children’s Homes and Family Services Inc., 115 Lydiard Street, North Ballarat, Victoria 3350</b>	<b>492</b>

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL  
AFFAIRS

*Aspects of family services*

MELBOURNE

Monday, 25 November 1996

Present

Mr Andrews (Chair)

Mr Barresi

Mr Kelvin Thomson

Mrs Elizabeth Grace

Mr Tony Smith

The committee met at 9.06 a.m.

Mr Andrews took the chair.

**MUEHLENBERG, Mr William John, National Research Coordinator, Focus on the Family Australia, 60 Carroll Road, Oakleigh South, Victoria 3167**

**WILLIAMS, Mr Glenn Allan, Executive Director, Focus on the Family Australia, PO Box 5210, Clayton, Victoria 3168**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into aspects of family support services by the Legal and Constitutional Affairs committee. I welcome witnesses here this morning and others who may come during the day. This is the sixth day on which we have had public hearings of the committee and the second day on which we have now been to Melbourne. We have received some 150 submissions to date and there are probably some more coming in, we suspect. So there is a considerable volume of evidence coming before the committee in relation to the matters which were set out in the terms of the reference.

May I also say that the selection of organisations and individuals to come along and give evidence at any one hearing does not reflect the bias of the committee on a particular day. It is just that by going around Australia we attempt overall to get a range of views before the committee. It might be one way in one city and one way in another in terms of organisations or agencies represented but overall, we hope that that produces some balance in terms of the various submissions that might be made to the committee.

I welcome the witnesses here before us. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence on oath, I should 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. I thank you for the submission which you made to the committee. I ask you in opening whether you would like to make some introductory remarks.

**Mr Muehlenberg**—The thing that we would like to stress which we did include in the submission, is the whole emphasis on prevention, as opposed to cure. This is the case with any number of social issues. Whether it be the drug issue or, in this case, marriage breakdown, we find often that governments tend to have a habit of picking up the pieces. They deal with aspects of social issues, saying, ‘We have got this problem. What can we do to remedy it? How can we put bandaids on some of the wounds?’ But our whole emphasis really in this submission and in additional material that we have got is that, like the public health model, really the way to go is prevention as much as possible.

My understanding is that we spend something like \$200 million to \$300 million a year on marriage education and related issues but spend something like \$2½ billion a year on picking up the pieces of marriage breakdown. If for no other reason than that of a simply practical one of saving money, I guess our organisation is concerned that we put much more emphasis in the preventative side of things. Using the public health model as an example, basically, you identify the at-risk group and you try to prevent more people from going into the problem area. You identify factors that will cause people to go into the problem behaviour and try to head them off before they get worse. So our emphasis really is on this aspect of doing all we can to prevent marriages from breaking up in the first place, not just saving money, because of the very real social costs that family breakdown have.

I will just add two more things into the debate. In our submission, we briefly looked at some of the

evidence for the harmful effects of family breakdown, especially as it impacts on children, but I really did not go into much detail. So something we have done in much greater detail is two papers—*The case for marriage*, which looks at simply the benefits to society of marriage as opposed to various other states, and *The case for the two-parent family*. Both papers are quite well documented and there are something like 80 footnotes on one, about 45 on the other. I just give those to the committee—I should have brought more; forgive me for that. It is simply to indicate that there is indeed a wide range of evidence, not only here in Australia but overseas as well that, by every indicator, our society suffers when families break down. It suffers certainly in terms of the wellbeing of children in relation to educational performance, risk of suicide, drug use and a whole range of indicators. It seems that children do, on the whole, thrive much better in a two-parent family and, when there is a marriage breakdown for whatever reason, children really do suffer quite dramatically.

That is a collection or summary of some of the evidence for this from studies all around the world. By the way, I have got piles and piles of studies on my desk back in the office, so there really is a rising body of evidence to show that marriage is the best thing for children and, in the long run, for society. So that was really just an addition to what we have put in this submission.

I have asked Glenn to join us simply because I am more of the researcher, the theoretician, if you will. However, Glenn has had quite a few years in practical counselling. So if what I say sounds a bit theoretical or in the air, I think Glenn can put a bit of substance to what I say. He will probably share throughout the morning some stories that he has to really emphasise the importance of putting preventative measures into the whole area of marriage breakdown and starting at the front instead of simply picking up the pieces afterwards. In general, that is all I really wanted to add to the written submission.

**CHAIR**—Did you want to add anything?

**Mr Williams**—What I would like to add to that would be that, whilst we have looked at a lot of evidence from overseas as well as in Australia about what is contributing to family breakdown, there is also a lot of evidence in our experience over the past three years where, as we have developed a service that has been offered on a national level to families, we have seen an incredible response.

Certainly, there are many challenges confronting us. One is in the area of resources. We daily encounter people who contact us as a result of hearing one of our *Focus on the family* radio programs which we now have airing on approximately 102 radio frequencies around Australia. There are many people who are just not aware of what resources are available to them. In fact, we produced a family resource catalogue, which I am happy to leave here with the committee. We sent that out to every person on our mailing list.

Now, those on our mailing list are not forced to be on our mailing list at all. They are people with various needs who have contacted us, some as a result of hearing a radio program, others who have attended some of the seminars that we have conducted, those who have been referred to us for counselling and also various churches and pastors who have felt a need to be informed about what resources are available, not only for them as they work with families, but also for families at the grassroots level.

So we encounter often people saying, ‘Listen, we never even knew that there were resources that

could address some of these issues, that could help us strengthen our skills as a parent, that could help us address issues such as attention deficit disorder, single parenting issues, helping children work through the whole process of grieving the loss of a parent and so on.' So there is an enormous number of issues. Certainly, many of the resources that we have put together in this catalogue do deal with the preventative side, and we have seen that to be a very important aspect of our work.

**CHAIR**—In various submissions before the committee, in answer or attempted answer to the question about what are the causes of marriage and relationship breakdown in the community, we have been provided with a catalogue, if you like, of causes. Is there any way of prioritising those causes? Are there causes that are more prevalent than others, or is it the reality that somehow it is a combination that afflicts different relationships in different ways depending on the circumstances?

**Mr Muehlenberg**—Glenn might be able to answer that at a more practical level. My understanding of the research is that, as I said in the paper, there may well be as many causes of divorce as there are divorces. There are certainly a lot of complicating factors. I looked at what I thought were some of the major causes but I suppose in some ways, even taking a step back from there, there are some causes that really transcend or go beyond simply something that a government can address—for example, the whole ethos of fairly rugged individualism which is really the hallmark of modern society. That is something which not only contributes to the divorce problem but, it seems to me, contributes to any number of problems. That is perhaps beyond the scope of any government to cure. How do you get basically a self-centred, 'me first' individual transformed into a caring community minded individual? That may be the realm of, say, churches or other institutions to solve.

So in some senses I am feeling constrained that, yes, there is a number of things governments can do and we do have a number of recommendations—for example, perhaps changing the Family Law Act, looking at some of the economic issues—for a number of kind of practical things governments can do, which I really think will go a long way to helping on the preventative side of things. But I am realistic enough, at the same time, to realise that some of these problems are much bigger than anything a government can do. As I say, there is a very big problem in this whole issue of individualism and the whole spirit of the age which says, 'Me first. Whatever is good for you, do it, and don't really worry whether it is for the sake of the kids or the community. Put your own needs and interests first.' In fact, as to this whole emphasis on rights at the expense of responsibilities or duties, I just think that if you read any of the great classical social commentators you will find that they all bewail the fact that, as more and more emphasis is put on rights and individual rights at the expense of duties to the community, eventually a society is not going to hold for long. That is getting a bit airy-fairy and sociological, but that for me is a parameter which I have to be aware of.

That is something the government perhaps can tackle. It can maybe help in some ways, as I said in the submission, by putting a bit of responsibility, for example, back in the Family Law Act. When you take out fault, in a sense you take out responsibility as well. Economic situations which tend, again, perhaps in the taxation policy, to favour the individual at the expense of either a married couple or the family, suggest changes that can be made to maybe slow down this whole spirit of the individual, but it is very difficult. Again Glenn may, from his practical side, identify certain core causes, but for me the problem is much bigger in many ways than what any individual government can do.



**Mr Williams**—In a lot of the counselling work that we have done with families around Australia, we have certainly witnessed a real lack of skills in relating to each other, among family members and husbands and wives alike. So I think that in terms of prioritising what ought to be done we need to be carefully looking at the whole premarital education aspect as well as marital education. In our counselling we are amazed that sometimes it is not all that in-depth. We seem to be looking at or identifying key relating skills, conflict resolution skills, communication skills and so on. It is quite amazing that something that comes across to us as perhaps fairly simple is yet for many of these people quite profound.

That is because many of them have not had the opportunity to come together to have any form of education in regard to the responsibilities and changes that will occur not just as a result of entering into a marriage contract but also as a result of starting a family. Many parents have children but do not have any skills or have not learnt any parenting skills for how to deal with some very difficult situations confronting them. We are finding, the more counselling that we do with families and with couples, that it does relate back to providing very practical skills in the whole area of communication and conflict resolution.

**CHAIR**—How do you think that has changed? I look back on my own parents' parenting skills—true, this is by definition a biased observation—and they did not go to any courses or undertake any programs but we seem to have survived all right, and most of the kids of the year in which I grew up did. The culture was totally different, I suppose. Is it because of those external changes in culture that people need more skills, whereas a generation ago they did not seem to? Raising kids is raising kids. I know that is a simplistic way of putting it, but presumably our parents' generation would have said, 'Well, there are a lot of difficulties in raising kids but we got on with the job and did the best we could, kind of.' That 'doing the best we could, kind of' does not seem good enough today or does not seem to address the issues that parents are facing.

**Mr Muehlenberg**—You are right. Every generation tends to think its set of problems are worse than those of the preceding one, and there may be a case for that. But I do think that probably most commentators today would observe that there is a fairly quantitative and qualitative shift that has taken place just in the last, say, 30 years. I do not know if I should bring in a personal element, but I was part of what was known in the 1960s as the counterculture. There was a fairly radical shift that took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s in terms of all of these issues—in terms of authority, the importance of family and marriage.

There was a whole dynamic that went on and resulted in some fairly radical shifts, I think. This is coupled with modern culture. I mentioned this briefly here as another kind of non-political area—the whole area of popular culture, everything from Madison Avenue advertising to MTV, Hollywood, all of the kinds of values and all of the stuff you get coming out of the television and video world today. A lot you really could not consider to be family friendly. Again it is very much emphasising the individual: 'Go for it and get all of the action out of life that you can.' Not of a lot of it is family affirming or marriage affirming. So there has been a kind of a tidal wave change in the culture around us.

Again speaking as a researcher and sociologist, in some ways I see these kinds of cultural shifts as being just as important as, say, some of the previous revolutions, whether a French Revolution or a Russian Revolution, which turned around a lot of institutions. In some ways I think these changes that have happened just in the past few decades have had as great an impact and again, because they are in some ways out of the bounds of politics, they are not necessarily amenable to political change. My frustration is that there are

certain things you as politicians can do, but I am aware also that there are certain things which are part of the greater culture and which, unless we can somehow find ways to addressing them, are going to make your job and our job much more difficult. That is a theoretical kind of framework but Glenn can maybe put some feet on all of that.

**Mr Williams**—I think that you could argue that, prior to the implementation of no-fault divorce, many parents really stuck at their task. I realise that in some cases that was for right or for wrong, in that certainly there were many people in a family situation or in a marriage that was not healthy who should not have stayed together. But having said that, I think there was a greater commitment to work through those issues because they realised that it was not as easy to get out of that relationship, whereas today it is so much easier for an individual to say, ‘Listen, I have had enough. I don’t want to work this through.’

In fact, even over the weekend I was confronted with a situation where there was a couple who had been married for 15 years and the husband wanted a divorce. The wife wanted to go for counselling to start with, but the husband was just not interested in that at all. So you have another situation where perhaps something could be avoided if there was a greater attempt to prevent that divorce from actually occurring, for the relationship breakdown to stay the way it is. Looking, I guess, to my parents’ generation, I think there was a lot more that kept them together.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—Following on from that, it is said that many marriages would not break up if there were not support bulk-billing mechanisms available or, alternatively, if there were a penalty situation so that, if somebody walked out, penal consequences followed. I use the term a little loosely; I am not saying to put people in gaol or fine them, but there could be some consequences that follow that are not particularly pleasant; or, if a mother walks out, there is no pension to go onto to support that decision. Do you believe it would be a good thing if those sorts of things were in place? Or are we just forcing two people together who are going to finish up killing each other, for want of a better word?

**Mr Muehlenberg**—As Glenn said, many people did have a sense of commitment in earlier days to tough it out—hopefully, not to the point of killing each other, as you mentioned, but to say, ‘Look, this is something we need to work out and hopefully we can get over some of the rough bits and make it last.’ We often say that there is a normative effect of the law, and there really were some clear messages that were sent out with the introduction of the Family Law Act.

As I mentioned earlier, when you take away fault, in a sense you take away the idea of right and wrong, and you also take the idea of personal responsibility out, to a large degree. In that sense, you have undermined what marriage has meant in the first place. It used to be a commitment for life: ‘till death do us part.’ There was an agreement in society and amongst individuals that this was something that was a binding, lasting institution and that you really needed to work at it, especially for the sake of children.

But, today, we are getting an opposite kind of message sent to us through things like the Family Law Act, which basically says, ‘If it is getting rough and you can’t handle it, here’s an easy way out. There is really no responsibility on your part to tough it out and hang in there.’ It has really sent out a message. It has obviously made the means easier by which you can end a marriage. But, even more importantly, it has sent out a message which says, ‘Well, maybe we don’t mean quite what we say about the importance of marriage

and the nature of marriage being such that it should be a permanent binding. It is instead something that a person can disengage from voluntarily and unilaterally, without any real sense of giving a proper reason for it.' That just sends a message to what is, as I said already, a fairly hedonistic society that says, 'All right, here's a way out. I have no real commitment to tough it out.'

As we said in the submission, there may be a place for reintroducing fault to some extent, simply because with every other contract we have in this world—business, law, or whatever—if you break the provisions of the contract, there are certain penalties and certain consequences that you face. But the marriage contract is really the only contract that I know of where you can basically break your commitment and your promises and not have to face any penalties. So that serves as an inducement for somebody to do it.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—Indeed, there are some advantages in doing so. Can I just say this: does it also send a message at the threshold, before people marry, in a sense? We really should be trying to ensure that people who should not marry do not marry.

**Mr Williams**—I am not sure that imposing a penalty fine on an individual who wants to get out of a marriage is really going to make much difference. The bottom line is that each member of that family to some degree—and society, also—is penalised, just as a result of the breakdown. We need to look at ways of encouraging people, as they enter into a marital relationship, to stay in that relationship. One of the ways to do that is to make it a little more difficult, perhaps, for people to opt out of their commitment in that relationship. I am not sure that, by imposing a fine, we necessarily do that.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—I hope you are not saying I suggested that.

**Mr Williams**—No, not at all. We could look at extending the whole 12-month separation period whereby, during that period of time, there need to be in place certain provisions that put in place compulsory counselling. That is a road that we would rather travel down first, rather than looking at imposing any sort of fine.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—I have two brief questions. Firstly, I am not quite sure why you mentioned radical environmentalists as having a hostile agenda for the family. That seemed to weaken your submission, if you do not mind my saying so.

**Mr Muehlenberg**—Yes, it should have been spelt out further. I suppose what I meant to say by that was that some, who in their perhaps legitimate concern for overpopulation, have tended to take fairly radical steps to reduce family size. China would be an obvious example, I guess, with the one-child policy, forced sterilisation, forced abortion. Those are not exactly family friendly policies, but they are done from the context of 'Look, we are overpopulated, or it is perceived that we are, therefore we need to take radical steps to curtail population growth.'

We have had similar calls at least in Australia, and if I had time I could document that. One recent Australian Museum palaeontologist said we should aim for a population in Australia of 10 million people. Now what happens to the other eight I am not quite sure, but the idea is there that some people, in their concern for the environment, tend to have fairly radical views about limiting family size. That, I guess, was

the context of that remark.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—Secondly, do you run programs sometimes broadcasting Harold Saylor, the American psychologist?

**Mr Williams**—No.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—You spend quite a bit of time in your submission on radical feminism. I have some personal views and I agree with quite a bit of what you said, but I would like you to spell that out a bit more for the committee inasmuch as where you see it has gone wrong. Have you any recommendations as to how we can make it more acceptable to society?

**Mr Muehlenberg**—Again, I put in the word ‘radical’ to give the impression that not all feminists are either radical or have tendencies which are not in the best interests of the family. I gave there a number of quotations from obviously some of the more radical—I mean really radical—feminists: ‘The family is a slave like institution,’ and ‘It’s like a concentration camp.’ Those are not exactly family friendly quotations that I gave but I would like to think that they are not representative of the mainstream women’s movement, which obviously has a lot of legitimate goals in place.

Why I included that, I gave the story of Ann Summers. Dr Summers was, of course, an adviser to Paul Keating for a while. I mentioned a story of hers in there just to show that certain people with certain philosophies, if they get into certain positions of power, can influence the way the whole debate goes on family issues. Am I saying that feminists or radical feminists should be excluded from positions of power? No, I am simply saying that, as in any situation, if you get a concentration of certain people with certain views, they may tip the balance.

So I am kind of saying, ‘Fine, hire any number of women, with any number of viewpoints to deal with, say, women’s issues especially.’ But often I find that, when they are talking about family policy or family issues, instead of getting representatives of family groups in, it is often more women’s organisations that are in. That is very important obviously, but sometimes it is to the exclusion of simply a more generic family group, or even sometimes men’s groups. Sometimes we need to get men’s voices in on some of these policy making decisions, so it does not get a bit skewed in one direction. Obviously it can get skewed in the other direction as well, but we have noticed, at least in former governments, that there may have been a tendency to rightly try to redress past wrongs in terms of women’s issues by perhaps going too far at the expense of either men’s issues or family issues in general.

**Mr BARRESI**—Throughout your submission you talk about the role of fatherhood. It permeates through most of the submission, particularly the part of your submission that is based on the work of David Blankenhorn. One of the things that we have heard in previous submissions is the difficulty of getting the male in the partnership along to pre-marriage counselling or post- or pre-divorce counselling. What is your strategy in terms of rectifying that situation?

**Mr Williams**—I think without doubt there is a stigma attached to marital counselling and family counselling. One of the programs that we have been putting a lot of effort into in the last couple of years is

putting together a corporate training program called ‘the homework project’, which looks at the whole interaction and values for home and the workplace. Our attempt there is to assist companies and management in particular to integrate those values.

The reason I say this is that perhaps there is less of a stigma attached to it within a corporate setting. Within a workplace environment employees can be challenged to look at the ways that their family life can affect their workplace environment and vice versa. Issues that they encounter in the workplace can impact on family life. We feel that by addressing those issues in the workplace—indirectly I guess in some sense—we are breaking down that stigma for men in wanting to address family issues.

**Mr BARRESI**—How long has this been going for?

**Mr Williams**—It is a program that we have put a lot of work into in the last couple of years. What we are looking for at the moment is a number of companies that are prepared to run with a pilot project. We have two companies that have been prepared to do that at the moment and two companies we are about to conclude that project with but they are very small. What we would like to see is two or three national companies who are prepared to have a go at that.

**Mr BARRESI**—So at this stage you are still at the pilot stage and there are no results, or tangible results, you can refer to?

**Mr Williams**—There are some tangible results in that it was a program that was run in its earliest form by a group known as the Cornerstone Group over in the States. I believe there is a Cornerstone Group here in Australia, but they are totally unrelated. It was run in such companies as Walmart, for example, in the States and they had great success in seeing that implemented in a number of companies over there. But again, I think it is such a huge paradigm shift for Australian companies it is just a matter of getting past that first base and getting management to say, ‘Well, yes, we believe that by implementing a program like this, it will reduce staff turnover, it will decrease absenteeism, it will improve the quality of relationships within the workplace and it will improve overall productivity and performance.’ But it is a matter of getting to that stage and getting a company to take the pilot project.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—In one of your proposals, you say that we should replace the Institute of Family Studies with a body that truly has the interests of the traditional family at heart. Would you like to elaborate on that a little bit.

**Mr Muehlenberg**—Yes, that was a bit radical I think. But I guess over the years our experience has been that, on some of these kinds of core issues—for example, what role does child care play in the development of the child; are there any negative effects in long-term day care; what about parental divorce; are children disadvantaged or are there any negative effects from that?—the Institute of Family Studies has tended to say, ‘Look, in the issue of day care or divorce, children are really pretty resilient. They really are not affected all that much.’

Both of the papers I just handed out really try to document some of those issues fairly extensively, but it has been our experience for some reason that on the whole the institute almost wants to say, ‘Look, these

things aren't all that bad'. I just find it—I would not call it a bias as such. It seems to me to fly increasingly in the face of a kind of a growing pile of evidence from here and overseas that maybe there are some adverse effects. There is almost a sense of trying to defend divorce. I do not know if that is the intention. Getting back to what we talked about earlier, there is perhaps more of a feminist slant as opposed to a 'Let us look at the effects on children kind of angle' and so those, I suppose, are some of our concerns. It just seems as though it has not been as responsive as it could have been to some of the overseas evidence and it has looked to some as though it is pushing its own agenda. So replacing that or simply asking for it to be a bit more accountable may be a better solution. But we have found it is sometimes running against the grain of some of the evidence that we are coming across.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Are you finding that we have not got a lot of evidence here in Australia based on Australian families and Australian experiences so that we are having to draw on evidence from overseas?

**Mr Muehlenberg**—I think there is a shortage in general of simply good, home grown Australian studies, so often we do rely on overseas studies. Then, if you are going to do studies here, it is a question of trying to get a fairly good objective measurement of whatever issue you are looking at. I think it has been a strength of places like America or the UK that there has been good, strong, neutral-ground institutions who are ready to do that kind of statistical analysis without any preconceived agenda. That would be another area, for example, where we could put more money into a whole sociological, statistical look at the problem so that we can look at the Australian situation from a very objective viewpoint and see what we come up. I think that is an area where we have fallen behind.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—With the long day care situation it is going to have be a fairly long ongoing study. Do you consider that the Israeli kibbutz situation would be something that would give us some indication as to what effect long day care has on children, because that is a similar sort of thing, isn't it?

**Mr Muehlenberg**—That is kind of getting a little bit outside of our—I should not have brought it up in the first place, I suppose.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—It is a whole shift in our society in the last five years.

**Mr Muehlenberg**—That is right, although there have been some studies to show that many of the kibbutzim are closing down. They are finding that they have not worked as well as they thought. I would tie in something like that—in fact, I should have brought my submission on child care which I wrote for another committee. But that is another issue, I guess.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Okay.

**Mr BARRESI**—Aren't you overstating the case, to some extent, about the effect of radical feminism on our society today? I would have thought that that might very well have been the scenario in the sixties in terms of where the movement was heading. But, over the last 20 or so years, they really have sorted themselves out in terms of balancing the role between the new and the traditional, and we have got the happy

medium in place at this stage. So I am wondering whether or not that is an overstatement and an alarmist position that you have taken there.

**Mr Muehlenberg**—The problem with a submission is always that you want to keep it short so it is readable and therefore you end up giving information which may be seen to be out of balance. As I said earlier, these are some statements of obviously a more fringe element in the women's movement. It is not a monolithic structure but is broken up into many different components—so who can really speak for feminism? I just tried to highlight a few issues. I think I mentioned the book by Marion Sawyer called *Sisters in Suits* and that is an indication of what I was trying to get at. From some of these people's perspective they feel they have indeed made some very good inroads—whether for good or ill—into, say, the bureaucracy in Canberra.

By their accounts they are feeling, 'Yes, indeed, we have made a lot of impact and we have been able to implement a number of items on our agenda.' So I am speaking perhaps to some extent from their vantage point—whether that is a correct perspective or not. They seem to think in some ways they have had some good results, and I guess that is where I was coming from. It could be questioned as to whether they have been as effective in achieving everything, or whether you can even speak of 'they' as though it was a homogenous thing, because there are all kinds of different agendas from different people. At the risk of oversimplification, I had just wanted to highlight some of the more extreme cases, but it tended to weaken the case perhaps when you were not able to pad it out fully.

**Mr BARRESI**—I will read that book. I wanted to ask a question on economic and taxation policies. The whole concept of income splitting and all those sorts of things have been mentioned a number of times. On 1 January, we will introduce raising that tax free threshold for families with one, two or three children up to \$70,000. Is that the direction that you are advocating as well? Should we be doing more of that?

**Mr Muchlenberg**—I think it is a step in the right direction. I think much more, to be honest, needs to be done, but I think that is the kind of movement we are happy to see taking place. We begin to recognise that the cost of raising children is fairly substantial and those especially who choose to forgo a second income—whether it is the mum or dad—to stay at home, especially in those formative years, to look after the kids, simply need help. Any kind of economic breaks, whether through the tax system or whatever, we are very much in favour of.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—You referred to Senator Moynihan's report and, correct me if I am wrong, but Senator Moynihan was very much a liberal democrat, someone whom I admired from afar—he still is. That study is referred to in these terms in another submission we have got from Associate Professor Stevens, Director of Women's Studies at the University of Melbourne. She says this of that study and what followed from it:

The issue was not the teenage mothers, but their having suffered what amounted to abuse at the hands of some of these men. These moral panics have of course been very much part of the agenda of the new right in the US.

What is your comment about that?

**Mr Muchlenberg**—People can put a political slant on these things, but I think the record has vindicated what he said 30 years ago. In fact, another liberal democrat, if I can quote him, Bill Clinton, who was just here, actually vindicated Moynihan just recently by saying that the best thing we can give children today is a mother and a father, preferably in a marriage situation.

It is not just a right wing or a conservative issue anymore, I think almost across the board in America—and this is my bias because, as you can tell by my accent, coming from the US—almost all of the sociological evidence, almost all of the leading thinkers in this area, whether left, right, wherever they are in the political spectrum, are pretty much all coming to the conclusion that Moynihan was right 30 years ago. Something like 68 per cent of all black children are now born without a father in America, and the white population is very quickly catching up, with something like 26 per cent of all white families today having a child born without a father. So most sociologists today say Moynihan was prophetic, he was right 30 years ago and he is even more right today. Again, that is all across the spectrum.

**CHAIR**—If we had more time that would be an interesting subject to explore further, but unfortunately we have not. I thank you for coming along and for your submission as well.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Tony Smith):

That the documents, ‘The Case for Marriage’ and ‘The Case for the Two-Parent Family’, ‘Family Forum’ and the *Resource Catalogue* be accepted as exhibits and received as evidence by the inquiry.



[9.48 a.m.]

**EASTMAN, Dr Moira Bernadette, c/- Australian Catholic University, 383 Albert Street, East Melbourne, Victoria**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. In what capacity do you appear before the committee today?

**Dr Eastman**—As a private citizen.

**CHAIR**—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 a contempt of parliament. Thank you for your submission which we have received. Would you like to make some introductory remarks?

**Dr Eastman**—Thank you. I understand that the programs under the Attorney-General's Department are mainly pre-marriage and marriage education and parenting programs. I have focused in my response here on the first question. I have addressed all the questions but in a sense I have focused particularly on the first question: views on factors contributing to marriage and relationship breakdown. There are various other aspects I could have responded to but I thought other people would respond very adequately to them. I have focused there on a particular area, which is that I believe cultural factors are very important in creating marriage breakdown, so I have addressed those in particular. That is all I wanted to say in my introduction.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. There is an overall theme in your submission that the cultural elites of Australian society—and I would add, American society, because you make references to America as well—have progressively ignored or neglected marriage and family life in their discussions and in their research activities in terms of the academy. This generally is something which is important in society in terms of speaking, researching, writing, discussing. Would you like to expand on that?

**Dr Eastman**—I believe that any reasonable person who looks at the evidence for that would have to concede it is a very strong case. In trying to document that, I started first with perhaps a rather extreme example which was the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapists. Out of 270 topic areas, not one at their recent conference was marriage. I introduce that as an example of the extent to which marriage can be seen to be somehow not a proper subject for academic investigation. I went on to look at certain areas in Australia, first giving the evidence of Jim Crawley when he was director of marriage guidance in Perth. In one of his articles he noted that a leading bureaucrat, from the Attorney-General's Department as I recall, had said to him that the problem with the marriage guidance agencies is the word 'marriage' in the title. I have never actually seen written down the argument for that. I would very much like to see it.

I then looked at areas which show in other ways that marriage and family are not highly regarded. For example, in the ARC grants there is no category for either parent or parenting, marriage, family, domestic economy, household economy, yet research, such as that by Ironmonger and Snooks, shows that the domestic economy is at least the size and the value of what we now regard as the total measured economy. If we look

at universities, there is not one chair of marital studies or marriage or family studies. There is no department of marriage or family in any university in Australia, but look at how marriage impacts on the economy if we take into our mind the size of that domestic economy, and the fact that 80 per cent of Australian businesses are family businesses. Okay, a lot of them are small, but still 50 per cent of Australians are employed in family businesses. The way that marriage usually sustains most of those businesses means that if the marriage fails very often the business fails.

I do not think I need to go on any more about it. It is a bit like a black hole or a blind spot. For a number of reasons, it has not been recognised. If the government is serious about reducing the rate of marriage breakdown, or not allowing it to go higher, I do not believe that that can seriously be done without addressing these wider cultural issues.

**CHAIR**—You make reference to the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy and the absence of discussion about marriage. There is also some discussion in the footnote about the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Is it your view that there has not been sufficient attention paid to marriage by the AIFS?

**Dr Eastman**—It is, actually. At the 1993 conference, two papers out of a couple of hundred were given on marriage. I gave one of them, and Michelle Simons gave the other one. Michelle has been very involved in this, and you are probably familiar with her research for the Attorney-General's Department on pre-marriage education. To me that is not the right balance. I believe that the positive aspects of marriage have not been recognised.

I just happened to flip through this morning a recent article by Norval Glenn, who is considered one of the most prestigious and best informed sociologists and demographers on family in the United States. He has done a recent study of textbooks in the US, and he comments on how very few of those textbooks address, except in the most cursory way, the positive contributions—what it is that marriage and family contributes to society. That tends to be left out, and an enormous emphasis put on the problems in marriage such as violence and abuse and what have you.

Both he and other prestigious social scientists are increasingly saying that this is very unbalanced; it is ignoring a very strong part of evidence. I have brought along an article today that I would like to add to my submission. It is an article by Linda Waite that was published in a November 1995 issue of *Demography*. Linda Waite, who is the President of the Population Association of America gave her presidential address entitled 'Does marriage matter?' to the association late last year, 1995.

She makes the same point that demographers have this data on how marriage relates to longevity, to wellbeing in all sorts of areas—income and children's wellbeing—but that they very rarely put it together. She argues that the social scientists have a responsibility to let people know what this data is. She also says that issues about marriage and family are not just government issues: people, individuals, make decisions about this. But she wonders whether they are making those decisions on the basis of knowledge. You cannot get anything more kosher, or more credible, than that presidential address to the Population Association of America and I would like to add that to the evidence that I am bringing today.

**CHAIR**—As I understand it, you are looking at the dysfunctional aspects of family life and studying that. If there is this neglect, bias by neglect into studies of what makes healthy families and healthy relationships, how do we turn it around? Let me go a little bit further before you answer it. It seems to be that what you are saying is that the ARC grants do not recognise it because there is not even a category to apply for a grant to recognise it, so maybe there is an argument for saying there ought to be some reassessment of the categories. Most of the government funding of research in this area, to the extent that there is, has gone to the Institute of Family Studies. There does not seem to be, that I can think of, and perhaps this is the nature of Australian society, a great history of private institutions that fund research in Australia. You do not have the private university system that you have in the States and the private institutes that are founded by philanthropic individuals and trusts. If there is that bias by neglect that you are describing, can you make some suggestions about what directions, if government has got a role here, governments should be pursuing?

**Dr Eastman**—One of the suggestions I make in the submission is—and I do not understand what government can do and what it cannot do, but presumably someone somewhere draws up those categories of research—that an effort should be made to include categories related to marriage and family in those categories for research and that every year there should be priority categories.

I think there is a very strong argument why a priority category from time to time should be either on, say, the domestic economy or the household economy and try to bring that into people's minds; or on parenting practices, because we know the link between children's mental health problems and the styles of parenting practices that parents use; or on marriage education or pre-marriage education, because it is very clear what the burden of ill-health, the burden of distress, the burden of suffering is both on children and adults when marriages break up or when they continue but they are dysfunctional. So I thought that would be one area.

The other main thing I have tried to document here is that I believe there is a very strong case that the national health strategy is overlooking incredibly powerful data that has been collected by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare but that has not flowed through into the national health strategy. If you look at, say, that better health document, the 1993 one, one of the things it refers to is a whole lot of national projects which are linked into the better health document, but nowhere there does there appear marriage education or pre-marriage education or parenting education, yet we do have a whole network of marriage education, pre-marriage education, parent education happening. I think just alone to link that in as one of these national projects linked to the national health strategy would make an enormous difference.

I do not think there is much argument there has been an ideological bias against marriage and family in social science. In the States, there has been a turnaround in that, a turnaround is happening at the moment. There has been no such turnaround in Australia. I find myself the medical area is more open to the data. Actually, I have asked to put in just a correction to what I have already submitted to one paragraph, and I have suggested that the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare produce another paper, one that documents the financial cost of family related variables to mortality and health. So, for example, the better health outcomes focuses on four areas: injury, cancer, heart disease—I have forgotten what the other one is. In every one of those four focus areas, family variables are incredibly strong. For example, two-thirds of the deaths by injury are either motor vehicle accidents or suicides. Suicide deaths of the non-married—the separated,

widowed, divorced or never married—are about three times that of the married and there are similar statistics with motor vehicle accidents. Yet they are not even mentioned in the health strategy documents. Other groups whose differentials are not so strong are mentioned. I believe we should do that empirical research and count up the actual financial cost—count up the burden of health alone related to these family variables. Get that into the public documents and I think that would be one way of starting to allow this to appear.

Secondly, people like Duncan Ironmonger at Melbourne University are arguing that the domestic economy should be counted. They are not asking that housework be paid for or car cleaning be paid for, or whatever, but if it were counted then it would appear in the public mind. For example, there is a huge amount of discussion of child care. That is the formal, burgeoning child-care industry. It is very little realised that at least 85 per cent of child care of children under five is done by parents. It is still a minority of children who attend any form of paid child care. Only about 15 per cent of children attend any kind of paid child care. But that is not in the public mind. What is in the public mind is the formally paid stuff.

Where in the public mind are people thinking, ‘We have got to resource these parents’? What they are doing is having such an incredible impact on the mental health of this next generation. But there is no resourcing and unless it is counted and appears in the government mind and in the public mind, there is no injustice seen either. Only the formal paid sector is seen and I believe that. When I say there is a bias, I really do not mean to say that this person, that person or the other person is biased; I do not mean it in that way. I mean there is something in the mind of the culture that just allows us as a community to overlook this. But the evidence is emerging more and more that this is a disastrous oversight.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—In your submission, you expressed concern about beliefs or prevailing views that marriage makes women sick; that marriage typically involves violence and abuse; that research finds no difference between children of divorce and children in intact families; and that all family forms are equally beneficial. You go on to say that there is some strong evidence around to refute those. I wonder if you could give us something of the nature of that evidence and what you have to say on those points.

**Dr Eastman**—I could perhaps look at the ‘marriage is good for men and bad for women’ and maybe the amount of violence in marriage. Are there any others that you think I should particularly evidence?

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—The other one is ‘no difference between children of divorce and children in intact families,’ or the outcomes of those children in those different circumstances.

**Dr Eastman**—For a start, ‘marriage is good for men and bad for women’ has become very widely believed. The only data that ever gets cited for that is a 1972 study by Jessie Bernard and she wrote about that in a book called *The Future of Marriage*, where she talks about two marriages, his marriage and her marriage. The reason she argues that is that there is more depression and anxiety in married women than in men. However, there are a couple of things to argue against that. One is that this area of depression and anxiety is a fairly small area of health. If you look at the data overall, whereas women have more depression and anxiety, men have more alcoholism and so on. There are two ways of expressing angst, but if you look at all the figures they do not look uneven.

If you look at the outline I gave you there—I think it is on pages 9 and 10—I have given the data.

Those two charts are ones I drew up from the data in the national health strategy's No. 1 report, *Enough to Make you Sick*, which came out in 1992. The national health strategy's *Enough to Make you Sick* is on inner qualities in health differentials and it focuses especially on the fact that those in the lowest socioeconomic quintile have more ill-health and more mortality than those in the top, so there are socioeconomic inequalities.

It lists the eight causes of death in one place for which these inequalities are the greatest, and that is what I am showing you there in that graph. But the same report's own data shows that for seven of those inequalities there is actually a greater inequality between the married group and the separated, widowed, divorced or never married group, so these marital status differentials are as powerful on health—

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—There is a greater inequality between the married and the never married?

**Dr Eastman**—Yes.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—And the high income, low income differential?

**Dr Eastman**—Yes. The differential in health between the high and low income, and there is an even greater differential between married and separated, widowed, divorced or never married. That graph puts the two together. If you have a look at it you can see how, except for lung cancer, on all those other measures that is the case, and if you look at the figures for women and men you will see that men perhaps benefit slightly more on some, but overall the difference is not great.

Different researchers have written differently about this. Some stress the difference between men and women more, but I fail to see how you can stress that, looking at those two graphs—and this has been found in every country of the world—when the never married, separated, widowed and divorced have such higher mortality. For men the higher mortality in the 25 to 64 age range is double. Men 25 to 64 who are separated, widowed, divorced or never married have double the mortality of the married. We are not talking about just tiny little figures here. I find it strange that this sort of data is not getting into the national health strategy.

We can think of obvious reasons. I am not saying everybody has to be forced to be married. I am not saying we have to stigmatise people who run into problems in their marriage. Absolutely not. I think a whole lot of red lights go on immediately even at the idea of mentioning this data. But I think this is very strong data that says, 'Look, pre-marriage education might be very important. Marriage education might be very important. Parenting education might be very important because all of those impact on people's ability to make and sustain a happy marriage.'

**Mr BARRESI**—Do you have the same information for de facto couples?

**Dr Eastman**—That is much more difficult because now the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not distinguish between married and de facto, so you have to have a different type of study. You will find, in that article by Linda Waite she refers to the cohabiting—they call it cohabiting rather than de facto—and you will get some of the data there. There is a certain amount of data on that, but I think one of the outcomes of looking at this is that the monitoring of the de facto situation is a high priority.

Just to refer to another thing about whether we have data on de factos. Look at the Linda Waite stuff for a start, then secondly, look at that series of books put out by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare authored by Colin Mathers. There are four books. There was the *Enough to Make You Sick* data 1992. Four books put out by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare look at basically the same data and analyse health differentials and inequalities. They are in four groups—children, older Australians, 25 to 64, and 15 to 24.

For the older groups, this data is showing you what has emerged, as it does in every country. Marriage has an incredible ability to protect health and other aspects of life—happiness and financial. There are a whole range of things that marriage has an enormous ability to protect. But in the 15 to 24 age, the married came out with by far the worst health statistics. I refer to it here in this document. Amazingly, that document gives only a paragraph to discussing the fact that against all other previous research, in the 15 to 24 age range, the very worst was the single mothers and then the married. The other groups actually had better health.

One of the things that needs to be looked at is the vastly increased number of de factos in the married group, in that age group, to the others. Dennis Ladbrook's research shows that in the particular state in the USA that he did his research—he is an Australian researcher from Curtin University—in the category professional and technical, where women and men are very alike in their work and what have you, the women are dying earlier than the men. Women normally live six years longer than men in the US but in that category they are dying earlier than men. The major reason for that—and he looked at six hypotheses—and the one that explained most of the data was the increased number of never married, separated, widowed and divorced women in the group compared with the men.

So there are a whole lot of reasons why, in the 15 to 24 age group, the married are looking worse. It may be calling into question everything I have said to you. It needs to be looked at. One of the hypotheses you would have to investigate is: does cohabitation and de facto have the same power to protect that marriage does? If you start with Linda Waite and go on from there, there is a very big question mark about that. It looks as though it does not have anything like the power to protect, and that is partly because it is not as stable.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—What do you say about the state of the research on issues dealing with children of divorce and children in intact families?

**Dr Eastman**—Up until quite recently, it was widely believed by social scientists that there was no difference. In fact, look at a paper of mine that I did for the Institute of Family Studies in 1986 where I say that it is not the structure of the family—it is not whether it is one or two parent or whether they are married or whatever—it is the processes. However, since that time an enormous amount of data has come out. It is very clear that the different family forms have different outcomes.

I think one of the best studies in the world is the one done by the Institute for Children's Health in Perth—Fiona Stanley, Steve Zubrick, Sven Silburn and that group over there. That study has a graph which charts the number of mental health problems in children to, firstly, the parent's relationship. In every family form where the parents have a good relationship the children have fewer mental problems than if the parents

have a poor relationship. Even so, the percentage of mental health problems goes up from the intact two-parent family, to step or blended families to single-parent families. With the intact two-parent family, even where the relationship is poor, the children have fewer mental health problems than the best step or blended family, and they are better than the single-parent family.

Let me hasten to say that these are statistics. I am certainly not saying that this is the case for everybody within that group. That is Australian research. In the UK, Monica Crockett and John Tripp did what has been called the Exeter study. I have forgotten what they called the intact family, but I will use that word because it is a very clear one; it is a word that many people find offensive and if you can give me a better one I will use it as I do not want to offend anyone. But let's call it the intact family, and in the study they then call it 'reordered'. If the parents separate that is one reordering and if they remarry that is two reorderings. The study very clearly shows that, for every reordering, the children's mental health problems go up. So do other problems: learning at school, getting on with peers—a whole range of problems. I would be very happy to submit a brief review of Crockett and Tripp's research. I presume that the Western Australian research institute will be speaking with you—

**CHAIR**—We have a submission.

**Dr Eastman**—They are most up to date with this data and their own research is getting a lot of attention internationally. I have mentioned a couple of bipartisan reports in the USA. Those reports review the data there. In USA, Australia and UK, the different family forms are not equal in their outcomes. That is very clear. I hasten to say that it is most important to me that I am not seen as stigmatising, demeaning or judging people in the different family forms. But for social scientists this is data that has to be looked at, and I believe it has to be looked at by government and parliamentarians.

There is another paper—I do not know if you can bear any more. It is by Norval Glenn and it is a critique of 20 marriage and family textbooks in the USA. He makes the point very strongly that it is virtually impossible to understand why these textbooks are not reporting on the difference in family forms and not reporting on what it is that marriage and family do to protect. This paper has influenced everybody's opinion about these issues and I could submit a copy of that.

You also talked about violence. If I could go back to the 'Break the silence. Stop the violence' campaign, the figure quoted at that time was that about one-third of wives would experience violence in their family. Firstly, that data was US data and it therefore included groups such as the blacks who do have a much higher rate of violence. You cannot really apply that data straight to Australia.

There were other aspects of it. If you look at the data a little more closely—and I would be very happy to show you the breakdown of that data—for severe violence, women actually did more of the severe violence than men, though the outcome is that the women end up getting hurt more.

Before that 'Break the silence' campaign came out, the same researchers—Strauss and his co-workers—thought that maybe marriage was a 'hitting licence'; that marriage was something that people felt bound to stay in and it therefore gave a man permission to beat his wife. They did a research study on that and they compared violence in de facto marriages and in formal marriages. The outcome of that was the

violence in the de facto marriages they found to be five times the rate of violence in married couples, and that has been found over and over again. I would be very happy to provide the data on that as well. If you ask me to, I will find it. And that is just one of the reasons, when I said that the de facto situation does not appear to have the same ability to protect as marriage.

Personally, I am not ideological about this. If someone can show me the data that the de facto situation is a new form of marriage and it is as protective, I am happy with that. My reading of the data so far is that this is an extremely serious situation, that it should be monitored very closely and it does not seem to be able to protect in the same way. For example, Burdekin in his report found that children's rate of abuse in single-parent families was six times that in two-parent families. So it is not just being found in one place, it is not just being found by ultra-right wing crazies. This is emerging by various areas of researchers.

**Mr BARRESI**—That was actually in the submission before yours as well. My question there is: is it not more likely that it will be reported in those families, as opposed to the traditional family unit, that in a de facto or a cohabitation, separated situation, a stepfather, there will be a greater likelihood that they will report those incidences? When there is a hidden abuse out there—

**Dr Eastman**—So that within a marriage situation there would be more tendency to protect than in a de facto relationship.

**Mr BARRESI**—Because of the stigma associated with it.

**Dr Eastman**—Why is the stigma greater in a marriage than in a de facto union?

**Mr BARRESI**—I am asking you whether or not there is a tendency to do that.

**Dr Eastman**—I am not knowledgeable enough about it to answer that properly, but it is not obvious to me why the stigma is greater.

**Mr BARRESI**—There would be a need to protect that marriage—

**Dr Eastman**—More than the de facto union?

**Mr BARRESI**—More than the de facto. Perhaps it is their second relationship; there is not that bond that took place during the marriage ceremony itself and the lead-up to it, it could be a trial type of a relationship that has taken place and there is a greater reluctance in the family unit to disclose.

**Dr Eastman**—I guess I would be surprised that Burdekin let that through, but—

**Mr BARRESI**—He is only reporting statistics. That is all he is reporting—the incidence of reporting.

**Dr Eastman**—I would have imagined that he and his team would have raised that question and checked it out. But I am simply not knowledgeable enough, so you will have to ask someone else that one, I am sorry.



**Mr TONY SMITH**—I am just having trouble with this chart. I do not have any pretensions for following charts.

**Dr Eastman**—Do you want me to just take you through it a little bit?

**Mr TONY SMITH**—If you would not mind.

**Dr Eastman**—Look at the one for men, for a start. I will point out to you that the axes are on different measures and that is not my desire to confuse you; it is that I cannot control my graph package.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—If you could help me with highest SEI quintile—

**Dr Eastman**—That is the socioeconomic indicators, so highest is the richest—

**Mr TONY SMITH**—What does that mean, though? What does socioeconomic indicators mean?

**Dr Eastman**—Both the social position and the economic position. So, basically, if you have a high status job you tend to have better health, as against a low status, and if you have more money you have better health. If you live in a good area you have better health. So it puts those three things together. So those in the highest socioeconomic indicator group have lower mortality and fewer health problems than those in the lowest. If you look at say, lung cancer, you can see that the poorest group—the one with the lowest SEI—has about 50 per cent more lung cancer deaths than the highest SEI group. It is not talking about the amount of deaths in any of those. For example, the pneumonia influenza has got a huge high peak. It is actually a small cause of death but it is one for which both low socioeconomic and the unmarried, separated, widowed and divorced die a lot more frequently than do the high socioeconomic or the married. It is like a ratio you are looking at there. I should perhaps point out the baseline represents the rate for the highest socioeconomic quintile and it also represents the rate for the married. They are looking at the mortality rate of the others compared with either the high socioeconomic quintile or the married.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—Are you satisfied with the direction of the Australian Institute of Family Studies?

**Dr Eastman**—At the moment, there are four areas of research that they are focusing on. I think one of them is child development. It seems to me there are probably other places in Australia that can focus on child development. I would like to see marriage as at least one of the key focuses of the Institute of Family Studies.

Secondly, I did notice when I was reading through these health strategy documents—and I have not looked at this properly but at a couple of them—some of them give you the list of people who gave evidence. Certainly, for the 1993 better health strategy, which seems to me to have been a very influential one, there was no submission from the Institute of Family Studies. I think the Institute of Family Studies should be the group that keeps this data in mind and puts it into the minds of the other government departments.

Yes, I would definitely like to see a greater focus on both the positive contributions that families make

and the importance of marriage within family. I suppose I look at it and think, 'If it was an institute of women's studies, it would really go for women's studies'. I do not see the Institute of Family Studies going for family studies in the same way as the body that speaks to government, I understand, about the importance of family. I just do not see it holding that important thing.

I mentioned to you that 85 per cent of the child care of children under five years is done entirely by families. Only 15 per cent of children—unless you count the children going to kindergarten, which are now being counted as going to child care—under five ever go to paid child care for more than just a couple of hours. But where is the voice to speak for those 85 per cent of parents? The child-care lobby has these very, very powerful, paid people who can research and can lobby government. But who can speak for, for example, those parents rearing children under five? I think the only group that can is the Institute of Family Studies. I feel it ought, in a sense, to speak very actively for that viewpoint.

I think there should be parents on the board of that body. How can the parents who care for their children at home—they are doing it under enormous difficulties; they must feel it is very important—get their questions into the research agenda? I cannot see any way they can. Yet, the child-care lobby get their questions into the research agenda and more than that. They get—I won't say any more.

**CHAIR**—We are going to have to wind up. There is one more question I wanted to ask you because it relates specifically to research. If these differentials are emerging in the research between—to put it broadly—the health of families and individuals that are different between marriage and cohabitation and/or de facto relationships, then should not those distinctions be in the data which is collected by the ABS? Whatever one's view—I am not trying to put some ideological point of view—do you as a researcher know how to explore that? How does anybody explore that in terms of whether it has some importance or not if the ABS is not collecting the data in the first place?

**Dr Eastman**—I believe very strongly it should be collected. As I said, in that recent book the married are coming out with worse health statistics but in that group no-one can look at it and say, 'What is the situation between the de facto and the married?' I believe it is a very important piece of data that should be collected. I have discussed it with a few other researchers who have said to me that it is hard to collect. People do not like to ask these questions; some people consider it private.

My own feeling about that is that people do not like answering questions about their income and a whole lot of other things, but it is considered important for planning. I believe it is a very important area and we should be collecting in the whole area of data relating to this.

**Mr BARRESI**—On the report on marriage in America—and maybe I missed it—you say there that the report came up with recommendations and strategies for the various groups, but there is no indication of what those strategies are.

**Dr Eastman**—I thought the paper was long enough without that detail, but I could send you a copy of that report.

**Mr BARRESI**—That was last year, was it—1995?

**Dr Eastman**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I made a note that we will obtain a copy of those three reports: ‘Beyond rhetoric’, ‘Families first’ and ‘Report on Marriage’.

**Dr Eastman**—I have just forgotten what I said I would collect. It was the stuff on violence in marriage, was it?

**CHAIR**—Yes, and the summary of the Exeter study.

**Dr Eastman**—Right, thank you very much.

**CHAIR**—I thank you for coming along and for your submission and for the further material that we have and expect, and for the opportunity of discussing it with you this morning. Thank you very much.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Barresi):

That the two papers entitled ‘Does marriage matter’ by Linda Waite and ‘A critique of twenty family and marriage and the family textbooks’ by Norville Glenn be accepted as exhibits and received as evidence to the inquiry.

**Dr Eastman**—Mr Chairman, if I can also add these corrections. There is an error I made on page 15 which has implications for page 22. It is that paragraph under AIHW health monitoring series. I table those corrections.

**CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Dr Eastman**—Mr Chairman, do you have a copy of ‘Does marriage matter’? Did I hand that over?

**CHAIR**—Yes, we have a copy of that, thank you.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Barresi):

That the two pages of the submission numbered 15 and 22 with changes therein be accepted as supplementary to the submission and be published as evidence to the inquiry.

[10.38 a.m.]

**DALTON, Ms Delyce Terease, Project Officer, Healthy Families Project, Victorian Board of Studies, 15 Pelham Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053**

**TICKELL, Mr William Gerard, Director, Healthy Families Project, Victorian Board of Studies, 15 Pelham Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. 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 proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false and misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the parliament.

Can I thank you for the submission which you have forwarded to the committee, and for coming along this morning. Would you like to make some introductory remarks?

**Mr Tickell**—Yes, thanks. If I may just take you back over a short excursion into the rationale and background, I will concentrate then more on the particular terms of reference that have a direct bearing on your inquiry.

The project is in its second year. We have worked with about 100 classes in about 55 schools so far, so we are still at an exploratory stage, and we should say at the outset that any evaluation of a project of this kind is obviously quite problematic, for several reasons, the first of them being, of course, that the links between understanding and behaviour changes are, as you well know, not very tight. So the likelihood that simply in a short term with an educational program we are likely to see discernible changes in behaviour is fairly remote.

Moreover, the behaviour that we are interested in is behaviour that will occur 15 years or so down the track, to the extent that we are hoping that children will be better able to accept their roles as parents. These year 6 children have still got some time before they are put to the test. In a sense, what we can assess at this early stage of the work we have done is, I guess, what you would regard as indicative matters but by no means proof.

Firstly, we can assess the engagement, the extent to which children are able to engage with these issues at that particular age and to which they can understand and identify with them and reflect on them. Secondly, we can measure to some extent changes in their understanding in a fairly direct cognitive way. Finally, we can make some judgments about the viability of the materials we are using and the strategies we have been adopting, establish whether they are usable or not and in particular what sort of negative side effects that they are likely to have, because it is quite obvious that a project of this kind is a sensitive one, it runs a great risk of frightening the horses if it is not handled well, and we are as much concerned with monitoring that as we are in the short term, anyhow, with making any confident speculations about the long-term benefits.

The rationale rests, I guess, on a couple of fairly clear points. One of them is the evidence that

abusive patterns of parenting are repeated from generation. The research, as you will probably all well know, is not absolutely clear on that. It is not as though there is a one to one correlation or that the behaviour is repeated in exactly the same form, but the research is fairly conclusive that children who are themselves subject to abusive parenting have great difficulty in establishing constructive family relationships, if for no better reason than that they do not have much by way of models to draw on.

Secondly, it seems fairly clear that children who are abused feel personally responsible for what is happening to them. They frequently blame themselves. They think that they are culpable and, partly as a result of that, they feel that there is no way out of it, in the sense that there is no way out of their own abuse. In a kind of fatalistic way they cannot imagine how else a family can be. As they look towards a family of their own at a later stage, they have very little sense of what that family might be like, other than the one they have experienced themselves. Even if they may feel desperately anxious that it should be different, they have no positive model to draw on.

So the response to that, firstly, with young children, is to try to help them understand that they are not alone, both in the sense that what is happening to them is not unique—they are not the only person in the world that is experiencing that sort of treatment—and that there is help available to them in the community at large. Secondly, we try to help them understand that they are not to blame for what is happening to them because, again, some of the research indicates that the self-image of parents is one of the major determinants as to whether they are able to adopt positive or negative patterns. If they personally feel bad about themselves, they will find it extremely difficult to feel good about their parenting role.

Thirdly, we try to help the children understand that there are options open to them, that families can be constructive and supportive and that it is possible for them, if they can only develop the sorts of understandings that we are working on, to establish such families themselves. The journey from year 6 in the primary school to parenthood is a long one and in the end there are a number of contingent factors that will determine whether these individual children are better able to become parents than their own parents were.

We see education as a necessary but not sufficient condition for that change. We do not claim that on its own it is going to change the behaviour. The strategies we have been adopting in this project are, firstly, to try to increase the understandings of children, both about what is happening to them and about parenting and families generally. Secondly, we try to make them aware that, if they do need help, they have support in the community. In some ways, that is an item of faith more than a statement of reality. Nevertheless, in the absolutely extreme cases, children can and frequently do find support in their schools. So both the school and other agencies in the community can provide support. If they can begin to understand that, they can begin to imagine a way out of the situation that they find themselves in.

When we devised the project, we addressed a number of issues which I think are relevant to your inquiry—that is, they have to do with the extent of what education can contribute. The first has to do with the age at which we start this. The advice we received from psychotherapists and family therapists suggested that we should start at the very earliest age with the very youngest children.

Whilst we do understand that, and we do realise that children's attitudes and values are shaped very early, the nature of this particular issue seemed to us to be too complex to address directly with very young

children. There are two reasons for that. One is that they would have difficulty understanding some of the issues. But, more importantly, the only way very young children who are not yet reading or writing or able to conduct independent inquiries can confront these issues is in class discussion and we believe that class discussion is fraught with grave dangers if it tackles sensitive material such as this.

We saw the top end of the primary school as a place where children were still young enough to be receptive and where they were not yet troubled with the adolescent patterns of behaviour that compound the difficulties that we are dealing with. But at least most of them were able to go and read novels of their own, able to conduct some research of their own and able to write their own diaries. In a sense, they had a repertoire of ways of inquiring and ways of reflecting that would take the heat off the intense classroom discussions that would be characteristic of working with very young children.

Secondly, we were worried about who we should target. The fairly obvious point was that if we were in any way to be seen to be attempting to identify children at risk the project would have been finished, both because it would have stigmatised those children and because it would have set up massive resistance in the school communities. Whilst we do realise that the issues that we are concerned with bear much more directly on the lives of some children than on others, we nevertheless directed it at the whole cohort.

We did so for two reasons: for the reason I have just given so that we avoided the risk of seeming to identify children and reassured parents that we were not, in any sort of way, trying to catch them out in their parenting behaviour and because we assume that all families could be better. All children were at least entitled to reflect on their own upbringing and their own parenting. Of course, one of the things that so often happens is that they just react against their parenting if they have no way of reflecting in a sensitive way on it.

Furthermore, we are conscious of the fact that parenting is changing in many ways. First of all, for many migrant families the models that their parents have used do not work in this new country nearly so well. Many of the teachers told us very often about—many of them had come from migrant families—the conflicts that they felt with their parents. Very often their parents, they felt, were trying to apply a set of rules that were derived from a different culture and a different time. In fact many of them said that when they went back to the old country to visit as young adolescents they were amazed to find that things were not quite as their parents remembered them anyhow; times had changed there as well.

We do believe there is a significant group of children in the community whose parents are bringing them up according to a set of rules that will not necessarily serve them well in a multicultural society in the late 20th century. The social changes that are taking place mean, again, that children will have to accept responsibilities as parents in circumstances that are quite different from the ones their parents confronted. We felt that was the critical thing.

One other issue was whether or not we made a direct approach to this issue. I use the term ‘add on approaches’, which have been characteristic of north American programs in parenting. That is, they are specific packages that directly deal with parenting. The north American assumptions about learning lead them into those head-on approaches to most social issues anyhow. It is, we believe, one of the reasons why a lot of the intervention programs in north America have not been successful and have often been controversial.

We preferred to integrate our approach into the mainstream curriculum, which is not to say that we were actually being devious but to say that we wanted to treat these matters as quite properly and normally matters that any growing young person would want to reflect on. If education was not about how families operated, what was happening to you at different stages of your life, how your relationships were shaping and directing and how you would live your life as you grew into mature years, we could not tell what it was about.

We felt that it was more productive and much safer to treat parenting and families as simply the content of the mainstream curriculum and concentrate on providing teachers with materials and support that might help them focus more clearly than they otherwise would have done on these particular issues.

The other thing that we were concerned about was that, once we made that decision, we also realised that we were working through teachers who have very limited training in mental health and in fact probably less even than they might have had a couple of generations ago, as teacher training methodologies have shifted from the 1960s where there was at least a smidgin of emphasis on educational psychology. So we were concerned that we were asking teachers to move into unknown territory to some extent, and we put a great deal of our effort into preparing them for it. They were apprehensive about where it might be leading and, as you will know, in this state we have a system of mandatory reporting of child abuse, so teachers were doubly conscious of the fact that they were likely to be opening up issues that may prove extremely sensitive for them.

Just briefly, I suppose we would say, to the extent that we have formed any opinion so far about the success of the project—and our evaluation team from Deakin University has given us a good deal of feedback so far—we take the view that the materials that we have been using have been very successful. The teachers have found them usable and supportive, and they have been able to address these issues in a much more straightforward and secure way.

We are convinced that the approach we have adopted—which is largely through vicarious experience, by which I mean we have focused on children's novels, films and videos rather than on talking about the personal experience of the individual children in the classroom—has been successful. The children have told us that and the teachers have told us that. To some extent, we would say we have had a trouble free run in a territory that could have been highly volatile. We believe that a great deal of that has been due to the fact that children and parents have not felt directly threatened.

The downside of that may be that we are not really touching the issues. You can read that either way you like. You can say, 'Well, of course you have had no trouble because, in fact, you have just skipped over the surface.' The teachers have been quite happy to talk about families in a very broad way and we have not touched the sensitive matters and we will not know that.

Finally, we are convinced also that the opportunities that children have had, particularly through the use of the private journal—and we will leave these materials with you—have been positive. The journal was designed to enable the children to reflect privately on what they were thinking and hearing about. The contract we had with the children was that no-one saw the journal so that they felt secure in writing in here reflections about what they are reading in the novels and the ways in which that touches their own

experience, but they have not felt any need to expose their problems and concerns in the wider classroom.

The truth of the matter is that many of them have to be actually discouraged from saying things in the classroom sometimes because, as the project has progressed, they have felt more and more secure and more and more open and there has been a quite remarkable rapport between teachers and students.

My last point is to do with the services, which is your second term of reference. You might like us to expand on this, but I shall be blunt. We have found the services available to support the schools in this work to be totally inadequate. We have had very good and constructive liaison at peak level with departments and agencies, but the further we have probed, the more apparent it is that, on the ground, the services are very thin, unevenly spread and, in our view, the agencies are not at all sure about what they have got there and what they can deliver.

The critical incidents that have arisen and, particularly, the one case of a mandatory report that became necessary in one of the schools, has persuaded us that, at crisis points like that, we cannot count on support. The teacher who was involved was left, in many respects, high and dry. The agencies were not able to provide counselling for the child or the family for some months. The child, having made this report, had to go back into the family. The school suffered a good deal of aggression from the family, who knew that someone had reported them and they did not know what the issues were.

A similar incident arose in another school where the case was not one of physical abuse but child neglect. The agencies concerned felt that that was not high on their list of priorities, they could not pay any attention to it and, once again, both the school and the child felt that they were probably worse off for having raised the issue in the first place.

That problem is compounded by the fact that teachers are not trained to handle these matters. They are already sensitive about opening up issues that they cannot handle or resolve. Very often, where a matter such as a mandatory report has occurred, they feel at the end of the day that the child, the teacher and, to some extent, the family itself have probably suffered for the lack of support it was expecting. That is probably more than enough preamble from me and Delyce can provide you with more details.

**CHAIR**—I would like to pick up on a few things. What was the impetus for this project? Where did it come from?

**Mr Tickell**—It grew out of the work in the International Year of the Family. The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation had a working party to look at ways in which educational initiatives might be developed to strengthen family life.

**CHAIR**—Secondly, you have said that you will provide a copy of the journal—

**Mr Tickell**—We will provide all the material.

**CHAIR**—That was my question—could we see the material, as that would be useful?



**Mr Tickell**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—My third question picks up on the training of teachers. Would you like to comment more on that? A lot of evidence before the committee has been that there needs to be relationships education in schools. That has been an overwhelming suggestion made to the committee, and without dissent, from a whole range of different groups. But without getting into any particular program, if that is broadly the direction we are going to go what do teachers need?

**Ms Dalton**—When we surveyed the 100 or so teachers that were participating in the project this year, we found that a fifth of them had not had the compulsory mandatory reporting training. That was unsatisfactory to us because we were taking these teachers into sensitive territory. That training, too, was earmarked at just two hours being satisfactory to prepare teachers for having to deal with those sorts of issues. In the case we are using, of the teacher with the mandatory reporting situation, she had had that training and found herself completely unprepared for the circumstances which arose—the procedures of the agency coming into the school, the child being interviewed, post the interview et cetera. So apart from more extensive training in that area I think they also need structures within the school that support them and the students.

We also found that not one of the schools involved in the trial last year had a written student welfare policy. Once they embarked upon preparing policies, one particular school was also in the process of putting together a committee or group within the school that was going to be in charge of all the welfare issues—teacher, student et cetera. The very fact that that group came into being was of enormous relief and support, and the teachers in that school felt more confident to go ahead with the project. Apart from that area, the teachers also need professional development that prepares them for issues that arise in this project. We are not convinced at the moment that the issues are being treated in the serious way that we would like them to be.

**Mr Tickell**—We probably also need to go back into initial training. We are currently dealing with a cohort of teachers who are well past their training. Mental health has a long tradition as an education aim, though it has lost ground in a way. But if it is going to be a more prominent educational aim, then the initial training of teachers, pre-service, has to pay much more attention to it. Teachers are generalists in so many matters. I would not think that they could ever reach the point where they could be therapists. But they do need to have a better understanding of psychodynamics and of the emotional and psychological processes of child development, which has not been receiving the same attention.

When I was in training we probably did a little bit of what was called ed-psych. It was mainly to do with learning theory, but a bit of it had to do with classroom management. In my other life I am the Associate Dean of Education at Monash University, so I am as culpable as anyone when I say these things. But that subject does not receive even the prominence that it used to do.

Somehow, teachers do need to understand more than they currently do about the emotional development of children, about the psychodynamic processes under which children grow into young adults. They need to feel less concerned with controlling children and better able to respond to them. There is the social pressure on them. They are still expected to have a quiet class and an orderly room and to keep

everything suppressed. Of course, that is almost the worst thing to do in some cases. They do need to be able to realise that children do need emotional outbursts and that an emotional outburst by a child or personal exposure by a child is not going to bring the world tumbling down. So they need to learn some of the techniques that psychotherapists learn, without ever imagining that they can adopt that role themselves. It is that balance between being able to handle the everyday issues and having access to expert support that has to be worked through.

**CHAIR**—I understand the emphasis on mandatory reporting and that aspect of it, but I take it that that is not the primary—

**Mr Tickell**—That is not the positive side of the thing, no.

**CHAIR**—Nor is it the primary objective of the program.

**Mr Tickell**—No, absolutely not.

**CHAIR**—Can you say in a few sentences what you would like the children who go through the program to come out with at the other end of it?

**Mr Tickell**—The focus of the program has been on the repetition of parenting behaviours from generation to generation—the sort of unreflective repetition. To some extent, therefore, we would say that all children could benefit from reflecting on their own parenting. Even my children did not have a model upbringing—I will admit that in public, and I am on the record. I suppose most of us could say that.

**CHAIR**—We could probably all admit that if we wanted to.

**Mr Tickell**—Good, we are all on the record. Our view is that all children would benefit by seeing parenting as problematic in the sense that there are always things to learn about it; that as society changes and becomes more complex, as values and cultures diversify, parents have to reconsider their strategies. That is not to say that there are not some well-established strategies that they would hold firm to, but they have still got to rethink them from generation to generation.

In particular, therefore, those children who are experiencing abusive and violent parenting most certainly need to understand that they do not have to repeat that pattern in the next generation. If you asked me to focus on a single understanding that we see as crucial to the project it is the understanding that patterns of parenting do not have to be repeated from generation to generation. In particular, we hope that that message will be learnt by the children who are at risk of becoming child abusers themselves.

**Mr BARRESI**—I was interested in your research. You mentioned throughout your submission that children tend to mistreat other children and those who come from dysfunctional families perhaps end up having dysfunctional families themselves. Taking that into consideration—and some of the kids who are going through this program are actually in those family situations—what level of resistance have you had, if any, from the parents of the kids who are going through the program? I would have thought that the role of a parent—you talk about the teacher understanding the childhood development phases—would have to be

enhanced as well. I would hate to think that a kid would come home, going through this program, and all of a sudden they start questioning the parents' role and the way they are managing the process and perhaps the parents then taking it out on the children.

**Mr Tickell**—Perhaps what I should have said, and we have perhaps mentioned it in there, is this: one of the things we required of schools was that at least they have the program authorised by the parent groups. One of our failures has been that we have not been able to get the degree of parent involvement in the project that we had hoped. The positive side of that is we have had no trouble—which is what is behind your question. The negative side of it, nevertheless, is that it may simply be a kind of tolerance of the program or that the parents may not feel as threatened as we feared they would be. We had hoped, and we would certainly be trying to build this into further work, that the parent organisations themselves would take up the issues. What we would have hoped to see was that there might have been evening sessions in which parents discussed parenting. But the thing we were anxious to avoid was that that should be initiated by teachers. So we just have not cracked that one yet.

But we did demand that the schools, before they came on the project, had the school council authorise their involvement and that parents of the class were aware of what was taking place. We did encourage them to establish a parent liaison group or support group in the hope that group might have said, 'Oh well, perhaps we should talk amongst ourselves about these issues too.' Only rarely has that happened so far, so that is one of our aims that has not been fulfilled. Delyce might be able to mention some specifics because there are at least a few incidents that might bear on that.

**Ms Dalton**—Regarding the case we were using before, the parent of the child in the mandatory reporting case had objected to the child participating in the project. The teacher encouraged the child to participate. The parent put on a condition that the child did not read the book, *Building Blocks*, which talks about the intergenerational issues to some extent—very mildly—and so the child did participate. The parent's concern obviously came from what was happening in the home because that had ended up in a mandatory reporting case.

The other incidents of resistance—and there have been very few, as Gerry said—have been similar. I think at one of the country schools there was a group of parents who came to the principal and said, 'We don't like this idea of this program.' I think they did not understand enough that the children were working through these issues vicariously—through the characters in films and novels—and they were not being asked to talk about their own personal experience of family. Those parents were satisfied once they had spoken to the principal. But, once again, the teacher who spoke to me said a couple of those parents had reason to be anxious because they were already under the department of human services for some issues.

**CHAIR**—Have you had any experience of the family skills parenting program which the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department funds? I am not sure where they run it in Victoria. I know there was one out at Broadmeadows that was started a few years ago. Have you had any experience of it and is there a place for something like that dovetailing into the work that your project is involved in?

**Ms Dalton**—Do you mean PET?

**CHAIR**—No, it is called family skills training. There was a series of programs funded by the Attorney-General's Department. There is one I know was at least started. I have not got the details. One at least was started at Broadmeadows and I know that there are some others.

**Mr Tickell**—How recently?

**CHAIR**—It was started about three or four years ago.

**Mr Tickell**—No, we have not seen that.

**CHAIR**—Fine. I just wanted to know whether it was that sort of integration.

**Mr Tickell**—But we would be happy to have a look at that and give you some commentary on it, if that was helpful to the committee.

**Ms Dalton**—One of the Catholic schools was intending to run a few parenting sessions alongside this project and Deakin evaluation team have been following whatever has happened to that. They have not reported to us yet.

**CHAIR**—Can I ask you, because you mentioned PET and STEP: do you have any comments about those programs? Are they the type of programs you would call add-on programs when you are talking about the American experience? Secondly, I know that Professor Maurice Bolson at Monash runs parenting type programs. Would you comment on those sorts of programs, and do those sorts of things have a place in being integrated with what you are doing? Where is the bigger picture?

**Mr Tickell**—Maurie's programs for parents would complement this very well. The problem that we have grappled with is how to get those programs established without making the whole enterprise look like a massive intervention. As well as taking up with children the question of parenting and families, if we would also then contrive to have programs running for the parents we were concerned that we might well have jeopardised the whole venture. So, as I said before, unsuccessfully we have tried to get the parents to initiate those things. We have had several sessions with parents from the different schools, and we have indicated that if they wanted to take up some of the issues then we would provide resources or put them in touch with other programs for themselves.

My view is that they are critical. If you could complement programs for parents and programs for children, that would be ideal. It would be ideal in the other sense too in that it would be a reinforcement of the sense that this was a family-school partnership that was embarking on this project and it was not a case of the school looking to interfere in the family's domain. We have had to tread that line very gently and it is quite properly that people are concerned about it.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—We had previous commentators critiquing not your program but in a sense your type of program by saying that in their view marriage was a larger factor in determining a person's health than unemployment or socioeconomic status or even smoking. They say there is no attention going to supporting it, there is even hostility to marriage, as opposed to their view that it makes both men

and women healthier and that marriage breakdown or failure to marry leads to a higher mortality rate. So they are saying a health promotion foundation ought to be aware of this and publicising this and promoting a positive view of marriage. What response would you have to that?

**Mr Tickell**—We believe we have promoted a positive response of marriage in a sense through the program, but we have not represented that as the only set of family relationships that are capable of sustaining young children. Of course, it is another line we tread very gently. There are two views of this project. One of them was the view that we were going to ram down everyone's throats a particular model of families and the other one was that we were going to undermine the family at a quite fundamental level by suggesting that just anything goes and promoting all sorts of extravagant alternative lifestyles.

Both of those, of course, are concerns that different parts of the community had and we have tried to tread a path down the middle of that. Our general stance has been that marriages work and they can be very constructive relationships, both for the people in them and for the children who live with the married partners, but that we are not going to suggest to those other children in the class whose parents are not married or who live in other sort of relationships that they ought to be ashamed of the way they live, or that, in fact, unless they can attain that ideal marriage state there is no future for them as parents.

At the end of the day we wanted the children to reflect on the benefits of the different forms of parenting that exist in the community, not ones that we developed hypothetically, but ones which are present in the classroom. That is the reality. We are not talking about a view that we want to promote. We are talking about a reality that exists in almost every one of the classrooms we are working with, and we do have to respect the lives of the children in those classes, but we do not, in any sort of way, set out to suggest that there is one perfect set of relationships.

**Mr BARRESI**—In your evaluation that you are proposing to do, are you proposing a long-term longitudinal evaluation of these kids?

**Mr Tickell**—We were not funded—

**Mr BARRESI**—I know the expense that is involved.

**Mr Tickell**—You are absolutely right. We were not funded to do that and we are talking about the possibility of that now. You can see the problem. There are so many variables over a 15-year period and this has been a very modest intervention. Our idea is still that the focus that we provide in year 6 is preceded by much more incremental and oblique work on family life in the first five years, and then it is followed up into the secondary school. We have begun to prepare materials for the first five years and the subsequent two and three years, not explicit teaching materials like this, but guidelines for the early primary and guidelines for the early secondary as to how teachers might build on what takes place in there.

The answer, I guess, is we have not made up our mind about that, partly because we are not funded to do it, but also, as I say, partly because we just may come to the conclusion that there are so many variables we would be just throwing somebody's money away. But it is not an irresponsible conclusion that we do not care so much as the recognition of what a modest enterprise we are engaged in.

**CHAIR**—When you said that the services in the community are totally inadequate, and I understand from your comments about the mandatory reporting aspects of the reference to those services which I took to be services provided through whatever it is called in Victoria now. Community Services and Health is what it used to be called. What other services, though, would you be seeking?

**Mr Tickell**—Education authorities themselves. Our impression is, anyhow, that education authorities themselves have fewer services on the ground than they had some years ago. There are fewer consultant psychologists in education systems; there are few social workers available in education. At least this is our impression. It is very difficult to pin this down, but when we have tried to do a stocktake in the communities where we have schools working we have found quite often that they are very thinly spread.

**CHAIR**—Apart from the services provided through the educational departments, when you run this project in a particular school is there an attempt to identify what other family type counselling services there are in that community, whether Relationships Australia or whether the Anglican Marriage Council or whoever has got services that are available? How does that integrate?

**Mr Tickell**—We did that in the first year.

**Ms Dalton**—In the first year we did that ourselves because there were only six schools last year in that phase. However, with 46 schools across the state this year, it is a bigger task than our small project team can manage. What we did though was encourage the schools themselves to do this, and we outlined some guidelines for them, and that has been left to them to do, but certainly we have encouraged that.

**CHAIR**—How long is this project funded for?

**Mr Tickell**—It finishes in the middle of next year. We are currently negotiating for sponsorship funding to see whether we can reproduce the materials more widely. But we have no further funding from the Health Foundation beyond July of next year.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for your submission and for coming along this morning and providing us with some greater detail about it. There are some documents which you wish to table.

Resolved (on motion by Mrs Elizabeth Grace):

That the documents entitled 'Healthy Families Project 'Pilot Material 1996 Resources', 'Healthy Families Project 'Pilot Material 1996', 'My Family Journal' by the Board of Studies Melbourne, 'A Story About the Family' by the Board of Studies Melbourne, as well as the folder of material entitled 'Healthy Family Projects' be accepted as exhibits and received as evidence to the inquiry.

[11.26 a.m.]

**CLARKE, Ms Billi, Domestic Violence Outreach Worker, Salvation Army Crossroads Project, 29 Grey Street, St Kilda, Victoria 3182**

**HAMLEY, Ms Margaret Joy, Manager, Housing and Crisis Services, Salvation Army Crossroads Housing and Support Network, PO Box 136, Moonee Ponds, Victoria 3039**

**PLANT, Ms Jenny, Manager, Crisis Services Network, Salvation Army Crossroads Project, 29 Grey Street, St Kilda, Victoria 3182**

**TOKO, Ms Maggie, Manager, Youth Services, Salvation Army Crossroads Project, PO Box 136, Moonee Ponds, Victoria 3039**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. 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 proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. We have received your submission which we have before us. Would you like to make some introductory remarks to it?

**Ms Hamley**—I will begin on behalf of the staff of Crossroads. I thought I would give you a brief overview of Crossroads so that you understand the context of our remarks today. Crossroads is an integrated network of services that works predominantly with homeless people—that is, homeless young people, homeless single adults and homeless families.

The Crossroads services include a broad range of things that go from crisis services, accommodation services—that includes transitional and long-term accommodation—intensive support and counselling services and labour market programs. These services all operate together in such a way as to try and take account of the broad needs of homeless people.

To give you an idea of the scope of the Crossroads Network, the three areas that are really important to what you are talking about here today are: firstly, our crisis services, where we would see about 300 people per day at our crisis services at St Kilda; secondly, our youth services, which Ms Toko is representing here today, which would support about 60 young people per night; and thirdly, our family services, which would support about 35 families on any given night. So we see a large number of quite disadvantaged people in the metropolitan area of Melbourne.

The first thing that we want to say is that we certainly support the provision of services currently funded by the federal Attorney-General's Department. We believe that these services which focus on enhancing relationships are vital. We see that quite broadly, in that we might be talking about people's personal relationships in terms of their family but also that we see a broader definition for a relationship in terms of people's relationship with the community being very important. When those sorts of relationships break down that is obviously the cause of enormous hardship and distress, and so we wholeheartedly support the continuation of these services and we also would support attempts to make those services increasingly

relevant and useful.

That being as it may, the main purpose of us making a submission to the inquiry is to draw attention to the needs of our particular target group at Crossroads. As a group they are highly disadvantaged, isolated people and they have particular issues which we believe are not adequately addressed by the current services that are available. We understand, in making these comments, that our target group is quite a small percentage of the population that would be being assisted by these services but that the particular relationship difficulties experienced by these people are enormous and that, therefore, the implications of those relationship difficulties not being addressed makes for a great deal of dislocation and marginalisation amongst those people.

The main points that we wanted to make are as follows: first of all, marriage and relationship counselling, education, the various forms of mediation and family skills training services tend to be provided in quite mainstream settings and, by definition, they are not then very accessible to our particular target group. They are services where our clientele tend to feel quite uncomfortable, they often feel judged and this is probably usually not—because of the intentions of the people providing those services—but that that is taking into account the self-esteem of the target group that we are talking about. So the end result is that our client group tends just not to use these services that are offered. I think their lack of access is something that this inquiry should certainly take into account.

Another very serious issue that we would like taken up is that we feel that issues of safety for particular segments of our target group are not very well catered for by existing services and, in particular, we refer to women, children and adolescents escaping domestic violence. We have two speakers who are going to say a little bit more about those particular issues. We believe for people from non-English speaking backgrounds who utilise our services that the problems around their accessibility are magnified. We have some specific recommendations about mediation services that we believe relate to our target group.

We feel very strongly that: no people should be forced or coerced in any way into attending mediation processes; the right to withdraw from the mediation process should be a clear entitlement of all parties who attend any sort of mediation; individual sessions, not just group processes, should be offered to participants in the mediation process to allow individuals to express their particular views that might not be able to be expressed in a group setting; and standards and guidelines should clearly state the need for awareness of issues such as domestic violence and child abuse.

One of the strategies that services need to be aware of is the creation of safety plans that need to be put in place for people who are in those situations. Thorough assessments of participants should be undertaken as to their suitability for undertaking the mediation process in the first place with particular regard to situations where there are criminal charges against a member of a family or allegations of violence and incest. A client complaint service should be developed as an independent entity to look at the accountability of mediation services.

Mediation services should be offered with other support services—I will talk a little bit more about that in a moment—and the definition of mediation should be broad enough to acknowledge that families remaining intact is not always the best objective for individuals within family situations.



Finally, one of the strategies that we believe is important involves better utilising of the expertise that exists within the service system that we come from. The target group that Crossroads supports does access services such as ours often on a daily basis, yet, as I have said previously, they are not accessing what we regard as more mainstream services.

We believe that it would be very useful if some kind of bridge could be provided between our type of service and the services that currently exist as a way of sharing our knowledge and expertise and enhancing therefore the accessibility for our target group. That might involve issues of training or it might concern the way that services are provided. Services could be provided within our context or workers familiar with our sort of culture could usefully be used in the existing services. I will hand over to Billi Clarke who is going to talk a little bit about domestic violence.

**Ms Clarke**—I will be brief. I want to thank you for giving us this opportunity anyway. I have a couple of case studies that I would be happy to be questioned on. My main reason for writing a submission to the inquiry was really to be able to feed back to you some of the experiences of women accessing the service. To give you an idea, we have seen approximately 120 women in the past 12 months and approximately 153 children. I would say 60 per cent of those women had been accessed into counselling services that existed within community agencies. They had not necessarily reached the stage of taking Family Court action. I believe that in most cases women's interests were in keeping the family intact. I would agree with Margaret on that point that sometimes that is not the best resolution for everybody.

Often counsellors that they had approached had been unaware of the issues around domestic violence. Issues had not been picked up at all. The women themselves were under pressure not to reveal information because joint counselling was being done instead of separate counselling. Often the situation of violence had accentuated over the period. Many men were moving from counsellor to counsellor until they found somebody who basically agreed with their view of the situation. What we have been seeing is women sometimes one or two years down the track after accessing these counselling services coming to us again at the point that they were probably at in the first place: they were in a violent situation and needed to leave.

Our service has a thrust this year to encourage women from non-English speaking backgrounds to access our service. One of the things that has become clear is that counselling in the way we have set it up has been culturally inappropriate for their situation. In some cultures, going to a counsellor would be seen as a betrayal of the family and dealing with the matters within that family.

I also want to accentuate the idea of safety. One of the reasons that I want to push that family law counselling remain within the family law structure is that it is able to offer a certain amount of safety for women and children accessing the service. I have had incidents where male perpetrators have been violent to counsellors in joint sessions because they have not been hearing what they want to hear. In some cases, counsellors have assisted in breaching intervention orders because they have been unaware that an order even existed. We have actually found ourselves in a two-worker service having to educate workers in that sort of area.

I believe that when women and children are accessing a domestic violence service, they are accessing a very specific service and counselling services need to respond in that same manner. It is a very specific

area that they are wanting to address. I suppose when women are getting to Family Court proceedings, it means that negotiations have truly broken down.

Especially in areas of domestic violence, there is an assumption within some sort of negotiating process that everybody is coming from an equal platform, and our experience of domestic violence would certainly dispel this myth. I have had women who continue to go to counselling because they have been threatened by their partner if they do not go, because it is seen as a good thing. He has used this, even in criminal proceedings about his violence, saying that his partner has agreed to come to counselling with him and they want to make a go with the marriage. She has felt very disempowered in the process to make it clear that this is not what she wanted to do. In fact, she has initially been channelled into counselling to seek assistance to leave the situation.

As you saw in my submission, I have outlined various areas where women have expressed concerns about the counselling services they have accessed. Although I do not believe that the Family Court counselling service is without its problems, I do believe it has a very clear mandate about what it sets out to do, and the accountability and the evaluation infrastructure is there for us to improve the service.

I might leave it there and just offer you the opportunity to ask me any questions later, and hand it over to Maggie.

**Ms Toko**—I just want to talk about the youth services and Crossroads. A number of the young people we work with have been in care for some time. They come to us with multiple issues, and often their families come as well. They have often been referred to lots of different counsellors for different counselling. Sometimes they are seeing two or three counsellors at the same time and then it impacts again when it is necessary for them to access family mediation.

In conversations I have had with a lot of the parents we work with, they have been saying that they are unable to access a lot of the mediation services because the parenting classes are held during the day. Some of the parents have younger children and cannot afford child care, nor can they afford the transport costs to get there. They are unable to get some agreement from their adolescent child that they will attend and, with a lot of the parenting programs, the whole family needs to agree to go. There needs to be some commitment. We also find that a lot of our client group are very transient, as are their families, so sometimes they are able to start the process but they are not able to finish it, due to housing, moving interstate and so on.

We believe that there needs to be some flexibility within mediation. Families can start the process, stop somewhere along the line and then go back, if that is how they are feeling. They need to be able to withdraw if they are unable to stay in work or to keep housing, or if they do not see that the process is going anywhere for them. Young people need to be able to withdraw if that is how they are at the time. Remembering that there are so many issues going on with both young people and their parents or parent, there needs to be room for them to be safe and to get safe, secure housing, and sometimes to learn about independent living, and that in fact counselling should be available, perhaps 12 months down the track. But there should be a bridging process—I know Margaret talked about that before—which may be about supporting both adolescents and families to a point where they can then access counselling and are aware of

what that is about.

A lot of the families that we work with have no education in actually making choices about whether they want to see somebody and, if they do see someone, what the purpose will be. Our experience, and the experience of the adolescents that we work with, is that they have had no choices. For them to continue counselling, there needs to be a lot of work prior to that—just about attending counselling and about attending mediation.

Some of those young people will never return home. That is okay because we are actually working with them and so they can at least have contact with their families. We would like to see that they could return home, but a lot of them have been out since they were four years old and so they have no idea of what family is about. There is not much more I can add, but I am quite open to questions.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Are any of your programs funded by the Attorney-General's Department?

**Ms Hamley**—No.

**CHAIR**—So are the adolescent-parent mediation programs that you run funded by your own resources?

**Ms Hamley**—We do not run any actual mediation. Most of our services in the housing and crisis area are funded through SAAP. We also have some other small funding through different government departments. The work that Margaret was referring to, where we would work with young people and their families, occurs naturally as a result of our casework rather than them being the target of family mediation services.

**CHAIR**—Have you sought funding from the Attorney-General's Department for such programs or not?

**Ms Hamley**—I do not believe that Crossroads ever has. I have never been involved in writing a submission for that. We have contact with the adolescent mediation service that is offered through Berry Street, because that is the closest to us. No, I do not think we have ever sought that funding ourselves.

**Mr BARRESI**—In terms of funding, have you put in a submission for the Prime Minister's youth homelessness pilot project, of which David Eldridge is the chair?

**Ms Hamley**—We have. Of course, we have not been able to talk to David about that.

**Mr BARRESI**—He has not talked to me about it either.

**Ms Hamley**—We were invited into the second round to put in a formal submission, so we are currently in the running for that. The submission that we have put in involves the component of family mediation across a range of Salvation Army services broader than Crossroads.

**CHAIR**—Just on the funding—and I am not sure whether you are the person who can answer this

question, and please tell me if you cannot—we are looking at specific family support programs funded by one department, mainly the Attorney-General's Department. I know that there is a variety of other programs, such as SAAP, funded through different departments, and then you have the state funding of other projects. Is there sufficient coordination and integration between not only levels of government but departments within government?

**Ms Hamley**—I might answer this from a slightly different perspective because I did a project working for the SAAP unit in Victoria about two years ago, looking at developing their guidelines for their family reconciliation workers. One of the tasks that I set for myself in that was to try to get a handle on the range of different adolescent mediation services that exist in Victoria. When I came to that task, it seemed to me there was not any coordination around those different services, and just in the sense of compiling the lists of where that funding was going and who to was quite interesting.

I think what was happening is that there seemed to be three different funding sources in Victoria at that time and they were funding in different locations, not necessarily with any reference to each other. So you could have a geographic region with no service at all and then all three funding bodies funding in, say, the northern region of Melbourne. Just talking about the adolescent stuff, my personal view is that probably the coordination has not been as good as it could be. It can be quite confusing because, unless you do your homework around where that funding comes from, for us referring clients to different places you do not know who they are funded by or what their mandate is.

**CHAIR**—I remember in the Year of the Family the council for the Year of the Family attempted to draw together some sort of overview of what was being provided but even that, with respect to them, seemed a fairly inadequate documentation of what is provided, which seemed to me to suggest that at a government level there is not a knowledge of how things integrate together.

Can I just take up one other matter in relation to domestic violence—not domestic violence as such, but another issue I want to try to address in relation to it. One of our terms of reference is about what are the causes of marriage and relationship breakdown—in fact, that is our primary term of reference. We have your evidence, and others, about the impact of domestic violence.

We have had the Healthy Families Project people talking about trying to take some small steps to break the cycle of generation to generation repetition of poor parenting practices. I know you are looking at it at the end point, but did you have any observations on what might be done by way of trying to stop this? Presumably people do not become violent at some point in a relationship. Speaking as a lay person, I presume there is something in the personalities or the behaviour patterns of the people concerned that means they are more conducive to being violent in that relationship and there may well then be some precipitating factors external to the relationship itself that causes that to happen. Can you comment on that?

**Ms Clarke**—I certainly think the environmental aspects have something to do with the extent of domestic violence. I think if you look back it is not that many years ago that domestic violence was a very acceptable thing in our community. Even that thing about the 'rule of thumb' where I think it was only probably 30 years ago that there was a law that you could hit your wife as long as you did not hit her with anything that was thicker than your thumb.

So we are talking about generations of people growing up believing that is okay and we are still talking about that today, unfortunately. We are seeing boy children take over from their fathers in some senses, and I think that is where a holistic approach has got to be taken, where the police knock on the door and actually take some action, where the local GP that the woman is seeing who is noticing injuries is taking action. I am a feminist and my ideology around domestic violence comes from its being a patriarchal thing where basically it is about ownership, it is about power. I certainly feel that from women and I certainly think that that becomes very clear when the relationship has split up, that men believe that their property has been taken away from them.

**CHAIR**—I understand all that but, without getting into a discussion about whether your ideology is right or wrong or correct or incorrect or different from anybody else's—we could spend all day going down that street—my question is: when you are talking about interventions by the police turning up and interventions by the GP and interventions of that ilk, hasn't the horse bolted?

**Ms Clarke**—I do not think always the horse has bolted. I think it is about giving a very clear message. Whether the horse has bolted, it may have bolted in that particular situation, but I see a lot of kids getting a very unclear message, and that to me is where it is going to become a problem again with the next generation. So I think it is about courts, counsellors, police, social workers, community agencies, anybody involved with families, giving a very clear message about it being unacceptable, and that means agencies have protocols around violence.

I have seen instances in, for example, crisis accommodation services where there has been violence and they will kick the whole family out, not making the man take some sort of responsibility for it. Then again the family may move and nothing has happened. So it has to be about an approach of saying violence is unacceptable, there are no two ways about it, we are not going to meander around, there is a law and people are going to follow it through.

I think that is the message we have got to be giving kids and I think it has to happen in schools at a very early age. We go and give lots of talks to teachers and other groups like that. I have been in the field for 15 years and I am now seeing children of women who have grown up and are now in domestic violence. I think sometimes it is about what you can expect out of relationships. If the only thing you have seen within your family is this is how relationships are and nobody else seems to be doing anything about it so this must be how it is, you may just accept that in your own life after a while.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—I would just like to follow up on that. You did say that quite a number of these people do not have the education to realise that they have the choices, that they accept the fact that this must be the only way they can live because they have not basically been seen or shown any other way. I do not fully agree with that, because they do intermix with other families and do not see that same behaviour in other families yet they perpetuate it in their own families, so there has to be something else there that makes them want to keep doing that. But what I want to know is how—even though we have got free education for everybody in this country—we get the message through to these people, particularly from these lower socioeconomic areas, which seem to be the ones that are affected with the lack of choice, the lack of education. How do we get them to absorb that there are these choices and that we can go out there?

**Ms Clarke**—I would actually disagree with you that it is a socioeconomic thing because I have worked with women police officers, I have worked with women lawyers, doctors et cetera, and that is where I am saying it is a power thing. You may be more resourced and in fact you may even know that it is unacceptable, but everybody else around you is not really taking up the challenge to do something about it. When women and children are coming to organisations such as ours with an issue of violence, if we sit back and say, ‘Look, we can access you into a nice little support group over here or you can go and have marriage counselling over there,’ it is a very clear message that this is just a problem that can be solved by talking it out. I guess what I am saying is that our society almost has to bite the bullet and say it is unacceptable and take some very clear and very determined and sometimes very radical action to give that message out to people. I think education is only one part of it. You can educate people, but to actually assist them, to give them the power to make the decisions themselves, is something else.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—That is what I mean. We have been educating people since Federation or before, yet we are still having these problems. We are missing something somewhere.

**Ms Plant**—One of the things we are talking about specifically in regard to domestic violence, which Billi has alluded to, is a complicity—in some respect—of structural societal factors. For example, when you refer someone to marriage guidance counselling or something like that, the message that violence is unacceptable is not strong enough.

We have seen campaigns that have changed community attitudes before. They have been centred around drink-driving and other major issues like that. It is not so much about education on a one-to-one basis; it is actually about a change in the community’s attitudes that we are talking about here, that violence is unacceptable. When you are a child and your environment is one of violence—whether it involves emotional intimidation or actual physical violence or sexual abuse—you are what you know. That is what we are talking about in terms of generational things. Unless people are actually getting messages from the community that are very clear about violence being unacceptable in whatever form—that is, whether it is emotional intimidation or physical violence or sexual abuse—we will continue to see those patterns.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—So you look at education as changing community attitudes rather than education of the individual in this particular context?

**Ms Plant**—Yes. With a change in community attitude will follow the necessary sorts of legislation and support that will resource people to make positive changes in their lives. The domestic violence program in Melbourne currently has a catchment area that includes St Kilda and goes as far as Toorak and South Yarra. In that area the people range from the most marginal socioeconomic street prostitute with drug and alcohol issues that lives in an incredibly violent environment day in and day out to women with very respected careers who are married to people with very respected careers in Toorak. So it is something that crosses boundaries. But the one thing they have in common is complicit messages from society: ‘I need to struggle with this alone’, ‘I need to struggle with this in settings where there is a marriage/relationship breakdown’, until other resources are put in for them.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—Margaret said that families remaining intact is not always the best outcome, and others have supported that. People who came here earlier today said that, statistically or

generally, that was the best outcome: that people in marriages live longer, that they are healthier and that their children have fewer mental problems.

**Ms Plant**—We would have domestic violence statistics that say women definitely do not live longer in violent marriages.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—In a marriage situation or beyond the marriage situation?

**Ms Plant**—In a marriage situation.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—What is being argued is that, on balance, people are better off in a marriage situation than outside a marriage situation.

**Ms Clarke**—Women are more likely to be injured or killed in the family home than they are by any health related illness.

**Ms Plant**—What I would point out again is that we are talking from the point of view of the people we would work with—the people who come through our services. What we are seeking to gain here is an understanding of the recommendations we have put up around ensuring that, if people are referred to mediation, they are in fact assessed as being appropriate for that. With women and children or adolescents in situations of mediation there is recognition of a power imbalance and, quite often, specific guidelines are put in around the funding of mediation services. We are certain that, in this climate, the move is towards the government becoming purchasers of services rather than continuing to provide them themselves.

**Ms Hamley**—Can I just offer a slightly different response to that question. The point that I wanted to make is that there are ways of looking at people in relationship to their families that is not always about them all living under the same roof. I believe very strongly that people—I guess I am thinking most often of young people, as in adolescents in relation to their family, but that might also be true of the experience of various members of families where a marriage break-up is likely—becoming reconciled to the issues about their family I am sure is very beneficial to their long-term mental health, but it may not be safe for them to live under the same roof.

So if I use the example of adolescents, the people that we work with are often completely isolated from their families and I do not think that is a good outcome for them. Perhaps they could have been assisted when they were young to have some understanding of the difficulties that existed within their families and the fact that there were reasons why they could not live with them but they should know that they could still have some contact with them. We certainly also have a very strong sense of extended family and the role that extended family can play in people's lives, again to give them a sense of family without putting them in a position of danger which might exist by them being all together in the family home.

**Ms Toko**—Most of the adolescents that we work with, I would say, want to go home. Most of the adolescents want to be with their families but the family that they want to be with is very much a television family and is not really the family that they come from. Most of the adolescents benefit within the services that we run from a family atmosphere, but it is nothing like they have come from and it is nothing like what

they will go back to.

A small proportion of those young people do in fact return to the family where we or mediation services have been able to link those families into ongoing supports. The young people have returned to the family home and it has been successful, and it will continue to be successful because they are able to continue accessing those supports. For other families, where they are living in regions where they are unable to access those supports, they do break down and the cycle begins again.

In situations where you have parents who have drug and alcohol problems and so on, there needs to be a safety net for those young people so that they do have contact with their families but they also have a safe place to go when the family behaviour is quite outrageous again. But, as I said, the young people do want to return home.

A lot of families want the young people to return home and they often comment that they love that young person, they want them in the home but they cannot deal with their behaviour. What they will say to us is, 'If you can get someone to deal with their behaviour, and if their behaviour changes we will take them back.' We are able to link those young people into anger management and to drug and alcohol counselling and to sexual assault counselling.

Then we will look around and the family actually needs drug and alcohol counselling, sexual assault counselling and so on. We have had some success in terms of linking young people up to different counselling that they need, linking the family up to different supports, and the families actually do go on to stay together under separate roofs. I would always strongly say that young people do want to go home and they do want to be with their families, but the picture is very unreal.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—Just before I leave that point, Billi made some reference to the family home being a dangerous place. Do you have a view on life expectancy for married women as opposed to life expectancy for women who are not married?

**Ms Clarke**—I do not have that sort of information, but—it is a bit like Maggie's point—the women I see have not wanted to break up their marriage and break up the family. In fact, it has often been years before they actually come to that conclusion, because we are talking about a person they once loved, married, had faith in and had children with. They had it in their head that they were going to build a life. It is not an easy thing for a woman to leave. That is why the recognition of these services that actually assist women to leave must be continued and recognised.

**CHAIR**—I take it there is not necessarily conflict between the two positions.

**Ms Clarke**—There is not.

**CHAIR**—It could well be that marriage is an optimum situation for the great majority of people but, for those you are talking about, it is the opposite.

**Ms Clarke**—That is right. It is a very small percentage that we are talking about.



**CHAIR**—On that point, I understand this varies from year to year, but how many families would you see each year?

**Ms Clarke**—Our service has been operating only for 12 months. We are a new project in St Kilda, and we saw 120 families in that 12-month period.

**CHAIR**—Can you break down what the problems were in those families?

**Ms Clarke**—I would say that 80 per cent of those families—and that is off the top of my head—were ones that had to be assisted to leave.

**CHAIR**—Because of domestic violence?

**Ms Clarke**—Yes.

**Ms Hamley**—It is a domestic violence service.

**Ms Clarke**—All those families were involved in domestic violence. Ninety per cent were physical abuse and, in almost every case, financial and emotional abuse were present.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—You were talking about changes to counselling services currently provided through the Family Court. Who actually delivers those services?

**Ms Clarke**—I thought it was funded under the federal Attorney-General's—

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—Yes. But who actually provides the services?

**Ms Clarke**—The services are provided within the Family Court setting. Counsellors are employed within the Family Court structure to provide—

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—So the Family Court decides. It has a list of counsellors—

**Ms Clarke**—No, it is actually within the court. They are in the building.

**Mr BARRESI**—They are actually employees.

**Ms Clarke**—Yes. When you make a Family Court application, there is a recommendation initially—and it has changed now with the new family law reform bill—whereby you are asked to attend counselling. But if there is a violent situation they will offer separate counselling on different days.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—That is Phillip's point: they are employees of the Family Court who deliver these services.

**Ms Clarke**—Yes. And I have had occasion to have to go along where a woman has had to be

escorted because of security reasons, and they are able to offer that.

**Mr BARRESI**—Just to follow up on the line of questioning that was taking place between Elizabeth and yourself when you kept talking about the need for a message to be sent, or legislative change and that it is not simply education at the individual end but education of society: could you just elaborate? In your perfect world, if you had the power and you were the legislator, what are some of those changes or messages that you actually would want to put through? Are you actually talking about punitive action against it, or what is it?

**Ms Clarke**—It is 1996. We have had a lot of education campaigns. The thing I am getting from women still—and this is women from all walks of life—is that when they have sought assistance from police it is still not happening. That is one of the first areas where I would probably begin. If you look at things like intervention orders, there are many thousands of intervention orders taken out over a period of 12 months. You can probably count on one hand how many men have actually been breached.

I guess I am talking about follow through action. The police have a very clear role in the intervention they could be taking. We are still getting women removed from the home—women and children at two o'clock in the morning being brought to places like the crisis centre when the male perpetrator is in the home. I am still seeing women the next day who have needed medical attention, who have asked to press charges and the police have just fobbed them off. Again, we are dealing with women with multiple issues. I may be working with a woman who is a sex industry worker who has a criminal history with the police, so they are not going to really take her seriously. You are talking about women who perhaps generally live in violent environments, so the police do not take it seriously.

My perfect world would probably be something that you might not want to hear, but I think that we have got an infrastructure that is not working, that is not accountable at the moment. Women do not want to complain about police because the next time those police come to the house they are probably going to do less than they did last time. I believe that, if there has been domestic violence existing within the family home and the police have been called, the male perpetrator must be removed immediately, never the woman and the children, until the situation has been assessed.

**Mr BARRESI**—Isn't there a possibility that you actually exacerbate the problem by doing that and you actually turn the male into an even more hostile being by doing that?

**Ms Clarke**—I think if you look at some of the statistics in places like America where they have actually instituted things like this where there are incidents of domestic violence—the man is removed, brought in, the woman is given the opportunity to press charges if she wants to; if she does not, he is accessed into other services—the incidence of domestic violence has dropped.

**Mr BARRESI**—One more question. You mentioned in your list of concerns the role of the male partner in the counselling quite extensively. We have heard a number of times from various groups of the difficulty of getting the male partner involved in any form of counselling, whether it be pre-marriage counselling or pre-divorce counselling, whatever it may be. It is hard enough getting them there to begin with but you have got concerns of when they are there as well in terms of the role they are playing. So what is the

solution, perhaps not in your situation because you are dealing with domestic violence and—

**Ms Clarke**—But generally.

**Mr BARRESI**—Perhaps it is all over and maybe it refers more to your work, Margaret, I do not know.

**Ms Hamley**—I guess that that was one of the points that we were making in those overriding comments at the beginning. The way that a lot of relationship counselling is set up, certainly the way a lot of mediation services are set up, there are pretty accepted ways that that counselling or mediation occurs. That is usually with either the couple in the room at the same time or in adolescent mediation with the family all together in one room.

I think that if there was an understanding as a matter of course that individuals were spoken to outside that setting, there would be an opportunity for women in situations of domestic violence or adolescents in situations where they might not be safe to articulate their fears without feeling under threat from the people who have the power in the family situation already.

I guess it is just that experience that Billi talked about before of women going through the counselling process sometimes for years without ever feeling that they could actually say that they were in danger because they were sitting there in the room with the person perpetrating it. So I think just some very basic stuff around service delivery of expecting as a guideline for service providers that they take that opportunity to ask people individually, that they are aware of issues of safety so that they know to ask those questions of individuals, that they do not assume that everything that they are hearing in those family meetings is all there is to the story.

**Ms Clarke**—I think too, just to go on with that, that counselling can be available in a range of ways. I believe that in lots of workplaces counselling could be accessed. You have got to look at where people feel most comfortable. And you are right: men are very wary of expressing their feelings and are not going to easily share the experience. So I think we could offer a range of services and not necessarily have them as joint services. The services could be even on work sites if a man feels comfortable within that setting and there is something available for him to be able to deal with. Lots of men actually ring our service because they feel violence is coming up. They realise that they have got a problem and they will ring us to see whether they can get assistance. In some cases, you may direct them to something and they will say, ‘Oh no, I do not want to know about that.’ It is too challenging. They have to go into a building, they have to make an appointment and they have to talk to a receptionist, they have to do all these sorts of things. So I think we have to be looking at places where people feel most comfortable—and that goes for women, children and men in general.

**Ms Toko**—I think it might be of assistance to access family conferencing so that, in situations where you have a perpetrator of violence, he may listen to someone within the family. There needs to be a coordinated approach there to bring extended family into that situation, perhaps, to deal with those issues.

**Ms Plant**—Can I go back to a previous point that you made before about how interventions from police might exacerbate violent situations? I would like to make the point that quite often interventions are

based on not provoking men—not provoking the perpetrator any further. Our intervention should be based on supporting the women and children in that situation when they have put up their hand and said, ‘We are living in a situation that is out of control. We need to do something about it.’ Interventions need to be about putting in place positive change or at least access to options for people in those situations. Interventions currently are brought about by police, by mediators and by counsellors with the best possible intentions but they are still based on, ‘If we do not provoke this situation or this person any more, then it will not be as bad tomorrow. They will be able to fix this up somehow.’

I think the police spend around 40 per cent of their calls responding to issues of domestic violence. We hear about very few of those. Very few of those people would come through to our service or other services but what I would say is that, when a person flags that they need a response from police, it is not something that is done lightly. You do not ask the police into your home lightly.

Once violence has been flagged it moves that violence or that situation from being in the personal and private domain where nobody wants to interfere—if we look away they might be able to patch it up themselves—to the public domain that requires a comprehensive and cohesive response from the community. From the moment they ring the police and say, ‘This is out of control. I cannot remove myself or the children from this situation; I need you to intervene,’ the message that that woman should get with her children should be about a positive experience of her making a choice about not choosing to live within that violence any more.

**Ms Clarke**—I am working with the Brighton Rotary club at the moment trying to get together a project to look at making accommodation available to perpetrators who have to be removed. One of the concerns of the authorities in kicking anybody out of their home is, ‘Where do they go?’. We look at some positive ways of removing men from the home and not necessarily rendering them homeless as well.

**Ms Plant**—They should also be referred through to counselling programs that are based on recognition of their own culpability and their own responsibility in creating a family environment that is in fact going to tear the fabric of the family apart. There are perpetrator programs.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—I have two points to make actually, rather than questions because of time. One is that a police officer’s duty is to investigate a criminal offence. So if he does not do that, you can take that much further. The other thing is to correct something that was said. I think it was Lord Denning who said in a judgment that I read that, ‘At common law a man was permitted to beat a woman with a stick, provided it was not thicker than the length of his thumb.’ What you can do with a stick like that I do not know. That is the common law.

**Ms Plant**—If it is in your fist, you can do quite a bit of damage.

**CHAIR**—We should finish up, but I just want to ask one question. We could spend all day discussing domestic violence and we have spent a fair bit of time on it, but there are various reports of the incidence of domestic violence and I think most reasonable commentators say these days that nobody knows, but there are various incidences. The only question I have is about the increasing reports now of domestic violence against men, not just against women. I appreciate that your service is aimed at providing for women, but even in that

context, do you get reports of domestic violence against men?

**Ms Clarke**—Very, very few. The odd man might ring up and ask for some assistance and we will refer him onto whatever is available. But I think that is because they are aware that we are a women-specific service.

**Ms Hamley**—Can I just answer that. From the overall Crossroads Network, we work with a lot of intact families, we work with a lot of, as I said earlier, single adults who are in relationships—and we are talking about hundreds of very disadvantaged people in different relationships—and I would say that overall there still are very few examples where I would be aware of the male being a victim of abuse from his partner. I can think of very few examples where that is so, and we tend to know an awful lot about those people's lives. But there are very few in our experience.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—Can I say that that is probably because they do not complain as much. If I can give you an example: in Queensland anyway, domestic violence orders fly around like confetti all the time. One partner will take one out, the other will take one out and it just is an absolute joke that occurs in the system, and the real victims are not being helped because of that.

**Ms Hamley**—As in the children?

**Mr TONY SMITH**—I think the real victims of it are not being helped because everybody is doing it.

**Ms Plant**—Again, that is a legislative issue that needs to be addressed. Certainly, when people take out intervention orders, one way of staying that process or getting a stop gap in the court proceedings is for the perpetrator—male, female or whatever—to take out their own intervention order, and so it becomes a balance of things there.

**CHAIR**—Is not that a deficiency then in the sort of command theory of law which you were advocating earlier, because what we have said in the law is that we will put intervention orders into place, but what there is some evidence of now is that intervention orders are being used willy-nilly as tactics in family proceedings by all sorts of parties. Does not that diminish the value of the intervention order and does it not actually contribute to the problem you have with the police in that they are still reluctant to do anything?

**Ms Plant**—I think the police have some sympathy from me, because I think that their hands are tied generally because, although they have clear standing orders in fact the outcomes are less clear for them. They are in the same position as the rest of us in that, until there are very clear public messages around violence, who would not rather deal with it as quickly and as easily as you can and get out?

What I would say is that you set up systems, legislative or otherwise, to protect the vulnerable. It is our duty as a community and as a society to ensure that the most vulnerable in our community have not only access but recourse to the protection of our police systems, our judicial systems.

**CHAIR**—I was not arguing against intervention orders. I was just asking whether there are

unintended consequences that make the situation worse.

**Ms Plant**—Obviously, I cannot answer here fully—I do not know that I would ever be able to answer it fully—but it is something that requires much further investigation. But, on balance, I would opt for a system that recognises and offers protection to women and children and that in that you would be dealing with 98.9 per cent of who was going to access that process.

**Ms Clarke**—Certainly policing our region has been a joint project taken up by our service and the CPS where, if they attend any domestic violence situation, the next day they follow up and will refer the woman into our service. They have said that it has made a huge difference on just how many times they are called to the house the next time because we have been able to put some sort of safety measures in, whether the woman is staying or not. So that sort of integrated approach can certainly make a difference.

**CHAIR**—I thank you very much for your submission and also for coming along and for the discussion this morning. It has been quite useful for us. Thank you very much.

**Ms Clarke**—Thank you for the opportunity.

[12.28 p.m.]

**BURNARD, Mr Don, Director, Family Relationships Institute Inc., 21 Bell Street, Coburg, Victoria 3058**

**CHAIR**—Welcome, Mr Burnard. Do you have any comment to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr Burnard**—I am also the senior clinical and counselling psychologist at the Family Relationships Institute.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. 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 proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament.

We have your submission of 30 October 1996. Would you like to make some introductory comments?

**Mr Burnard**—Yes, Mr Chairman. I am here to address a particular modality, which is marriage relationship education. I am here on behalf of the Family Relationships Institute, which conducts over 70 workshops a year in this area. These workshops are for individuals before they are in relationships, and couples before they are married, de facto or de jure, and also couples who are in marriage, de facto or de jure. Over 600 couples a year attend our workshops and services.

The focus of this submission is that marriage relationship education needs an enormous amount of definition and clarification. The promotion of marriage relationship education will require a sustained community education program, because what we have learned from the couples who attend our workshops—and we have been running workshops since 1978—is that there is a very poor understanding of what marriage relationship education is really about. Generally speaking, marriage relationship education is associated with churches and there is very little recognition within the community that there are non-church agencies which are able to provide these services.

The second point that I wish to present to the inquiry is that most people who attend marriage relationship education at this stage are not attending from a purely voluntary perspective, but are required to do so by their religious celebrant. Even with a non-church agency like ours, in our pre-marital relationship workshops, many of the people who attend are not totally self-motivated to attend. For those couples it has been a requirement for them to be married.

Community education is needed. If marriage relationship education is going to be serious adult education for relationships, we will need to create a culture within this country that it is not a sign of failure or inadequacy to attend a workshop; but on the contrary, it is a sign that a person has a mature and sophisticated approach to what it takes to make families work.

I heard a lot in the previous submission about the problems of domestic violence in families. We

know that sexual abuse takes place in families more than in any other structure in our society. This is something that we need to address. People who are abusing people are largely coming out of family structures. There is research to show that people live longer within families, but there is plenty of research to establish that it is the perpetrators of violence and abuse that come out of families.

What we wish to do in this submission is, first to propose: that a community education project will need to make clear to people that relationship education is not there to defend the institution of marriage as much as it to help people within marriage to achieve a quality of life and to establish a family system which will work for all of its members.

As long as marriage relationship education is associated with the defence of value systems or the defence of institutions, then it will not be taken up within our community. That is the evidence that we keep having put to us by the couples that attend our workshops. There is a striking contrast between the couples that do pre-marriage education, who are sent largely, and the couples that do the post-marriage relationship education. The difference is that the couples that come to us after marriage are self-motivated.

However, even those couples that come are still largely representative of people who are having major problems within their relationship. So, despite working for over 20 years in this area trying to convince the community, at least in Melbourne, that marriage education is not just for people who are having major problems, not just for people whose marriages are in trouble but for everyone, we have not succeeded. It is going to require resources beyond this particular agency to achieve that goal.

The second point that I wish to make is that marriage relationship education does not have a peak body of its own. If we are going to change community attitudes to marriage education and if we are going to promote within our culture a different attitude towards developing the skills that are necessary to be a person in a relationship, there needs to be a peak body exclusively promoting marriage relationship education.

As I point out in the institute's submission, we have three peak bodies and they are dominated by counselling agencies. There is a great deal of dissatisfaction within Family Services Australia, a peak body to which this institute belongs, about the structures of the three bodies. I am coming at this problem from a different point of view: the need for a marriage education peak body.

I think that when couples approach civil celebrants it is important that both civil celebrants and religious celebrants be encouraged to motivate people to attend workshops before they marry, but it is important if they do this that there is a clear choice between church programs and non-church programs. We have people that come to us who have seen the government brochure and have worked out that they have had a choice and they have exercised that choice. There are many other couples who believe that they have no choice; that if their minister of religion or their priest recommends them then they are recommending them to their church program. Those ministers of religion who give people the choice are more effective in their work than those who direct people to a particular church program.

We have worked with civil celebrants, and this is a much more difficult process because the difficulty that civil celebrants face is that their living is often involved in their work. If they start asking people to attend workshops which involve a fee, then the fear they have is that people will go to other celebrants who



do not make any suggestions, or do not make any efforts to motivate them towards workshops.

So another task that faces the community is to perhaps educate celebrants how to motivate couples, and essential in that motivation is choice. I think the literature that the Office of Family Services sends out to celebrants needs to more clearly emphasise that there is a choice for couples and that it is up to them to exercise that choice. I think it is fair to acknowledge the work done by clergy and by some civil celebrants who take their job seriously and realise that to make relationships work is a psychologically challenging and arduous task. In our society today we are finding that the changes in employment patterns are putting partners under far greater pressures than I think they have ever been under.

There is also confusion between the partnering relationship and the parenting relationship. It is critical for children that the parenting relationship remains intact even if the partnering relationship breaks down, and we need to look at this seriously. When we talk about the breakdown of marriage, we assume that a divorce means both a breakdown in a partnering relationship and a breakdown in the parenting relationship. In point of fact, it is not always a breakdown in a parenting relationship. This realisation can take pressure off people to take their relationships more seriously if they do not have this hidden belief that partnering and parenting go together.

We at the institute—and I represent eight marriage educators and three in administration (the president and secretary are here today)—certainly appreciate the opportunity to put this submission to the committee.

**CHAIR**—Can I take up your comments about civil celebrants—and you are not the first one to speak about civil celebrants and we have had various associations of civil celebrants appear before us in other public hearings. The facts are, roughly, that about half the weddings are conducted within church-religious settings in Australia and the other half are conducted either by civil celebrants or in registry offices. So far as marriage education is concerned, almost all the couples who attend marriage education programs are referred by religious celebrants and very few—I am generalising—by civil celebrants.

You identified the problem of it being a livelihood for some of the civil celebrants. Also an attempt was made by the Attorney-General's Department with the 'Is love enough?' project to try to encourage civil celebrants to in turn encourage couples to attend marriage education programs. I am interested in your comments about that project and whether it achieved anything and, if not, why not. I hear you saying that we in government ought to be spending more money on some sort of broad education program. But given what you say, that the couples who do turn up do so because they are persuaded to turn up by their celebrant rather than out of any sense of motivation, there would have to be a considerable fear on the part of government that a broad education program could spend millions that might increase the numbers turning up slightly but not make a substantial difference. I am interested in your reactions to those matters.

**Mr Burnard**—The initial response to the project 'Is love enough?' was extremely favourable from the civil celebrants, and the number of people referred by civil celebrants since then has increased slightly. But, unfortunately, this project followed hot on the heels of a deregulation of civil celebrants. And that has contaminated the real variable in the lack of progress because the video *Is love enough?* was a very successful campaign. We organised meetings of civil celebrants throughout Melbourne and there was a very positive response.

When civil celebrants were deregulated, those who had started recommending people to come were afraid that couples would say, 'They're putting a bit of pressure on us to do things. All we want to do is get married' and then they would then go down the street to another celebrant. Fear is a crippling thing and I think they were afraid that their incomes would be reduced. It was unfortunate that deregulation followed on the project associated with 'Is love enough?' I think this project would have been more successful if deregulation had not happened at the time.

With respect to the government spending more money, this is a real concern. It concerns me that we could be pouring good money into something that requires new structures before that money is spent. There are several mentalities that need to be addressed. For example, marriage education is still seen as a welfare project, particularly by the community agencies, because the only referrals that you ever get are from people who have really big problems. Community agencies have a mentality which is that the only people who need help are those who have major problems.

The genesis of marriage relationship education is that it is a preventative, pro-active and a health and wellbeing venture. It is not just a variation on the support of welfare or the support of counselling, both of which are critical and important. I believe that marriage relationship education is an attempt to stop more people falling into the welfare net and more people falling into the counselling net so that those services can achieve a higher standard of service. In the previous submission, I think that point was well made.

**CHAIR**—One of your recommendations is that a cash voucher be presented to each couple planning to marry, with a maximum value of, say, \$150. You go on to say that that ought to be redeemable against an approved marriage education agency. The figure that is bandied around is that about 20 per cent of couples attend or participate in some form of marriage education. I take it that you are saying that there would be advantages and that it would be equitable to change from a system whereby agencies such as yours are funded by a grant into a system which is funded by the couples being funded. Therefore, if you attract enough couples, you effectively get your grant. Is that what you are saying?

**Mr Burnard**—I think the proposal is something that needs to be carefully thought through. There are difficulties with this. This voucher is associated with a whole lot of other thoughts which are in the submission. I think the government needs to take a pro-active role in what is pro-active education. If we had a system whereby as soon as a couple announced their engagement—it would be difficult with couples who move in together, but I am sure that they could be reached in some way—and are seriously planning to move into a relationship and live together, with the possibility of having children, they could be notified, given a voucher and encouraged to use it.

It is important for the voucher to come from an independent source and not from a celebrant. That is where a great deal of work needs to be done to somehow to lift this whole venture away from celebrants. Their work has been extremely important but, as their influence decreases and more and more people are cast adrift without that contact, there needs to be another way of doing it. The funding of agencies is critical for their existence. Although we have maintained our numbers this year, we have had to do it by giving a whole lot of concessions to people, which we have never had to do before. We have had couples attending workshops and we have charged them \$10 because that is all that they can afford.

**CHAIR**—Just going back to the voucher aspect: the difficulty in the whole system seems to me to be that the trigger mechanism at the present time is the notification of intention of marry. That is legally the trigger mechanism at the present time. The real mechanism at the present time is the need to book the bluestone church you want to get married in which you do when you book your reception centre and all of that. There is a differential in time between the two. As I recall, the law now says the maximum length of intention to marry is six months and the minimum, I think, is one month, whereas I suspect, at least in Melbourne, if you want to get married unless you want to do it on a Monday night at 8 o'clock—or 8 a.m. probably—you have to book the reception centre 12 months, 18 months or two years before. That seems to be the point when something happens.

If you are going to have a system that encourages people to attend a program earlier then you would need some trigger that occurs earlier. If you say it is not the celebrant who provides the trigger—because at least when the celebrant is booked or the church is booked, whether it is civil or religious, there is a trigger—I am not sure what other trigger you could put into place. Do you see the difficulty I am trying to address?

**Mr Burnard**—That is right. It is a considerable difficulty too because, first of all, the number of church marriages has been declining steadily and it has shown no signs of increasing. In some places, civil celebrants are conducting well over 50 per cent of weddings. For centuries, marriage was de facto and the evidence all around us is that more and more people are moving into de facto marriage relationships. That is where I think we need to collect all of these people into the net. That is why I think this is going to be a mammoth task. There is no simple solution for it.

We need to emphasise the critical role of parenting. Once people choose to be parents, there are responsibilities and I think we need government to emphasise these responsibilities. We have been putting the responsibility on people to keep their relationships together and the community has tended to condemn the breakdown of relationships rather than the breakdown of parenting. We have models of people who are parenting their children extremely well after their relationship breaks down.

In bringing together a whole lot of people in the community this inquiry needs to be thought through because if we focus only on marriage de jure we are going to cut ourselves off from people who also need support. It is every person who is in a relationship that needs support. I speak to Rotary and all sorts of groups. When you go to these groups, people come up to you and say, 'Look, this is fantastic. What a wonderful thing. It is a pity we did not hear about this'. They are referring to both pre-marital, and post-marital workshops. As soon as you say to these people, 'Look, we have a workshop in a couple of weeks in your area. What about doing this?', they turn pale. That is the challenge that we face and the whole community must work together to meet it. Marriage relationship education should not be seen—and this is the point I keep making—as only a venture of the churches, which is what the people that come to us keep telling us.

The other thing I would like to share with the committee is the number of married couples who come to our workshops who have been to four or five counselling groups. They say, 'I believed the only choice I had was to grin and bear it for the sake of the children or cut my losses and move right out and have a life of my own.' I think that is tragic because there is another alternative which is to the benefit of the country, the nation and above all the individual person: that is, to create an environment in which we really believe

that relationships can be made to work but, if they do not work, at least one cannot renounce one's responsibility to children.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—When you were talking about that recommendation for a voucher, you did not specify whether it would be pre-marriage or post-marriage—assuming it would go out with the marriage certificate. Did you have any preconceived ideas about this, or was it still a bit nebulous and just an idea?

**Mr Burnard**—I would think the vouchers need to be for the married as well as the pre-married. It needs some reward system built into it. For example, when people's relationships break down if they have done something constructive, then perhaps the waiting period for divorce, might be less. In other words, I think the government has some power to get across a message that we do take relationships involving children very seriously. The trouble is that, if we use the word 'marriage', that immediately divides the community into a group that is really married and a group that is not, and I think we need to change that.

**CHAIR**—In relation to your comment about the churches, I would say that, to be fair to the churches, at least they are doing something. The problem is that 50 per cent are being married by civil celebrants; and, for whatever reason—whether financial or historical—because they did not think they had to encourage relationship education, they are largely the group that is doing very little in terms of encouraging this work.

**Mr Burnard**—I began working in a church agency and I would recognise the constructive side of that. The difficulty is, and this is why I moved out of the church scene into the secular scene: there is interference. I could document it, but I do not want to publish it; I could table letters from church authorities to the effect that marriage education was meant to reinforce Christian values. As soon as that element is there, there is a difficulty. I believe that marriage relationship education exists to develop sophisticated psychological techniques, attitudes and values, because people have their religious values from their family and from their church community. It is not the time, I believe, to combine them. Yes, I think the churches need to be recognised, because they have put in an enormous amount of energy and time, but I do not believe that it is working, in the long run.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—I should preface my remarks by saying that a lot of the other submissions point to the importance of the work that you and similar organisations do. Kevin teased out the issue of the voucher, and I want to tease out your ideas on another couple of recommendations for a peak body for marriage relationship education and a training program for marriage relationship educators. Perhaps you could tell us a little about why you see those initiatives as necessary.

**Mr Burnard**—The first recommendation, which is the peak body, would address the difficulties that secular agencies have in this area: the logistics of finding venues, of training people, and even of having teaching resources. Churches have these things, so that often, when they run programs, they have very good facilities, very good equipment, and personnel who are already involved in some way. So the peak body is necessary to combine the two groups—the church groups and the non-church groups—as equal partners. If they cannot collaborate as equal partners, then there is a problem.

The problem in the past was that, when we went along to a national grouping, there would be us and

perhaps one other agency, COPE, while all of the other groups would be church agencies. The impression was given, once again, that established it as a church venture. In view of that difficulty, a peak body needs to be clearly a body which represents the two streams as equal partners.

On the other issue of a training program, if you listen to university people, they say things like, 'You're wasting your time running premarital education because people have no experience of marriage.' Once again, that thinking is almost white magic because these people who come to us have plenty of experience of relating. We need to train educators to use the experiences of people in relating over the 25 years or the 50 years where they come to us, to see that the greatest resource in marriage relationship education is the experiences of people in their relationships, both positive and negative experiences.

When president of a national body, I sat in on programs. They tended to use manuals and get people to follow these through rather than use the experience of the couples and help them to analyse their experiences and look at themselves and build on their experiences. This is a training program that is quite specialised. You cannot produce, I believe, a sophisticated, competent marriage educator simply on the basis of somebody being trained as a psychologist or a social worker or a marriage counsellor. It is a specific discipline with specific skills.

**CHAIR**—It has been my experience that there has been a fairly major shift away from what you described as the manual approach of 15 years ago. There may be some groups that still approach it in that way, but overall the concepts of adult education and experiential learning would be the basis of most major programs these days.

**Mr Burnard**—We get couples who have gone to other programs and, when they come to us, they still speak about the chalk and talk approach. I am not suggesting that they mean by that a chalk blackboard, but there has been an emphasis on content. The reason I say this is that we get requests from all over Australia from people to help with their programs, but what they want is content. They never ask about process; it is always, 'Have you got something that could help us work on family of origin?' 'Have you got material that can help us work on conflict resolution?' I think that indicates that, within a lot of bodies, they are still going for the content rather than the process, and still looking for something to give people, rather than drawing out of people what problems they have in relating and addressing those problems.

**CHAIR**—But are they looking for something to give people or are they looking for the exercises—the things by which the couples can then work through their own issues?

**Mr Burnard**—I cannot really answer that fully because I have not sat in on other programs for several years. Indirectly, I believe that they are still very heavily into content, on the basis of what I said before. Also, when you hear people talk about the advantages of doing marriage relationship education, it is often on the basis that you can stop marriages breaking down.

As soon as you hear somebody saying that marriage relationship education is about reducing marriage breakdown, I think that indicates that there is a belief that you can give people something they can use to prevent something happening. Whereas essentially this approach is empowering people to make their lives work and perhaps indirectly helping them discover, something which I believe, that one of the best ways to

make life work, and the firmest basis for parenting, is to find out how to do this in a committed relationship. That is the process.

**Mr BARRESI**—In your submission you mention that the funding basically commenced with the Fraser government and successive governments have added more and more money to it. But you also indicate that there has been little significant change in the community's attitude.

**Mr Burnard**—Yes.

**Mr BARRESI**—Therefore why throw more money at it, if that is the outcome?

**Mr Burnard**—Because what we have never done is change the culture in which agencies use this money. That is the frustration in this work. When people come to our workshops the feedback that we get is positive. Our referrals to a large extent come from people who have done our workshops. The present Australia culture prevents people from going away and telling others. People will buy a Honda car and tell everybody, 'Look, I've just bought a Honda car, it is the greatest car I've ever bought.' But people in our culture will not go away and say, 'We did a weekend workshop and it was terrific.' The couples tell us that when they go back to work and say, 'We did a course,' the most common statement is, 'Did they teach you how to do it, Jack?' That is what I mean by changing the culture, which affects the most educated person and the least educated. The money that is being invested is not being as effectively used as it could be. The people that do workshops are gaining from it. There is no smoke signal system between engaged couples yet, because the culture does not say—

**Mr BARRESI**—Where is this money supposed to be spent, then?

**Mr Burnard**—I think there needs to be a large investment in changing community attitudes by public education. We have already done this in two significant ways in my lifetime. When I was a teenager, if somebody had said to me, 'In 40 years time people won't have one for the road at a young persons' party,' I would have said, 'Impossible.' That was the culture I grew up in, and we have changed that culture. Marriage counselling, as a result of an advertising campaign several years ago, is much more acceptable in our community today than it was. Marriage counselling suffered from the same problem. You would not tell anyone you went to marriage counselling. But today it is a little more acceptable to say, 'We've been to marriage counselling.'

That is, of course, people in crisis. We have not yet got a majority of people who are not in crisis attending relationship workshops, yet the greatest risk in marriage is boredom and staleness, and the skills required to stop it being boring and stale are what marriage relationship education is about. So the money that has been spent has not been wasted, but it is still in a very narrow trickle within the community. The result is—and we heard it in the previous submission—that domestic violence, sexual abuse, is still very prevalent in our society; in fact we seem to be discovering more of it. This is part of the approach to address these urgent problems.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—On that comment, I had a long history of working in the law in this area, basically defending people charged with some of these crimes. As best as I can recall, of all of the matters I

was dealing with, I think probably only two related to ‘normal’ family situations. There was always a dilution of an uncle or a de facto or some situation like that involved. So sometimes we get a picture that it is happening in family relationships, but frequently—in my experience anyway, for what it is worth—that is happening in those different situations generally where there has been a break-up of a marriage and an uncle has come along or something like that.

**Mr Burnard**—One’s experience is the most important thing to work on, but I could say this to you quite emphatically. In my work as a psychologist—and I have a private practice—the amount of abuse in what people regard as well functioning families is saddening. When people come to you and they begin to open out, you see the abuse that occurs in what are well functioning families to the eyes of the community. That, I think, is something that we can address only through marriage relationship education because people treat children and partners abominably, but these behaviours do not break the law or get to the stage of reaching the legal fraternity, though I think they are a form of violence. I can only say that a lot more violence goes on in the family than reaches our courts. It is psychological violence. I am a step-parent and when I look back on my life I see that I have done things to stepchildren without realising how violent I was against their interests. If I had had more time to attend step-parenting programs, perhaps I could have avoided this.

**CHAIR**—Thanks for coming along this morning and for your submission.

### **Luncheon adjournment**

[1.43 p.m.]

**ANDERSON, Ms Diana Gayle, Acting Clinical Supervisor, Southern Family Life, 197 Bluff Road, Sandringham, Victoria 3191**

**CAVANAGH, Ms Jo, Director, Southern Family Life, 197 Bluff Road, Sandringham, Victoria 3191**

**MARYANNE, c/- Southern Family Life, 197 Bluff Road, Sandringham, Victoria 3191**

**TESSA, c/- Southern Family Life, 197 Bluff Road, Sandringham, Victoria 3191**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Do you have any comment to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Ms Anderson**—I am also the coordinator of our family violence prevention program. Maryanne and Tessa are appearing on a confidential basis.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I 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 the parliament. We are in receipt of your submission. I now invite you to make some introductory remarks to it.

**Ms Cavanagh**—Thank you for the opportunity to be here. We have Tessa and Maryanne with us today because we wanted to give them the opportunity to talk about some of the particular issues around providing services for families who experience relationship difficulties and the way work is conducted at our agency and perhaps offer that as a model that is worthy of consideration by the committee, particularly as, at this stage, Southern Family Life does not receive any funding through the Attorney-General's Department, although we would be very happy to do so.

**CHAIR**—Let me interrupt there. So you receive no funding from the Attorney-General's Department?

**Ms Cavanagh**—That is right, we received no funding from the Attorney-General's Department, although the work of our agency has a very direct link with the Family Court and the sorts of services that are funded through Attorney-General's. We have provided you with an executive summary of some of the issues that we think are significant and worthy of attention. Broadly, we would like to frame that around what we see as the need to focus on the link between treatment and prevention and looking at what happens in the practice of providing services, researching that practice and using that as the basis for developing educational strategies.

We see that the whole of family approach that is taken by our agency has fairly significant consequences for families in that we focus on more than just relationship issues. We look at the whole family and what their needs may be, whether that is to bring about change and enable the family to remain together or for them to move forward under a more healthy type of separation which still addresses the needs of children.



The local accessibility to services is something that we see as quite critical. If those services are locally accessible to families that can have a more positive impact on dealing with treatment and change for families rather than them being caught up in the legal track that is involved around the Family Court, and conflict and dispute resolution.

Our model is more based at looking at treating the issues that have led to the difficulties in the family, providing people with options around changing that and looking for alternatives in their life. Today Tessa and Maryanne are with us to talk about what those experiences have been for them. We would invite you to discuss with them their feelings about that sort of service model and what it has meant for them.

I would like to ask Diana Anderson if she would like to make a few comments. In particular, we are concerned to draw attention to our family violence prevention and treatment program. We see this as significant for addressing issues around intergenerational transmission of patterns of violence and as the primary way of preventing children from going on and repeating the patterns that they have experienced within their own families, particularly as there is now research that confirms that that is, in fact, what children do. I might ask Diana if she could say a few words about the family violence program.

**Ms Anderson**—The family violence program that we have got at Southern Family Life takes a very holistic approach. Whether or not the perpetrator of family violence—which is usually the male—attends initially, we would still contact the rest of the family to see if his partner is interested in coming to counselling with him, if that is appropriate, or attending a group program. Down the track, we may invite the children to come in for a family session. We may also have the children attend what is called our STAR group. It is a group for safe talk about rights: children learn about the right to be safe, the right not to be abused and the right to be cared about in their family situation. They also learn other ways of resolving differences than through violent actions through words or physical actions.

There is also a concurrent parenting group that runs at the same time as the children's group. The non-offending parent would attend a concurrent parenting group with their child while their child was in the STAR group. Alternatively, a woman might attend saying that she had been a victim of family violence. Again, in that situation we would contact her partner—if there was a current partner—and invite him to the MATES program or he might come to individual counselling as well or prior to. The MATES program is a men's group that addresses issues to do with ways of controlling their anger—anger management—as well as ways of relating more respectfully to their partner and their children and ensuring the safety of their families.

I think the importance of our program is, as Jo was saying, the prevention of transgenerational patterns. It is important to address the whole family issue: to not just deal with the women or the men, but to also have programs for the children. We do that with the group work. We would also see families—if that was appropriate—down the track. We would talk with them about how they might reconcile their relationship, how the couple might reconcile their relationship or, if they choose to separate, how they would separate, taking into account the wellbeing of the children.

**Ms Cavanagh**—We have Tessa and Maryanne with us; they have participated in the different services of the agency. We asked them if, without breaching their own privacy and confidentiality, they might share what some of that experience has been like for them and, perhaps, respond to questions that you may have.

**Tessa**—I have been involved in Southern Family Life on two occasions. On both occasions I have needed extra help in directing myself into finding out how to cope with various situations within my family. I feel that Southern Family Life gave me an approach—a different way—to cope with the situation better than I had been. It basically helped me through a particularly hard situation.

**Maryanne**—I have been in an abusive relationship with an alcoholic. At the end of last year and towards the start of this year, I was a shattered woman, so to speak. I had tried other counselling from separate individuals but I decided to give Southern Family Life a go. The counsellors there encouraged me to basically take responsibility for myself and to try to get myself back on track. They told me about a program they had available for women and children. I went along and joined one of the women's groups and have basically got my life back on track.

I just think it is a wonderful service. Many people probably do not know about the service. It is such a shame because, when you are desperate, you need help then and there. I find this quite emotional actually. But I think the service is wonderful and it should be more well known, basically.

**Ms Cavanagh**—It is probably just as important to say—I checked this with Maryanne and Tessa beforehand—that although Maryanne and her husband initially separated, they are in a process of reconciliation and are particularly focusing on the needs of their children. Tessa has also been able to attend couple counselling with her husband. They have strengthened and rebuilt their relationship and family too.

**CHAIR**—In your submission you talk about the transition from being a couple to parenthood. In different guises, we have heard a lot about that, not only this morning, but in other submissions and from other people who have appeared before the committee. From a theoretical point of view, it would seem that education can be tagged around life cycle changes. Becoming a parent is one of those life cycle changes that occurs.

But from other evidence it seems that it is a time of increased pressures within a relationship. At the same time it seems to me that very little, if anything, is done about that within the community in any formal sense. We have classes about childbirth which, as I recall, teach you how to breathe and all of that, which is important, but it does not help much with the baby after it arrives. When a friend of mine said to a doctor, 'What do I do with it now?', he said, 'Just bring it up for the next 20 years.' But that is about the approach we have.

Should we be doing more than that? Should we, for example, be trying to link some form of relationship and parenting education into the birth, particularly of the first child, and using that tag or peg that we have with the birth and the fact that people go to hospitals, birthing centres, midwives or whatever for a birth and there is a willingness to go along and learn the things about the birthing to try to build on to that something about relationships? I am interested in that, whether it is a general answer or whether there is some practical experience that you might be able to throw in.

**Ms Cavanagh**—One of the things that birthing education has done for us is that it has made it acceptable to have to learn about actually bringing children into the world and taking responsibility for them, and we need to build on that. Here in Victoria the maternal and child health program has always been an

important part of our family support services. That has suffered some changes under recent times that most of us are feeling fairly anxious about.

One of the particular programs that our agency offers is a firm link with maternal and child health for our in-home support program where referrals are made through maternal and child health nurses for women who may need someone to go into the home and help them learn more about the practical day-to-day care issues. We offer that as an integrated program with our counselling program where there may be a need for the couple to come in and talk about what impact this child is having on their life and all the sacrifices that they make, including loss of identity and all those sorts of issues.

We have also worked to establish groups of women who are feeling the loss of their role in the community, perhaps in losing their employment, to come together and share their views about that. We would certainly agree that it is one of those life cycle stages where we need to make it more and more acceptable for people to ask how and ask for assistance. Again, that is where the local and community based services are really important because they are more likely to go to the maternal and child health nurse at the end of the street than to some specialist hospital or centre that is on the other side of the city. It needs to be part of a community nurturing approach where we teach each other how to take on the responsibilities.

**CHAIR**—Do the maternal and child health services—I am generalising, so accept it as a generalisation—offer anything more? My youngest child is 10, so it has been a while since I have had any association with them. But I think as a generalisation you could say that it was largely about weighing, measuring and checking the child was getting on all right, if breast feeding was occurring, there were no hassles with that and the mother was, basically, getting on. Is there anything more provided these days which is aimed more at the emotional and psychological relationship with the couple or is that still primarily the focus?

**Ms Cavanagh**—I think there is some variation from community to community. Certainly in our community there has been a link between us and local government and maternal and child health to work on that and to make sure that we see the maternal and child health centres as a community resource so that there is a conscious linking to what is happening in the rest of the family, what other services are needed and what other ways we can use the maternal and child health centre so the play groups are run there. Interestingly, now we have to make sure that men feel able to attend, particularly where they have become the primary care giver, and participate in those sorts of groups. That is about bringing the community together. In our community it certainly is something that is well and truly encouraged.

**CHAIR**—Tessa and Maryanne, could I ask you both a series of questions you might respond to if you can. Did either of you and your partners attend a pre-marriage education program of any kind before you were married? If so, what was your experience of it and was it useful or not useful? If you didn't, why didn't you? Was it because you didn't know about it being in existence or did you choose not to? A second part of the question is: do you see value in that sort of program, whether or not you experienced it in your own past?

**Tessa**—I didn't. Had I looked into it, I probably would have. With maturity, I look back on it now and think that it is certainly something that all couples should do before they become involved. I think, possibly, you are fairly starry-eyed and everything is wonderful at that stage so maybe it would not have

made a great difference. When realisation sets in after you have a couple of years of marriage and so on, more than likely that is when the problems start occurring and that is when they should be addressed.

**Maryanne**—I didn't have any premarital advice, so to speak. It was offered through the church where we got married but both my partner and I chose not to go through that. We thought we were pretty much on track and knew what we were about. But the more the years went on, the worse it got. As you said, the honeymoon period has subsided and the reality sets in. Not only do you have all these new issues to cope with if you have just had a baby or whatever but there is the reality that you are stuck together. All these new problems come to hand, whether it be that you have a new business or whatever. It is basically about how to handle your relationship and where to look for help. There is help out there; it is whether or not you want to go out and seek it. I suppose, if you want to keep your relationship together, it is worth while looking in your local paper to pursue some kind of group thing, or whatever is out in the community. I think it would be very beneficial because after a couple of years, whether it be two years or four years, things can start to go wrong and it is how you handle them.

**CHAIR**—So is the impediment to going, if I can call it that, simply, 'We've got a great relationship and we don't need that'?

**Maryanne**—Are you saying to start?

**CHAIR**—Yes. In your case you said you were offered it.

**Maryanne**—Yes and we chose not to take it. I suppose what came to mind for myself—not my partner—was that it was through the Catholic church and I thought it might have been a lot of religion pushed and I was put off. Some of the older priests preach at you and do not try and encourage a positive relationship. Perhaps their attitude needs to change and relax a little bit more. Now I would go and do something, but then it was like the priest was saying, 'You have to do this.' It was pushed at me and that made by go the opposite way, unfortunately.

**CHAIR**—So how could you have been encouraged?

**Maryanne**—Perhaps by the attitude of the priest saying to me, 'We have got a program.' Or maybe some younger person who had some experience working with the community could have offered something tantalising to me or my partner: 'Here is an opportunity. We believe that this will be beneficial for you.' Perhaps through Southern Family Life or the local council you could be offered some kind of program to encourage you to want to work together so that you learn to compromise right from the start so that you change the way that you go in your marriage.

**CHAIR**—If the government sent you a voucher worth \$100 redeemable on a marriage education program, would that have been tantalising enough?

**Maryanne**—I suppose it depends where it is and what it is about. I am interested in these kinds of things. If it was something local and I said to my husband, 'Okay, what do you think about this?', then possibly I would be. I would not say no, but it is not really a matter of money; it is more a matter of

knowing how to have a marriage. It is like when you have a child and you have not been a parent before. It is education through the community, I believe.

**CHAIR**—In your experience—and I suppose I am asking for the experience of other people you know, not just for yourself but a generalisation and I accept it is a generalisation—do problems really arise in a relationship when kids come along? Is that the point when they arise?

**Maryanne**—I suppose you have to take each relationship on its own merits. I could talk from a personal level. My first child was a premature baby and that created a series of problems—I suppose that is a little bit irrelevant to what we are talking about. I do not know. I suppose the bottom line is: if there is a program there which can help and encourage people to have a better relationship, bring down the divorce rate and help with family violence, all these issues, and help children, because they are our future, I think it should be encouraged, no matter what the cost. If you can keep a family together, you are going to save on social services and many other things in the court. It is like a vicious circle, I suppose. If there is something there and we know about couples in distress, maybe you have more chances of saving more relationships and marriages.

**Ms Cavanagh**—Can I comment about what we know about education, which is that people have to be receptive to it. At the time when people are committed to a relationship, it is one of those circular prevention arguments: how will you know whether you prevented something if it was not there in the first place? If they are committed to that relationship, are they going to be interested in hearing things about what is going to go wrong with that relationship or what skills they might need to protect that relationship?

Rather than just focusing on the marital relationship, a lot of work needs to happen before that—which is around work in schools with children—around what is a relationship and how you give and take within a relationship, what do we mean by friendship, first and foremost, before we get to intimate and committed relationships. That is a developmental and incremental process. Then, for people who are in a marriage, it is knowing that there is a service available.

We are finding, now we have started restructuring our services, that there are some people for whom we only need to offer one intensive session. That is really about them meeting with us and using us as a resource to help them focus on what actually is the issue that is upsetting people, getting some clear ideas and suggestions about a way of moving forward with that and then taking that away to work on it themselves. A lot of people have skills that they can bring to the problem, anyway and they know that they can come back to us at another time if they need to. That is not a very expensive way of assisting people. It is fairly efficient.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—I would like to ask both of you the same question and then ask about something that you said that I was quite interested in. If there had been, in your case, no violence in the relationship and/or whatever it was that upset the relationship, would you have sought any sort of learning skills classes? Had life gone along in the way it had before all the drama started, would you at any stage have been aware of—or gone to = a class or a course to perhaps develop your family skills and your living skills, things like that, or do you think it is only when you have come into this crisis situation you have suddenly thought, 'Heck, I need help. Where do I get it?'

**Maryanne**—I think for a lot of us in the community there quite often has to be a crisis before we reach out for help. That is just human beings, I suppose. For myself, yes, if there were things available I would go to them because I think it is a learning process for me and I can only pass it on to my children, my friends, and it just snowballs.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—And what about you, Tessa?

**Tessa**—I agree. I believe that from the birth of my first child I was learning right through. I have been going to the library regularly and getting books on child care and psychology, all those things, to try to help me through it. But when it came to the crunch, when I knew I could not handle it, I had to seek expert advice to get me through it.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—And do you think the reading that you have done and that type of thing, where you have extended yourself, helped you realise that you needed to get help? Was that part of it, too?

**Tessa**—Yes.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Had you extended your knowledge enough to know that you were in a situation where you could not cope with it any more and you needed someone out there to help you?

**Tessa**—It certainly helped. I probably would have formed that idea even without reading, but it made me look at the issues and say ‘Something’s going wrong, I don’t know how to handle it’. First, I go to my friends. Then I go to my parents. Then when they cannot help me, I have to seek expert advice and that is what I did. I must admit that it certainly made me focus. Even though I had been reading a lot and thinking that I had been handling it fairly well up to date—which I think I was—there are always little stumbling blocks along the way where you need someone else to be there for you. Rather than having your family and friends constantly telling you what to do, it is nice to have someone who knows the steps to follow through and you can continue on seeking their advice.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Maryanne, you were saying that you had been to several counsellors before you went to Southern Family Life. We have heard this coming through as a theme too: that people are doing that, they are going to several. Why did you keep looking for another? Was it that they were not offering what you were wanting, or were they not helping? What made you keep looking? Why did you not stay with one person?

**Maryanne**—The problems did not change.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—They did not help solve your problems?

**Maryanne**—Yes. We went to probably three different places, privately.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—I notice you say ‘we’.

**Maryanne**—My husband and I. Because I felt it was our problem, even though it was his alcoholism and abuse. I was there so it was my problem as well. We needed to work it out between ourselves. Financially, it cost a lot of money. We could not afford to keep going each week to private counselling. I noticed the counsellors really want to rush you through. We tried three separate ones. It is not like we were just homing in on one.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—They were all private counsellors?

**Maryanne**—Yes.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—They were not attached to any specific organisations?

**Maryanne**—No. It just so happened they were all women. But to be really honest, they did not help us. I do not think it was my attitude or saying, ‘They’re counsellors’ or whatever. Really we did not get the encouragement. That would be a very strong word, but they did not encourage us to try and work together, compromise and try to work out our problems ourselves as well as working with them. They were just telling us things.

Really, to be quite honest, I have known about Southern Family Life for a long time and I thought after a period of time that I had to get myself back on track because I was losing the plot, so to speak. I rang them up and spoke to someone on the phone. I went up there, made an appointment and decided to work on it myself—not us. That is how we have got back on track because I have gone along and done the counselling and then he has gone along and done a MATES group, which is about abusive men and things. I have also joined—and it is my second group—a women’s group with Southern Family Life which has not cost me financially. That is just wonderful and it has been the best thing since sliced bread, because it has really changed my life. I cannot speak any more highly of Southern Family Life for what they have done.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—It is interesting. Thank you for that.

**CHAIR**—Can I take up something you said, because I want to clarify it in my own mind? I am not sure whether you meant what I thought you might have meant or not. When you said you went to the three private counsellors and they did not help you, was that because of the style, or am I reading it wrongly in thinking that you were suggesting that they were not that interested in your relationship hanging together? Let me put it bluntly the other way: were they saying that in fact the best thing might be for you to separate and the relationship not go on. I am not trying to put words into your mouth. I am just trying to understand what you were saying.

**Maryanne**—Yes. I found that basically they were not really caring. I am speaking about two of the three people we saw. One of them became a little bit emotionally involved. They wanted to be there for us, because it was very difficult. The other two—and I am being really blunt here—they really were just turning over people. It was costing us a lot of money. It was \$120 for an hour. This is the lady who is like this all the time—looking at her watch. When you want to get something on track and you are reaching out to these people and they are looking at their watch, that would put anyone off.

You can feel at this particular place where I have been that they really do genuinely care. It is so different. They have got compassion. They have got so many wonderful things. They give a bit of themselves. They show that they are human as well. As I have said, I have been to three different places and I found that they really were fairly cold towards us. We were just like another number or another deposit in their book. That is being pretty horrible about them, but realistically that is kind of like what happened.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—Yes. Is it the case that you did not have to pay anything at Southern Family Life or you had to pay a lesser amount, or what?

**Maryanne**—No, it was not the money. We paid the money for quite some time at \$120 for a session.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—At Southern Family Life?

**Maryanne**—No, privately. No, not at Southern Family Life.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—That is what I meant actually.

**Maryanne**—Yes. At Southern Family Life you pay a percentage based on your earning capacity.

**Ms Cavanagh**—Can I just clarify that? It is a donation that people make. It is a free service, but people are invited to make a donation, if they can.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—It seems a real incongruity. It is a very good point you raise. In the private counselling situations there is really that notion, is there not, of churning people through? I wonder whether that is almost a conflict in itself. If somebody wants to talk to you all day, in theory they might need to be spoken to all day, but you cannot do that in private practice.

**Ms Cavanagh**—We cannot do it either actually, because we are in the situation at the moment where we have been taking in 26 to 35 new requests for service each week in the last couple of months. We are pretty well full and the counsellors are groaning under the workloads that they have. I think it is more about the nature of the relationship you are engaging in with the person who is asking for service where there is a community service, not a private business. Having worked privately myself at one stage, I appreciate that people who are in a private business do need to make it financially viable for themselves. Our approach is one of community service, not of a private business.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—Probably in a broader sense it may be that the encouragement of more community orientated counselling will result in—and I have to be careful how I put this—perhaps a more holistic approach that is capable of being administered in that environment, but I do not know. There seems to me to be an undervaluing of some of the churches' voluntary counselling efforts in all of this. It seems to me that a lot of the churches do offer voluntary counselling but they are not availed of as much perhaps.

**Ms Cavanagh**—I think there is an issue of privacy for families. They need to feel that their matters are kept confidential. The issue about being local and community based is really significant in terms of linkage. We can make linkage to the range of universal services that are in the community. For instance,



where we are dealing with families where there are adolescents and there are difficulties, we can link with the school. We can look at whether we ought to be reaching out to the young person at the school, whether the family comes to see us or whether an in-home support person goes to visit them in the home. So we have flexibility about tailoring the service to what the needs are of the families.

One of the big issues that we are seeing at the moment is parents of 14-year-olds. Fourteen-year-olds seem to be causing everybody a lot of difficulty at the moment, but there are issues around drugs, freedom and independence. Parents are really appearing to be quite deskilled in terms of exercising their authority as parents. Now we have the opportunity where we can also pick that up at the schools and talk to the schools about ways that we could provide forums for parents to talk about some of these issues more generally, because we are in the community and we know who the schools are, et cetera, to talk to.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—Just on another topic altogether. This is perhaps a question for all of you in relation to the notice of intention to marry. Do you feel that, if the notice period was extended, that would be a good thing? If it was extended from, say, one month to three months, would there be that slight cooling off period before you leap in?

**Ms Anderson**—I am not sure that it would make a great deal of difference at that time. I think that most couples when they decide to marry are fairly starry-eyed and think that their relationship is going to be quite ideal. It is probably 12 to 18 months down the track when the honeymoon stage is over and you get down to the nitty gritty of living together that it is a more difficult time. It is a time of reflection and may be a time of perhaps being open to learning new skills about how to get on in a relationship.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—The other side of the coin is: would you prefer it to come back to two days or a week?

**Ms Cavanagh**—Given that many people choose to live together, and that we are looking at the official statistics around marriage separations, the issues for children are no different in families where people do not have a formal contract but have an emotional contract and still have children. For those children, there are still issues around their parents separating and the need for relationship counselling to help people either to reconcile or to separate in a healthy way that is attentive to the needs of the children. It would be a shame to focus just on the issue of formalised marriage, because that is not what our community is doing; we need to be responsive to what is happening in the community.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—Can you tell us more about the recommendations you referred to, on integrating specialist services with universal services? What did you mean by that, and why did you make that recommendation?

**Ms Cavanagh**—Because of the link that we need to make between treatment and prevention, and practice and education. It goes to the example I was giving before. Where an issue comes up in our community with the families that we are working with, we can take that back into the universal setting and ask, ‘Can we come at this from a broader educative point of view?’ Where we are identifying, for instance, families experiencing difficulty with 14-year-olds experimenting with drugs, we can go to the schools and find out if there is some way we can work together and offer a forum for parents, to talk to them about the

issues of exercising authority over their 14-year-olds and establishing with their teenagers collaboration rather than conflict; so we can generalise out to the educative issues.

Another thing is that, where significant problems come in through a school—in an abuse case, for instance—we might go back to the school and offer a secondary consultation and talk to the teachers about how those sorts of situations might need to be handled, and whether there should be a broader discussion with the parents. So the education gets linked to an identification of needs in the community, from what we see in practice. We then extend that out to what the broader learning is so that we can prevent these situations from arising in the future. We have no way of actually measuring whether we have prevented anything, of course; but it seems to make a better link, in terms of being clearer on what community needs are and offering an education response.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for the submission and for coming in today and, in particular, for the personal testimony that Tessa and you, Maryanne, provided to us. It is always useful to have some real life experiences. We all understand the personal difficulty involved in your doing that, and we appreciate it very much. Thank you.

[2.24 p.m.]

**KERIN, Reverend Tony, Liaison Team Priest, Catholic Engaged Encounter Oceania, 402 Albert Street, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002**

**GREELY, Mr John Terence, Member—Liaison Team, Catholic Engaged Encounter Oceania, 10 Churcher Court, Mount Waverley, Victoria 3149**

**GREELY, Mrs Jacquelyn Ann, Member—Liaison Team, Catholic Engaged Encounter Oceania, 10 Churcher Court, Mount Waverley, Victoria 3149**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. 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 proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter which may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. Thank you for your submission to the committee. Would you like to make some introductory remarks?

**Mr Greely**—Thank you. The opening statement will be made by the three of us, if that is okay. Firstly, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to put our case for funding for the Catholic Engaged Encounter movement. We were elected to office some 15 months ago. We represent nine areas in Australia, covering five states. We also represent some couples in Singapore and New Zealand.

**Father Kerin**—The liaison team coordinates the activities of Engaged Encounter in those different communities spread out around Australia and, indeed, Oceania. We are responsible for team training in-service, and also for updating, revitalising and encouraging the activities of these communities around Australia. We also coordinate and share information and experiences from one community to another. We operate by cross-fertilising, if you like, the experiences in different parts of Australia, not only in cities but also in Northern Queensland and the outback and remote and distant areas of Australia as well.

The value of Engaged Encounter is as we have presented in our written submission. In particular, there is the benefit that a live-in weekend affords couples who have difficulty getting together for a longer course or a course that is strung out over a number of weeks. People who live at a great distance from one another or who live in remote areas are much more able to undertake this intensive weekend experience.

Our experience in modelling with less than perfect couples, and even a less than perfect priest, enjoying their callings in life and enjoying their relationships, despite their shortcomings—which are also shared with the couples—is that it gives them an experience so that, even after five, 10 or even 30 years of marriage, people can enjoy their relationship as fulfilling in their lives.

Our experience has been that, by giving couples assistance and encouragement at this time of their lives, when concepts like disillusionment are addressed they are less than receptive because of their stage of infatuation with and love for one another. But, because it has been mentioned to them, when it does happen later on, they tend to panic less. They are far more liable to approach for assistance and counselling earlier than couples who have not done any marriage preparation. So the highlight of Engaged Encounter is the

opportunity that we offer to assist these couples by giving them a private but intense experience of a weekend together discussing their relationship with one another.

**Mrs Greely**—Catholic Engaged Encounter has been going in Australia for 16 years. It started off in Perth. In that time it has been run solely on a self-funding basis. All the personnel have been and still are totally voluntary. The problem we have got now is that it has expanded so much in that time that it is becoming impossible for us—the liaison team—to keep up with quality control, training, enrichment, and encouragement to all those areas unless we get some sort of financial help to get us to those areas—because we would be the team who would handle that role.

**Mr Greely**—Jackie and I believe one hundred per cent in this program. We have been involved for quite a few years. The worth of the program is backed up by the fact that, in 1992, Harris and Simons did an Australia-wide survey of couples participating in marriage preparation programs. The movement that we are involved in was rated very highly by all participants, and that was based on the evaluation of the couples themselves.

**Mrs Greely**—As the liaison team we are totally committed to this role that we have taken on. The three of us use our holiday time so that we can visit communities for enrichment days or team training. Terry is self-employed. In the 15 months that we have been in this role, he has already donated in excess of \$8,500 in working hours so that we can fulfil the commitment we have taken on. We do not want to be paid for what we are doing—that is our commitment and our donation. We just want you to understand how valuable we see this work is and how much we want to do it. We feel that we are qualified to do it. We are not asking you to pay us to do the job, but we are asking for financial help to expand the movement. We think the biggest priority is the quality control of the couples that present the program.

**Father Kerin**—In our submission we pointed out the fact that we are not seeking funding for the provision for services, but rather assistance in quality control training and expansion. We see a couple of areas where this is possible. One is the subsidising of the annual marriage education conference, because it is important for us as one of the groups involved in pre-marriage education to associate with other marriage educators and to be aware of what is happening in the field.

We would also very much like every one of our marriage educators to receive a copy of the *Threshold* magazine, which is the forum for marriage education in Australia. Unfortunately, their finances are already stretched excessively with the voluntary commitment that they are making to their own individual communities around Australia. So we see that as one way of doing these things.

As far as the federal government role in the provision of these services is concerned, we believe that the government has a unique opportunity, firstly to recognise the good work that is being done by voluntary agencies. Also it is an opportunity to own—at little expense to themselves—the work that these agencies are doing by simply making it more visible to the community by providing improved advertising and awareness in the community of all of these services. Services that are self-funding will continue at no further expense to the government, but increased numbers of people attending would be the result.

If that is the case, then we would need some funding for training and expansion. Of course, there are

other agencies that require administrative assistance in funding and we work under those groups. Here in Melbourne, for example, Engaged Encounter works with the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau who coordinate marriage education in the Catholic church throughout this particular region. What we are saying is that the federal government can value the marriage education that is already taking place and ensure that that marriage education is of the highest standard, not necessarily by bringing in new programs, but rather supporting, encouraging and improving those agencies and programs that already exist.

**CHAIR**—One of the things that comes through your submission which you have been remarking upon and which we have heard about from others is that there is a dichotomy between those agencies which are funded and those which are not funded. Perhaps you could comment on this. It does not seem to me that there is—on what I have read and seen—any particular reason why some agencies are funded and others are not. That is, certain ones provide programs and get funded and others provide programs and do not get funded. In your case—and I cannot remember how many years you have been providing programs—you have been providing programs for 16 years or something.

Firstly, is that true? Is there a reason for that? Is it simply an historical accident? Secondly, as I understand what you are saying, you are not saying that you as a federation of communities with a particular approach to marriage education are looking for funding for all of those programs, but what you are looking for is some infrastructure funding for the field of marriage and relationship education which does not exist at the present time. Is that a reasonable summary?

**Father Kerin**—Yes. To answer your first point, the dichotomy between those agencies which are funded and those which are unfunded is an accident because some agencies employ professional marriage educators. To do that, you require funding. We do not want to be professional marriage educators. I am a presiding judge of the Catholic Tribunal for Marriage Annulments for Victoria and Tasmania. That is my full-time job. My interest in marriage education is specifically because, as a result of that work that I do, I can see the benefit and value of this work. This is my interest; this is a cause that I commit myself to. Terry has no interest in being other than a plumber, but he is still, with Jackie, committed to the work of marriage education. We do not want to be professional marriage educators.

But one of the things that is very clear is that when we go to a marriage education conference the quality and commitment that marriage educators bring to their task is not distinguished between professional and volunteers. The quality of work and the importance of the work that they are doing, whether they are paid professionals or whether they are volunteers, is something that they all have in common. What I am suggesting is that the federal government could harness the goodwill, expertise and experience of the voluntary agencies and make that part of the whole scene by providing more awareness and advertising of the availability of these programs.

One of the ways that this could be achieved is through the voucher system. The voucher system is not satisfactory as a total funding proposal for marriage education. The voucher system is essentially assisting the couples who participate, not assisting the agencies. I will tell you why: because whether the couple who attend for an engaged encounter weekend pay \$90 themselves and \$100 from a voucher, or whether they pay \$190 themselves, we still get \$190 to fund our operation. But what it may do is highlight the awareness of these courses and improve the numbers of people who are attending these courses. In which case, we are

going to need further assistance to expand, train extra teams and fund ongoing infrastructure.

We are in support of the voucher system as an advertising ploy, as a raising of awareness, but we cannot see it as replacing the recurrent funding that agencies like the Family Welfare Bureau or Centacare or whatever would receive. We value it as a highly important and innovative approach that directs benefit—like a government wedding present—to the actual couples who are getting married.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—We had a submission this morning talking about the idea of a peak body and the idea of training. I suppose that has been covered to some degree. Do you have any thoughts on the idea of a peak body for groups which are providing this kind of service?

**Father Kerin**—Yes. As you see from our submission, we already are affiliated with the Catholic Society for Marriage Education, which was a peak body until some recent times when a change of funding brought us in under Centacare Australia as part of that. The climate is ripe for marriage educators of every persuasion, both through the Catholic Society for Marriage Education and the Marriage Educators Association of Australia—which is a wider group but specifically of individual educators as a sort of professional association—for working together and associating with these groups without a doubt.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—In a couple of places through the submission you talk about money being spent on advertising. You are saying that to get the message across people have to spend most of their budget on advertising. This is a common complaint that we are getting from various agencies. They have difficulty advertising their programs because they want to use the money for counselling and courses. They do not want to spend it on putting ads in papers, printing brochures and things like that. Do you see that as an area where we could be of assistance?

**Father Kerin**—Most certainly. In fact the Attorney-General's Department has been of some assistance in that area in the past, both for the former Australia Association for Marriage Education and the Catholic Society for Marriage Education, in providing funding for raising awareness. There have been a number of programs and attempts at raising that awareness. It has been shown to be quite successful in the production of a video for celebrants to show to couples interested in marrying, but also in the printing of various brochures.

The adaptation of the forms that the celebrant now gives to couples marrying has been undertaken in conjunction with the Catholic Society for Marriage Education. In fact, the cartoon characters on the counselling brochure were used with the permission of the Catholic Society for Marriage Education who originally owned the copyright on those. So we are working in that area. We see the government as having a major role in changing the attitude in society so that clever, intelligent couples who are really committed to one another seek to prepare themselves the best possible way they can and therefore follow up on these issues.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Following on from that, we have had groups saying that it is very important that we change community attitude. We have changed the community's attitude to drink-driving and to smoking and we should now be looking very seriously at changing community attitude towards marriage guidance, pre-marriage counselling and that type of thing so that people see it as an acceptable thing rather than something strange that you do because you have gone off the rails a bit, or something like that.

Do you see that as a role that we should be playing also?

**Father Kerin**—Most certainly. Society's current opinion is that marriage education is for dysfunctional couples. But in fact, marriage education is for the normal couples. Marriage counselling might be for dysfunctional couples, but marriage education is a different issue altogether. It is significant that many people have preconceived ideas about what, for example, a Catholic church sponsored marriage education program might be about. It is not about proselytising or evangelising. It is specifically about skilling couples—

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—The public think it is, though.

**Mrs Greely**—Yes.

**Father Kerin**—They do. Once they have done a course they realise that they are being encouraged to pursue their own unique relationship and to develop it as they are best able. I think it is significant that changing those attitudes has to begin in schools and, if we start to do that, then we are improving the national pool from whom marrying couples come. They are already being skilled at that level in relationships. It is also significant, however, that couples who have undertaken a pre-marriage course are much more likely—according to recent studies—to actually attend counselling when things get difficult and to do so sooner rather than later. The advantage of that is that it increases the effectiveness of the money that is spent on counselling, post-wedding. The current attitude needs changing.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Thank you very much for that.

**CHAIR**—When you spoke about professional versus voluntary, I take it you meant paid versus unpaid, rather than trained versus untrained or unskilled?

**Father Kerin**—Most certainly.

**CHAIR**—You were talking about funding for training programs and that sort of thing. Is that where you see that there needs to be a lot more emphasis?

**Father Kerin**—We believe that there are many people who have an interest and a concern in seeing relationships succeed in this country. Many of them are prepared to offer their services voluntarily, but I do not think we should turn around and expect them to pay for the privilege of educating themselves to provide those services. We are specifically asking whether we can offer the highest quality training so that these volunteers can become marriage educators of the highest calibre.

**CHAIR**—As I recall his evidence this morning, Mr Burnard said that being a psychologist or a psychoanalyst or whatever was not the necessary pre-requisite for a marriage educator; it was being trained in educational programs.

**Father Kerin**—Correct.

**CHAIR**—There was one other question which I have now forgotten, so it looks like it will have to wait.

**Mrs Greely**—One of the best things in the feedback from couples is that they find it really gratifying to listen to a couple sharing their lived experience—talking about our life and the way we live it and how we have got over those difficulties—rather than someone saying, ‘These are the steps that will be valuable’.

**CHAIR**—You have reminded me of the question, too. Of the couples that come along, how many come along voluntarily and how many come along because they are persuaded?

**Mr Greely**—That is a difficult question because we do not actually ask them. You can feel it on the first night. We could only guess at that, and I guess about 50 per cent.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Do you see tension in that one partner has brought the other partner along? Do you initially see that they have come under duress because of the other partner?

**Mr Greely**—Yes. We cover that in our very first presentation. We are aware of that and don’t panic.

**Father Kerin**—There is no perceived difference in the couples appreciation of the course whether they are there under duress or whether they wanted to be there.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—So at the end of the 48 hours they are all the same?

**Father Kerin**—Yes, so it gets back to how we get them there.

**CHAIR**—Precisely.

**Father Kerin**—That is where we see the federal government’s role as being really important.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much both for your submission and for coming along this afternoon. We appreciate it.



[2.50 p.m.]

**STIVENS, Dr Maila, Director of Women's Studies, History Department, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3052**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. 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 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 are in receipt of your submission to the inquiry. Would you like to make some introductory remarks?

**Dr Stivens**—Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak to this committee. I feel my piece is more conceptual than some of the others you have received. As an anthropologist with probably many years experience working on issues of family and gender, I have become very concerned about the level of debate at large about issues of family in Australian society and about some of the basic assumptions that are informing those debates. I thought it was worth while putting them down on paper and speaking to them.

I was particularly disturbed about the rhetoric that I had heard bandied around on a number of broadcasts about how families should be left alone to do what they do best. I felt that this was based on a number of unwarranted assumptions about what families are, how they develop and are produced, and the kinds of support that they need. I suggested in my submission that we needed to analyse the terms of those debates very carefully.

I was also quite intrigued and concerned about how these debates seem to be echoing many of the scenarios from the US and some of the debates there, and how they get reworked in the Australian context. Those debates derive from very different social conditions. The sorts of things I speak about in my submission include the present moral panic in the US about teenage mothers. As research there and here has shown, the majority of so-called single mothers are divorced women of varying ages who raise children on their own. Moreover, in the US, many of the fathers were more than 10 years older than the single young mothers. So, as some people pointed out, it could be more an issue of child abuse than of these teenage mothers being blamed for all the social ills of American society.

We have seen some attempts to import this hysteria to Australia and to see it as a symptom of the terminal decline of the family. My thoughts on this were very much directed by what we saw during the debate on gun control. We saw a lot of American rhetoric about the gun lobby suddenly occurring, including defending the Australian constitution—absolutely empty rhetoric directly imported from America.

I felt that we needed to ponder very seriously why Australians feel impelled to import some of these moral panics and how they get reworked here. I suggested that, in a globalising age, we probably should not underestimate the force of some of those debates and how they reverberate in the Australian context. But, of course, there are ideological and policy effects of their doing so in the Australian context.

My submission looks briefly at some of the issues that have been central to the debates about the

decline and the death of the family, arguments which are far from new, but keep getting reinvented and reworked in each new generation. I note that anthropologists generally agree that the death of the family hypothesis was greatly exaggerated, although they would never for a minute underestimate the effects of rapid social change in restructuring families. That is something that I am working on at the moment in the Asian context.

I also looked at a second issue—defining the family. I do not know if you have had other anthropologists saying the same sorts of things to you. Anthropologists have never been very happy with any of the definitions of ‘family’. They could not come up with any definitions for ‘marriage’ at all because there were so many different types of arrangements that were counted as marriage around the world. They gave up on the task and said it was undefinable. I note with some bemusement how the issue of definitions hijacked the International Year of the Family. Everybody got sidetracked into talking about that rather than the sorts of things that families might need.

I go on in my submission to note the problems with constructing rosy views of the family in the past and also question the resistance to the attempts of demographers, sociologists and anthropologists to discuss the family in an historical or a comparative perspective. For example, I note that we can point to the numbers of children in the 19th century who would be expected to lose a parent before they came to adulthood. This was very high according to one study in Australia. For example, a study in Castlemaine showed that 55 per cent of children could expect to lose a parent before they reached adulthood. We must not construct rosy images of the past.

I was asking what is at stake in the need to feel that the family is in some kind of crisis and why some sociologists feel the need to argue the opposite—that is, that in spite of high numbers of blended and reconstituted families, these do not represent the death of the family but only its rebirth in a revised form.

I go on to say a little bit about the script that seems to be running around family sociology circles at the moment—the so-called post-modern fragmenting family—and I express some scepticism about whether the changes have been as profound as are suggested, especially once you take a more long-term historical view. That long-term view sees family as constantly adapting to changed economic, demographic and political conjunctures.

I reiterate the point that what counts as a family in the modern/post-modern world is constantly negotiated. It is constantly politically contested and it is constantly redefined. I suggest that we need to move beyond merely indulging in fanciful nostalgia for a non-existent past, whether that is the past 19th century or, perhaps more recently, the 1950s past.

I conclude by pointing to just how dependent family forms and ideologies are on the social, economic and political context and suggest that the committee might ponder how the present changing work context, like high casualisation or lengthening work week and pressures of unemployment, affect and structure families. I am sure you are doing this ad nauseam. I am sure that you will be receiving much expert advice in this area, but I do go on to make some rather trenchant remarks about it being problematic to help create conditions producing family breakdown with one set of policies while providing bandaid solutions with another.

I finish by stressing the point that we cannot treat the family as some autonomous entity, but need a sophisticated understanding of the complex ways that wider economic and social forces structure the family.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Can I just take up what seems to me to be a theme coming through your remarks and that is that debates about what is or is not a family—and, I suppose, what is or is not marriage—are, in the end, not particularly helpful. I also understood you to be suggesting at the end that in fact it is other factors which are more important in terms of the lives of individuals and those in relationships that are important.

My question is, I suppose, from the perspective of being involved to some extent in trying to formulate public policy, and it is: whether we define institutions like family or marriage formally or not, do we not so so by default? That is, governments seem to put in a range of policies that have an impact upon these entities without having thought through, often enough, what the impact is and that one set of policies might pull in one direction and another set in another direction, whereas would it not be better to at least try, even if the approach ultimately does not take you to a final point, to try and work out some sort of societal consensus, if you like, about what it is we are talking about so at least we can judge policies against that? It seems to be the modern dilemma of government.

**Dr Stevens**—I agree with you, particularly on a pragmatic level. I was thinking more of the problems at a conceptual level of having some fixed idea of what a family is and, therefore, using that as some notion of a basic unit of society. This is a very common notion in some sociology and in much wider circles—in the Western world anyway. In Asia as well one hears the sort of notion that the family is the basic building block. I think a number of critics of that would point to the problems in having a very fixed notion of what the family is.

I point out how contested family is, and I think that happens precisely in the sorts of processes you are talking about. Trade union legislation in the 19th century, as feminists have pointed out, constructed a notion of the male breadwinner, which embedded an idea of women being dependent on men and made it very difficult for women to go out into the work force for a long time. So it is very contradictory. On one level you were looking for a form of support for families and ensuring that they had an adequate living wage, but at the same time there was an unforeseen effect that created and strengthened the idea of the male breadwinner as the dominant head of household—something that many people now want to challenge.

There has been an attempt in worldwide literature to try to get rid of the notion assuming that a head of household is male. I think in Australia this notion is probably not as strong any more, but it is very strongly embedded in a lot of the UN documents and other sorts of materials in a more global way. It is very problematic when you have large numbers of female headed households. I know from my own research that people have this silliness of having a 15-year-old boy counted as the head of household in, say, a peasant family somewhere—it is a long way from your present concerns—and his mother not being counted as head of household. These definitional problems are perhaps something for professional sociologists to worry about a lot, but I also think they do have an impact—as you suggested, in your own policy formulations and worries.

It is much clearer in things such as who is defined as a spouse for the purposes of immigration, isn't

it? That defines marriages by that happening. Australia has very liberal rules about who can be defined as a spouse coming through immigration—far more than many other countries. So you might argue that Australian consensus has a much more inclusive notion of what a marriage is than in some other places. I think if you are a British woman you cannot even transfer your citizenship to your child if you give birth to that child outside Britain.

**CHAIR**—When I read your paper, I made an annotation against a particular sentence. I will tell you what it is and you will probably say that exposes my ideological views, but there was this sentence:

In the mid 1960s the democrat Senator Moynihan produced a famous report that was widely seen as blaming black family patterns, with their large numbers of single mothers and female centred kinship networks, for the supposed problems of young black men.

I wrote: ‘Wasn’t he right?’ By that I meant the changes that were occurring in society which he described—things that were really happening—and haven’t the last 30 years been evidence that, even though he was a liberal democrat for which he was castigated by other liberals in American political terms, history has proven him right?

**Dr Stivens**—It is quite interesting. He was, in the 1960s, as you are obviously aware, getting a large amount of press. Then all those sorts of debates rather died away. They have been resurrected quite recently with the crisis in American cities, which I do not think anybody would deny is a crisis in many places.

I think his critics argued that, really, you were confusing symptoms with causes. They were saying that because African-American males had such a difficult time getting access to any form of permanent work it was much more sensible for women to form households, which were often a woman with her children and her mother, and also massive kinship networks and neighbourhood networks to help them get through. It is a very common strategy for anybody in a situation of poverty to form those sorts of strong female centred networks, where women who are looking after children need to have access to at least one or two breadwinners of some version: female breadwinners plus some domestic carers to set up something that makes a household that works to keep everybody from starving and depending on welfare.

It is a very moot point. I do not think you could argue that the crises of American cities that produced the problems for young black men are to be sheeted home to their mothers, which they have tried to do. I do not think it is right at all, but we may well differ on this one.

**CHAIR**—I think we are describing different things. I was asking whether what he factually described was a situation evolving, one which was true, although you would put different causes to it.

**Dr Stivens**—At the moment a number of feminist writers in both Britain and the US are very interested in the problem of the badly behaved young male, their lack of rootedness in society and the problems they pose for everybody around them, including their mothers. I think the arguments there are that one needs to look at the structure of the job market, racism and so on and at how they produce these effects which then make it a defensive kinship network that is very female centred.

I point out that research into extended families in Australia does show, even among the middle class,

a strong female centredness on networks. If I asked my students who have grandparents living in Melbourne if they have seen their grandparents in the last couple of weeks, you might be very surprised how many have. It is usually very high. Research shows that 50 per cent of people have seen their parents in the last week. It is extremely interesting that kin ties are stronger on the women's side. There is always more on that side than on the men's side. There is quite a strong female line even in comfortable middle-class Australian kinship, although the male line is also quite useful.

I do not know how many of you come from middle-class backgrounds, but research in middle-class Australia shows that people give quite a lot of monetary help to their middle-class children: for example, they give the deposit for setting up house. We are always being told, 'Don't go guarantor for your children because it is too dangerous for you financially.' In fact, it is a well-established Australian custom to do something to help your kids set themselves up during their early stages of marriage.

So it can be shown empirically that that sort of financial support that the death of the family argument says is not happening is still occurring. The question is: how high are the divorce rates and what sorts of complexities are these producing? We need ongoing research to answer that question.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—In your submission you argue that the fundamental grouping of families is usually mother and child, and this is following on from what you are saying here. We had someone in this morning arguing that fathers are essential for the family. Would you like to tease that out a little bit, please?

**Dr Stivens**—I am not really engaging with that argument at all. I am saying that, if one looks at it comparatively and historically, the only definition of 'a family' you can come up with is a basic mother-child tie. That is very different from saying whether people profit from having a functioning father in the household as well, isn't it?

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—In some ways that is going back to what Moynihan had said about the black family and the lack of the male role model.

**Dr Stivens**—It is a site of great anxiety at the moment. Of course, you are going to have people from different positions arguing different versions of the significance of males within domestic units. It is quite intriguing because at one level many women in the face of the feminist movement have been making much greater demands on the males in their domestic households and asking them to be more involved. Fathers are going to childbirth classes. They are being present at the birth. There is a lot of alleged sharing. I do not know whether I believe the research that says men are doing only 10 minutes more housework a week. I actually know an awful lot of men who are doing a lot more—personally, in friendship circles and in professional research. So that is clearly an area—some people call it gender wars—and it is going on.

So there are great demands from women and there is a whole group of men who find it socially and economically very difficult to be involved in domestic units because of the sorts of pressures that market forces and others are placing on them. If the supports are not there, then it is going to be extraordinarily difficult for people to become that kind of father if that is what society says it wants, children want and so on.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—There are a couple of hundred of them in Canberra called parliamentarians who would have great difficulty, I think.

**Dr Stivens**—This is the point I am trying to make. Again, if you look back at the image of the rosy past and at the fathering my generation received, you will see that a lot of those fathers who were allegedly there were extraordinarily absent—especially middle-class fathers - who were supposedly doing a good job - were off somewhere else. I know a point of extreme sensitivity in parliamentary circles is about fathers being present and the difficulties they have with commuting, jobs not being in the same place and so on.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—You might like to comment on this. One of the people giving a presentation this morning, Dr Moira Eastman, described one of the important contributors to marriage and relationship breakdown as ambivalence and possibly even hostility towards the concept of marriage. She especially fingered academics. She said ‘especially in academia, bureaucracy, social services, media and so on.’ What is your response to that?

**Dr Stivens**—I am probably in a slightly more unusual position among feminist scholars through being an anthropologist because I think the Western feminist movement was based on a very large-scale critique of marriage which had its origins in 19th century social theory. From an anthropological viewpoint, you see large numbers of people, as I note in my submission, in places like South Africa, and much closer to home, among indigenous Australians, where they want to defend marriage and the family against social forces that they see as being politically stacked up against them.

So, as I said, with the African-American circles, it is also very strongly the case with disadvantaged indigenous Australians, that there is quite a strong female network which is used to try to protect them against the worse vicissitudes of the market and other sorts of forces that perhaps contradictory elements in welfare are unleashing against them.

I think it is quite interesting that the forces of what I will call—I suppose it is my ideology as well—the new right in the US, which has been very strongly pro-family, has actually in some ways paralysed Euro-American feminisms in their stance against the family. It is very difficult to try to ask how to support families in difficulties or to be pro-family in the face of a very large political lobby which is organising itself in extremely trenchant ways.

I do not know if that answers your question, but it is a complicated field. I think there are a lot of players in it, obviously, as you are only too well aware. I do not know which academics she had in mind.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—We did not ask.

**Dr Stivens**—Academics get a lot of flak for a lot of things.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—There is almost a throw-away line in your submission about the impact of the present casualisation of work in Australia, lengthening the work week and I think you said we are receiving a lot of material on that. Unless I have missed it, that is not in fact the case, but I do think that is a significant part of your submission. I wondered whether you wanted to say anything more about those areas

and what we ought to be doing or saying on that front.

**Dr Stivens**—That is a huge issue. You really ought to get an opinion from somebody like Professor Belinda Probert, at RMIT, who works on this. She would be much better placed to inform you about that. One of the most apocalyptic scenarios is that we are heading into the decline of proper jobs. You must all be familiar with this. Australia is going to build up a large tourist industry base where we have a lot of casualised labour where people go from one job to another and are often very highly skilled for the kind of job they are doing. A very large proportion of our children may not expect to get a decent job and so on because of these unfolding larger structural changes within globalisation and so on. I heard with great interest that Australia in fact does have a very high rate already of casualised labour.

There are many contradictions in all of this. One of the points that is quite interesting is that the dual income household strategy is one way of coping with some of these vicissitudes. Most families—households, married couples—cannot cope on one income very well these days. It is very much an issue that the male wage that used to be defined as ‘the support’ has now got, in terms of real wages, to a level where the demands that people have—and you might question those demands in terms of consumption and so on—means it is getting to the point where you now need two workers.

So the degree of casualisation also relates quite intricately to that pattern. I am quite intrigued by the way that women now have more access to property, more access to income and so on. They clearly have much more say. All the family research shows that where women have access to their own wage, even if it is part of quite an impoverished family strategy, they still in fact have more say in family decision making.

I am sure you have heard other people tell you that it is women who petition for divorce more than men. So it is from women’s dissatisfaction with marriage that some of the perceived crisis is occurring. The sorts of pressures that casualisation is going to put in that would be an unfolding scenario, I would think; I could not pronounce about it.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—Another thing too is the lengthening work week. I think the common state now amongst partners is exhaustion and I do not think that is positive.

**Dr Stivens**—Yes, doing the ironing at 11 o’clock at night. My husband was doing it at 11 o’clock last night. It is absolutely a standard sort of family pattern.

**CHAIR**—That is a dilemma because on one hand you need two incomes to survive these days, as a generalisation, but having two incomes at longer hours means that that places pressure back on family life.

**Dr Stivens**—It is a complete contradiction, that is right, it is a stress that is somewhat insuperable. Again it is probably totally outside your brief but I have been doing some work on the new middle classes in Asia and it is very interesting there that the sorts of stresses that we have do not occur for many people because they still have a core servant class and so tension between the sexes is nowhere near the level that we have because of these sorts of stresses produced by this couple of decades of increased female participation.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—I have a similar problem to the one that the chairman had with that paragraph at pages 1 and 2 of your submission. If I might say so, with respect, I have difficulty understanding it, but also it seems to have as much rhetoric in it as the rhetoric you are criticising, again with respect. But what I want to tease out of you, first of all, if I may, as difficult as it is to get anybody to agree to a general proposition, is this: do you agree that an optimum environment for a child is to be brought up in a loving mother and father relationship living together?

**Dr Stivens**—I do not think I actually can agree because I think there are so many children that have been obviously brought up in other circumstances who are extremely well adjusted and happy children, from all the research that we have in the Western world. There are many other housing arrangements that bring up children worldwide, so I think that is a problem with talking about what the optimum is. I am not a psychologist; I cannot pronounce about that. Maybe psychologists would have their own very strong opinions about that. There has been a very strong line from post-Freudian psychoanalysis about families consisting of a particular type of family, but that is embedded in Western notions of what a family is too.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—Coming from the position of the children, you often hear the children saying that they want their parents together when their relationships are breaking down, so perhaps if we asked all the kids of these broken relationships they might come up with the answer.

**Dr Stivens**—I would not disagree with you on that at all, but I think one cannot make any categorical statement about absolute optimums. I think there is a range of possibilities available. There is some very good research on lesbian couples who have extraordinarily happy children, so I do not think I want to agree with you on that one at all.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—Have those children been followed right through?

**Dr Stivens**—Yes, they have. There is actually some very interesting results on that stuff.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—Studies being through 20, 40 years or so?

**Dr Stivens**—Twenty years so far. There is some stuff in the States; it is very interesting research.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—This is possibly the area I have the most difficulty with. You pose a number of propositions which seem to come out of Senator Moynihan's study, but I have not read that. I presume they have. Then you go on to say:

Today again it is being widely argued that teenage welfare mothers and their children are not proper families and that they constitute a huge welfare burden which is impoverishing the whole of US society. In some versions they are even held responsible for the decline in US cities, the epidemic of drug addiction and all other woes.

The problems with these arguments have been highlighted when it was revealed that the average age of the fathers of these babies were in fact often in the mid-20s.

I just see that as a non sequitur: the problems with these arguments.

**Dr Stivens**—Maybe it is not as well expressed as it could have been, but the argument was that the



image that was being evoked was that there were vast numbers of these people for a start, which there were not. Secondly, the image that was being evoked was that they were wild 14-year-old girls deciding to have babies on their own and the fathers were probably 15 or 16 or something. When they actually looked more closely at who the fathers were, they found that quite irresponsible 25-year-old men had fathered these children and then left the children to be raised by the teenage mothers. So the blame was being put on the young mothers, but I am actually asking—which perhaps suits your ideology more—what the men's involvement in this was and where their responsibility was for those children?

**Mr TONY SMITH**—But was the blame being put on the women?

**Dr Stivens**—Yes. I do not know if you have looked at any of the stuff in the United States. Particularly in 1994 when I was there, there were very strong articles in the papers and on TV and Oprah Winfrey and everywhere about the epidemic of teenage mothers and that these were somehow single-handedly responsible for crack cocaine addiction and all the other things that were destroying the fabric of American society.

**Mr TONY SMITH**—But I have never heard anyone say, 'This is a terrible thing—all these teenage mothers are blamed for this.' I have never heard anyone say that.

**Dr Stivens**—I think it can easily be read as that. I think that is entirely what was happening. It was really saying, 'How could we prevent this? These are the causes of all these social problems,' rather than again seeing it as some symptom. It is fascinating—I am sure that you are probably well aware—that the American rate of so-called 'illegitimate' teenage birth is very high in comparison to Australia's. Many people see this as being because of some of the fundamentalist Christian groups and others who put great pressure on schools not to have decent sex education. These sorts of problems come from other causes rather than just the behaviour of young women.

**CHAIR**—In my reading of the American press more recently, and then looking at books like Blankenhorn's *Fatherless America*, I think what you were describing was the Rush Limbaugh version of America, which is fairly full-on, and it seems to me that that has changed and now it is the concept of fatherlessness that is the focus of attention.

**Dr Stivens**—It is a field of contest. The moment a whole series of those arguments came in they were not without their critics and they all immediately intervened and so on, so obviously it goes on. But it is interesting how the Moynihan debate keeps coming back. It is a very racialised debate. That is the point. It is actually a code for young black women being 'the problem' or black welfare being 'the problem'. That is why a lot of the debate keeps coming back because it is not only about young teenage women; it is also about a wider set of concerns.

**CHAIR**—We could spend a lot of time on this, but we have not got it.

**Dr Stivens**—Yes, we could.

**CHAIR**—I thank you very much for your submission and also for coming today.

[3.23 p.m.]

**LACEY, Mrs Denise Elizabeth, Coordinator, Marriage and Relationship Education, Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, 396 Albert Street, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002**

**CHAIR**—For the record, the committee is now reconvening as a subcommittee. Welcome, Mrs Lacey. I think you were here when I read the statement about not needing to give evidence on oath, so I will not repeat that if you have heard it. We have your submission. Would you like to make some remarks to it?

**Mrs Lacey**—Yes, thank you, I would. I chose just to focus on two particular issues of concern out of probably a range of about 20 that I could speak about. One that I have chosen to nominate is marginalised groups accessing programs for marriage and relationship education. I am very concerned about the lack of opportunity for certain groups within our community to have access to these programs.

Traditionally, marriage and relationship education programs have really been designed for employed, working-class, middle-class—for want of a better term—people who probably come from reasonable family backgrounds and have some experience of education of a tertiary nature and perhaps beyond. That is well and good; that is great, but the difficulties are that when we provide programs only focusing on that particular group of people we are eliminating a lot of other groups that really are in need of our services.

I have named as the first issue those who are in marginalised groups, those who come from dysfunctional family backgrounds. That includes people who may have been in serious relationships since their very early teens and perhaps by the age of 20 could have one or two children and maybe are in their third committed relationship. Often what happens in these relationships is that people repeat the patterns of family behaviour that they had in their own family of origin. Unemployment is a big factor in their life, or else they only have part-time employment.

They are usually known in other agencies and may have contact with them, but these agencies, generally speaking, handle welfare, child care and so on and they do not ever do relationship education. My experience has been that when we talk to those agencies about relationship education they are pretty impressed and they acknowledge that it is a gap in their services. These are the most vulnerable groups in our society and we need to be addressing them. I do not believe that we get a lot of encouragement from our funding bodies to address the needs of the marginalised.

I would like to also highlight a few other marginalised groups that I am aware of in my own role. The first such group I want to mention is those who are deaf. If we have one partner or both partners deaf, we cannot provide a service unless our agency takes on the responsibility to pay at least \$300 per couple for interpreting services. There is no funding available for deaf people, not only for counselling but also for marriage education. This year I have had two deaf couples and our agency has supported those couples to the tune of just under \$600. Quite obviously we cannot do that every time a deaf couple accesses our programs but we do believe that our programs are there for all people regardless of their disability.

I do know, from speaking in the deaf community over several years, that they would access our services a lot more because they will not go to people within their own community. The deaf community is a

small community, even in a city the size of Melbourne, and everyone is known to everyone else so they like to access services from outside their own community. They believe they cannot access our services because of the cost involved in interpreting and to some degree they are quite right, unless they have the initiative to make contact with us and we can try and negotiate some favourable agreement. The favourable agreement is usually that we pay the lot.

The other group is the English as a second language group and that is an interesting one. If we have a couple who come along and they have a language other than English, we can actually get free interpreting services. There is a real difference there in the services available for couples who want to access our programs. We can get up to four hours free interpreting for Polish, Italian, Greek, Vietnamese or whatever, but we cannot for the deaf.

If we have—as we had recently—a Polish couple, we have an interpreter. We had four free hours but that excludes them from doing a group program because group programs go for 12 hours. They have to do one of our individual programs known as FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication Understanding Study). That is okay but it limits their options in marriage education. Again, in four hours, when you have to do interpreting those processes are a lot slower. So where with an English speaking couple four hours is probably reasonable, with those in the English as a second language group you are probably looking at six or seven hours. So they are still not getting a full service even though we do get four free hours of interpreting. I might add that we only get that because I tell a little white lie. When I ring up the interpreting people I say it is for marriage counselling and not marriage and relationship education because if I said that we would not get the free funding for it.

The other disadvantaged or marginalised group is the mildly intellectually disabled. There are a lot of couples that do marry that fall into this category. Our traditional programs that we offer, generally speaking, do not address their needs unless we are creative enough to come up with something that they will be able to respond to and participate in. They certainly cannot participate in our group programs, it just does not work. Even our individual program such as Focus presents some difficulty. Focus does have an alternate edition inventory which is a help but if they cannot read it does not really matter. It does require some creativity and I think it would be a really important area to address. That is my first issue.

The second one is the cost of training and supervision. Traditionally, as people would know here I am sure, marriage education grew out of a volunteer model and as such of course has gone ahead in leaps and bounds, particularly in the last 20 years. The provision of a good quality professional program is dependent on those that are up front doing it. The only way that you are going to get really good, skilled, trained and supervised people is by providing the supervision and training.

Our agency has this as a very high priority. I would just like to talk about the supervision and training in two areas. The first one is in our group programs. We run a large number of group programs. We have 33 educators that work in those programs and supervision and training is very important. The cost—let alone the effort—of the supervision and training of 33 sessional people is very high, but if we do not do it then we are not keeping our programs up to scratch and not continually developing and meeting the needs of couples as they come to us. For example, in the last five years couples have got older and they are marrying for the first time. That requires different skills from our educators, different types of programs, different tools that you

might use in the program, different ideas and so on. That does not happen unless supervision and training takes place.

We have six meetings a year for our group program. I have said in my submission here that it costs around \$2,000 a meeting. We put that into our budget. It is not funded by the government, but I do not add in there the supervision that takes place outside the group programs, only the team meeting. The second part of the supervision is that we supervise on a program for a couple of hours in terms of presentation of a session and then we have the individual performance appraisal which is approximately two hours. I do the performance appraisals, but the supervision on group programs could be somebody else nominated by the supervisee in agreement with me. You can see that to supervise just one person takes an awful lot of effort and therefore there is a high cost involved. But if we want to provide good programs, then we have to be doing it.

The second aspect of it is our individual programs, which is our FOCCUS program. We meet once every four weeks with our team there. That is very important because my belief is that what happens in the FOCCUS program is that we often get couples choosing FOCCUS, which is an individual perhaps more confidential process, not always but often because there are particular issues of concern in the relationship. They may not even be consciously aware of them. We have some very skilled FOCCUS program facilitators. They have psych and social work backgrounds. Often the FOCCUS couples do present a real challenge and serious issues are raised.

When we are dealing with those sorts of situations, obviously we have to have ongoing supervision and an opportunity for debriefing. In fact, our individual programs in some ways actually take up more time than our group programs in terms of supervision. I cannot comment on the group programs this year. I do not know. Perhaps some couples have made a decision not to marry as a result of doing a group program but I do not know of any. But in the FOCCUS program in the last seven weeks we have had four couples: two chose not to marry as a result of doing the program, the issues raised and making a decision; one has postponed their wedding and one is in the process of making a decision at the moment.

Obviously, it is not our job to break couples up. That is not what we are on about. But what has happened is that the process has allowed them to assess their relationship and see that things are not ticking over well. There are serious issues and that marrying at this stage would not be the right thing and they have made their own decisions which is good. Of course it does present real issues for the facilitator too, because they really need time to debrief and talk through it, work out how to approach it and how to provide the support, the follow-up, the referral for counselling, if needed, and so on.

They are the two issues that I particularly wanted to focus on. I wanted to say also that in some ways through the Attorney-General's Department and so on we are being encouraged to start to look at those issues. But in fact it is verbally being said, 'But there isn't any structure in place to allow it to happen.' We then revert to what we had in the past, which was a volunteer model. Even though we are saying one thing at this end, we are in fact doing something at another end in many cases. That is what I wanted to say.

**CHAIR**—We had a submission from the Australian Federation of Deaf Societies and they addressed us in Hobart a couple of weeks ago. We are aware of the problems that they raised. Elizabeth might want to

take it up, but I just wanted to say that we have heard that and I am not ignoring what you said about that.

**Mrs Lacey**—Good, I am pleased.

**CHAIR**—Can I just take up the training and supervision? It seems to me that this comes back to a problem of funding. The way in which the department funds the agencies is to give them in effect a block grant and say, ‘Here’s 20, 25, 30’, or whatever the amount of money is, which does not take into account the demands of the particular agency or the number of clients which are expected to be serviced by that, nor does it seem to have been based upon any breakdown of the costs of providing the service or the supervision that goes with it. That is, it seems to me to have been along the lines of just picking a figure and arbitrarily giving that amount. Even in the new rounds of funding, if you go through the amounts it just says, ‘\$30,000 for all these regions’, whether or not the regions have 50 or 500 couples that could be serviced in a year. Is that realistic?

**Mrs Lacey**—Absolutely, yes it is. I could not agree more with that. What I find interesting is that it is often written down in words, ‘supervision, training and professional practice’, et cetera. Those sorts of terms are used all the time, but nobody has thought about what that means in terms of the funding. So there is no connection there. In the last round of funding that we have yet to hear about, one of the areas that we have actually applied for is some marginalised work—for want of a better term—where we work with very small groups.

You would have to work with very small groups, maybe four to eight couples. The supervision and training that would need to take place is really almost out of proportion to the number of people that you are going to work with. But, if you are serious about wanting to create change in people’s lives, you have got to do that. But it does not actually take that into account in the way that the funding is set up. So I could not agree more.

**CHAIR**—I am not saying we will—and this is off the top of my head now—but if we were to make some recommendations about changing the way in which funding is provided and if that was done in a way that recognises in a sense the service delivery—and I mean that in a broader sense, not just the number of couples you have sitting on seats in a program, but what it costs to do that in terms of supervision, training and so on—do you think in your experience, working in an agency here and having worked in another agency in Adelaide, that that would be a preferable way of approaching it?

**Mrs Lacey**—I think it would be good. I am not sure how you would do it, because I think you have to look at it in terms of how many people you have employed and how many people you service, rather than an arbitrary number. It is interesting. I know that in Sydney they do a lot more programs than us for example, but they have less employed. They basically work as part-time jobs. We actually have more employed. We have 90 programs on our books next year and we have 33 educators.

How do you work that out? Do you know what I am saying? I do not know how many programs they have in Sydney next year. They have more than 90 anyway, but they have fewer educators. So how do you get that balance to get the right sort of funding per head of a person that you employ?

**CHAIR**—Presumably you would have to have some formula that took in account how many educators per program.

**Mrs Lacey**—Yes, and how many hours they would actually work.

**CHAIR**—And hours per educator, a rough cost per educator and all of that. Given that no formula approach is ever perfect, it seems to me that that at least would meet needs a little bit better than one which just gives an arbitrary amount of money regardless.

**Mrs Lacey**—Yes, it would. I think that would be good. The other thing is that we get arbitrary amounts anyway. We get \$29,000 and that underpins a bit of our program. It does not underpin anywhere near what we do. We are funded by the church and we are self-funders. We have about a \$146,000 budget and we have battled with our figures in the last 12 months. Where do you put the \$29,000 in some ways? Do you say it is under a program out west or north?

**CHAIR**—One other matter which was raised with us by someone in Sydney was the amount of form filling that has to occur for the Attorney-General's Department. It was said specifically for example, 'Why do you have to provide six-monthly reports? Why can't it be an annual report?' There was some talk about now having to provide a budget as well. Would you like to comment on that?

**Mrs Lacey**—Yes, I certainly would. We have been asked to supply a budget for our \$29,000 in the geographic region. In the past, that \$29,000 has underpinned our program and has not been nominated for any region, so how do we break it down? It is just playing with figures from my point of view. I think it would be much better to feed our figures in on a 12-monthly basis. It is interesting because in the first six months of the year our figures are less than the second six months so sometimes that is not a fair representation of what we do over a 12-month period. In January we hardly do any work. We do a very small amount. In February it builds up. In April it really starts and then your figures have to be in at the end of June. But by the end of the next six months you have a representation of what we do. But how do you work out where you spend your \$29,000 out of \$146,000 when it underpins the total budget?

The other thing is that I really believe we have to be free to respond to community needs. If there is a need in the community for marriage and relationship education and if there are enough couples there, we have to be able to say that we can go out and provide that service that is needed. If our funding is going to be tied up so tightly, there is no way we will be able to do that. We will not be free to do that. This year we had two programs that we operated out at The Basin, near Ferntree Gully, because of a community need out there and they were very successful programs. That is without even looking for work. But I think we have to be free to do that and it is real restriction on that funding if we have to account for where it is spent and how you spend it. I think it will encourage people to manipulate the figures really to be quite honest because the money is being spent and being spent well. If you do eight couples out at The Basin and you do 20 couples out at Sydenham, what makes one better than the other?

**CHAIR**—Can I take it from that that the funding of geographic areas the way it is happening now is something which does not accord with reality?

**Mrs Lacey**—I just do not see how it can work. I really do not. What makes one area have a specific need that requires funding over another area unless you are going in for a particularly targeted program? At the moment the funding is for our general marriage education programs. If we were to go in and run a program for intellectually disabled people in wheelchairs or something that would be different but what we are doing is running what I call the ‘moggy marriage ed’, that is, our general marriage education programs or relationship education programs. I just do not see how you can do it in fairness. I cannot see what it is going to achieve either really.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Following up on that: we have had several groups say to us they would prefer to get their money in bulk lump sum rather than have it earmarked for specific programs.

**Mrs Lacey**—Yes.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—You are virtually backing that up?

**Mrs Lacey**—Definitely.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—You are qualifying that again today?

**Mrs Lacey**—Yes, I would much rather that because we need to be free to respond to the needs in the community. If our funding is tied up so tightly, we are not going to be able to do that. We also have to be able to plan. We try and assess from one year to the next how to plan best for the different areas and regions. If I just take Sydenham as an example, when we run courses out there they just fill up weeks and weeks beforehand. We are now running them at Roxburgh Park which is a very interesting residential area. It is a newly developed area, fairly isolated, no services provided, young families and so on. It is a suburb in the middle of a paddock. We have decided to run programs there now. We only decided that during this year.

If our funding had been tied to a geographic area we would not have been able to do that and yet there is a need to run it in that isolated area—particularly next year with our relationship education programs where we are providing an opportunity for couples that are already married as well to come to some stuff around relationship development, relationship enrichment, budgeting and so on. If it is tied to a geographic area, then we are not going to be free to do that.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Similarly, if it were tied to a specific program such as pre-marriage and you decided that there was a need, as you are saying here, for post-marriage or relationship education, there would be a problem.

**Ms Lacey**—Just relationship education. You can take away the marriage part if you have got that committed relationship—and I am assuming probably the majority of people are married. Young couples in isolated geographic regions with no services and very little transport having first and second babies spells disaster in some ways. I am not trying to put down, but it does until they start to provide services in those regions. I think one of our responsibilities, apart from the fact that we have a demonstrated need to do marriage education in that region, is to provide services to meet those needs.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for your submission and also for coming along today.

Resolved (on motion by Mrs Elizabeth Grace):

That the Marriage and Relationship Education Programs 1997 brochure be accepted as an exhibit and received by the inquiry.

Resolved (on motion by Mrs Elizabeth Grace):

That the submission from Relationships Australia dated 15 November 1996 be accepted as a submission to the inquiry and authorised for publication.



[3.46 p.m.]

**FISHER, Mr Peter John, Executive Member, National Anglican Caring Organisations Network, 12 Batman Street, West Melbourne, Victoria 3003**

**KIRKEGARD, Ms Susan, Executive Officer, National Anglican Caring Organisations Network, 12 Batman Street, West Melbourne, Victoria 3003**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. 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 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 your submission before us. Would you like to make some introductory remarks?

**Ms Kirkegard**—We come to represent the range of work done by the Anglican church in this area. We come in that capacity so I will firstly comment briefly about the range of services. We want to speak very briefly so that we can use this time to answer your questions about the Anglican involvement.

Basically, we represent services in every state. There are about 30 family services. I think about nine are funded by the Attorney-General's. They range from family mediation to very well-established marriage education in most of the cities. In more capital cities than not, the marriage and relationship education services are very closely linked to a whole range of family support services.

**Mr Fisher**—I am a member of the executive of NACON which is made up of representatives of some of the agencies—it cannot be all of the agencies because the executive would be far too big. The executive represents agencies which have a broad cross-section of programs, many of which are funded by the department. I think we have representation from just about every state and territory in Australia.

**CHAIR**—Can I take up with you the discussion we were just having about funding—you probably overheard it. We have had a reasonable amount of evidence at the various public hearings on concerns about the funding through the Attorney-General's Department. Some of that has been that there does not seem to be any transparency in the way in which the funding is applied and that, historically, it has been given for reasons that do not necessarily equate with services being provided today. Then there were the concerns that we were just discussing briefly with Mrs Lacey. Would you like to make any comments about funding of programs through the Attorney-General's Department?

**Ms Kirkegard**—We really would like to support the initiatives the Attorney-General has taken to buttress family services in Australia. The feedback I get is that those services are extremely valuable and that they are plugging a gap that is there. We would suggest that the amount and level of funding that is there has been extremely worthwhile spending by the government.

**CHAIR**—What about the actual mechanism of funding? I do not think anybody is arguing that the funding ought not to be provided or that it has not been useful. But there does seem to be some feeling that the funding is not provided in a way which actually relates to the services which are provided—that is, that

often more services are provided than are funded and there is a lack of connection.

**Mr Fisher**—I think there needs to be a degree of flexibility. The funding began back in the 1950s with funding for marriage guidance—I think that is what it was called then.

**CHAIR**—The Matrimonial Causes Act.

**Mr Fisher**—A lot of agencies still receive that type of funding. With the changes to the Family Law Act and the emphasis on the family, there has to be some movement there. They fund program areas on a needs based planning model. I think that is as good as any because I do not think there are many models around. There is an attempt to look at the areas that are funded and the needs in those areas and to then apply the funding. You can use my example: I am actually from Darwin, so I have saved you a trip.

We are funded geographically for Darwin and Palmerston. Because of the nature of the way the agency works with remote communities and the perception of people in those communities in terms of—even from a long way away—feeding off Darwin, the reality is that we do a lot of over the phone work and we in effect deal with people from areas, geographically, other than Darwin. So there is frustration there.

There needs to be a degree of flexibility; there needs to be a response to the intelligence on the ground that comes from the people working in the agencies. I would also stress that there needs to be some degree of accountability. I would not like to see every agency being able to just take a lump sum and say, ‘Okay, we’ll go and do this and we’ll tell you later what we’re doing.’ There needs to be a degree of accountability.

**CHAIR**—Are you saying that the broad buckets of funding put into education, counselling and mediation are generally acceptable and that those subprogram funding areas are relevant?

**Ms Kirkegard**—We are working on the edge of a range of support needs for families. The Attorney-General’s funding, even with the mediation and the education, is on the edge of a broad range of services that families need. Therefore, you are going to have problems at the cut-off points because you will almost go into a particular problem and it will be quite obvious that there is another range of problems there that cannot be tackled. That does get into the federal-state dichotomy in that, traditionally, the state has also done a range of family support services, particularly in the family counselling and the family and adolescent support areas.

Nevertheless, I think it is very real when it comes into parenting education and into a whole range of services that support young families. That is why I say that, at those cut-off points, because we found that in some states not as much money is being put into these family services, there are many more needs that are coming before all services, including the Attorney-General’s. People who have particular stresses through disability or people who have particular stresses through unemployment are all impacting on the services the Attorney-General runs.

Therefore, I think your complaints about funding are likely to increase because there is more demand at the edges. We had some very urgent pleas that relationship counselling be available for people and couples who are running into problems. It is just not there in a couple of cities that I could name to the degree it is

needed. That is when people are most likely to want help and to be receptive to receiving help that will save their marriage.

**Mr Fisher**—In the area of marriage relationship education there should be flexibility. There is a movement now—an idea I thoroughly agree with—that suggests education should dovetail in with the other services. That is, to use the example you are speaking of—counselling, for instance. If you have a program that is providing family counselling, then, if there is also on staff an educator and the counsellor says, ‘I’m finding in these families there is a need for this sort of education, and I can get a group together and there is a referral agency over there that sees the need for this,’ then you need to have the flexibility to provide a program that will respond.

The other area to consider is working with Aboriginal people too. My experience is remote Aboriginal communities, not Aboriginal people who live in Melbourne or Sydney or cities like that, and I think there is a great deal of flexibility needed there, a flexibility to be able to go into those communities and to work with those communities and say, ‘Well, what is your need?’, and then construct a program that is culturally appropriate. Because, if we are looking at justice and equity, at the present time it does not exist for those Aboriginal people in remote communities. The types of programs that we provide are just far removed from their experience or what is appropriate for them.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—A couple of the other things that are coming through from groups that we have had here are a request or suggestion that there is money needed for advertising. They feel that it is one area that we as a government should be looking at, to provide more money for advertising programs or courses that are available, and even groups that do provide these programs and courses. Have you any comment to make there?

**Mr Fisher**—There is some advertising happening at the present time. We have recently received funding to produce a television commercial advertising a mediation program. This is a funded program and we are getting a good response to the commercial and have made it available to other funded agencies. It can be adjusted for other programs nationally. Advertising is a good thing. I think we have got to be careful that we are not advertising to cover a deficit, I suppose, in our ability to interpret what the needs are and to reach those people through normal channels. I think advertising is appropriate in terms of just education. You can do education particularly through television, and is it the Church of the Latter Day Saints that do those ads about family relationships?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mr Fisher**—Very effective, very good. Traditionally in relationship education we have looked at dealing with people prior to marriage or marriage enrichment, and we just have to broaden that because our community at this time is made up of a lot of different types of relationships, and not only are the relationships different but the stages within those relationships are different. There is an evaluation being done at the present time, or about to start, to evaluate what are those relationships and what are the ones in most need. One example may be the truck drivers on the interstate trucks who are never home yet there is a pressure on their relationship, and they are not the sort of people who normally just roll up and sit in a group and talk about their relationship. So we have to evaluate the way we reach these people and think laterally, I

suppose, and advertising is one way of doing that.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—I think that is probably what people have been saying to us: that we have to look at ways to reach these people. Everybody has to look at it and possibly this is one area where the government could be a big assistance, because some of the groups are saying that all their dollars are doing into their actual counselling services, their education services, or their programs that they have got and they really begrudge spending anything on advertising these courses because they really see the need for the courses, and so they have this dreadful dilemma of, ‘How do we let people know the course is on, but we really want to give it the best shot we can with the right material and the right people’.

**Ms Kirkegard**—I only mention two things. One would be that we would not want to see money diverted from the current help for people who are in crisis because it just is not reaching at the moment.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—No. There has to be more money out there. That is obvious from what everyone is saying. Where we are going to find it is another story.

**Ms Kirkegard**—And the other aspect: I would actually recommend that whatever expertise is in advertising is put to the use of some of the existing agencies rather than separate. I am just fearing the cultural issues of separate firms who have had no experience in the area of counselling and reaching sometimes very much subcultures in the community that do not respond—they may not be the middle ground, but there are still very needy people in our communities, in terms of understanding how to build their relationships positively. Then those often come in the subcultural areas who are experiencing the more stress, and there is a particular expertise in delivering services to them appropriately. It is usually learnt by actually being on the ground with them.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Following on from that, there has been the other theme that has been recurring which is that we have changed the community’s thinking on drink-driving and we have changed the community’s thinking on smoking over a period of 25 or 30 years—and hopefully we do not spend so long doing it—but we should be starting to work on an education, advertising type program to encourage people’s thinking on what relationship courses are about and why they are there. We need to get it across to people that it is not because you are in crisis but it is for an ongoing purpose as well. We need to remove the stigma whereby people think that there has to be something wrong to go to counselling or education courses. What is your opinion in that area?

**Mr Fisher**—I wish it were as easy as drink-driving or smoking—and they are hard issues to deal with. It is a very complex issue. I think the way of addressing it is not only courses. What you are trying to get across is complex. We have just put in a submission for a family skills training program. One of the suggested programs we have involves the worker actually going into pubs and doing something, not like a floor show, but an education presentation in there alongside the people drinking at the bar. I suppose I am emphasising this, but it is one approach. We first have to look at what the relationships are, the education needed and what is the best way to contact those people. It may well be that advertising through the media is one way of doing that.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—The theme is that we have to change the community’s perception to

get a response from the people who need help that are in some ways hiding it or not facing up to it. We need to make people aware and take the stigma away from it—that is what I am trying to say.

**Mr Fisher**—That is right. The whole issue of violence is connected there, too.

**CHAIR**—Peter, as you are here, can I ask you some questions specifically about the Northern Territory? My recollection is that Darwin has by far the highest rate of de facto relationships of all cities in Australia.

**Mr Fisher**—And separation and divorce—very high everything.

**CHAIR**—Yes. Are there peculiar problems, therefore, in the Northern Territory for agencies working in this area that do not exist elsewhere and ought to be taken into account?

**Mr Fisher**—Yes. There are several problems, I suppose. One is the people themselves, in that they are generally disconnected from extended family networks and that means that the problems are not helped by the support that tends to come from family networks. Because the problems are so extreme, then you find you are often working at the bottom of the cliff rather than at the top of the cliff to change things. Many agencies like ourselves have waiting lists, so there is a pressure.

It is an interesting cultural mix and up until recently white Anglo-Saxons were in the minority. So there is quite an extreme cultural mix. I think agencies like ours, although our intention is to reach those people from other cultural backgrounds—and we have had a degree of success in the area of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and we do contact people from other cultures—I think we need to go further and not only give lip-service to the fact that these services are available to all of those people, but actually walk the talk and do something about it—and not just as interpreters.

I was a bit sorry that the new CDOs programs—community development officers programs—were funded and put in large cities. One was not put in Darwin and I thought that would have been significant. I wrote about this matter to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Attorney-General at that time, without success.

**CHAIR**—So what should we be looking to do for, say, the Territory?

**Mr Fisher**—I think when you are funding any program in a remote area—and I would include Darwin and other parts of the Territory in that definition—then it costs more to do things. I know everyone is talking about money, but it does simply cost more to do things. It costs more to attract the right sort of people there. It costs more to provide training and supervision because the training and the supervision is not available in the agencies or other agencies within the community. You have to do it yourself, so it costs a lot.

Travel, to get to people and provide the services in remote communities, is a cost. The challenge of reaching and providing these services to people in remote communities is there as well.

**CHAIR**—Presumably, with the remote communities, the only way we can do it, unless technology improves beyond our wildest expectations, is by having some sort of circuit of people going in and out of

communities on some regular basis. Is that correct?

**Mr Fisher**—That is one idea. I think you are aware that there is some research being done at the present time into that, and I happen to be on a reference group for that program. That is one very obvious way of doing it and it is effectively done by some agencies at the present time. You need to support those people and promote supervision. They need the equipment and four-wheel drives to get in and out but there are other ways of doing it. One suggestion is through technology, through video link-up, but there is expense connected to that. There is also the expectation that those people in remote communities are able to use that technology and are comfortable with it.

The main issue, if you can get the staff in there, if you can get past the cost, is the support of those staff. There is some suggestion that rather than have a counsellor go in and then a marriage relationship education person or separate people, that you have a one-stop shop within those communities. The suggestion is to have a generalist sort of person who can provide all these things but with the backup of someone in a central location, in our case Darwin, to support that work.

**CHAIR**—Are those comments as applicable to Aboriginal communities as they are to non-Aboriginal communities?

**Mr Fisher**—Yes, they are applicable to Aboriginal communities. The important thing with Aboriginal communities is their ownership of programs. There is a real danger, and particularly as we come closer to the year 2000, the Olympic Games, that we just throw money at it. I think we have tended to do that in the past. I am not saying do not put funds towards needs, but often the timing that comes with that is wrong. You have to do things in the timing of Aboriginal people and with their support, otherwise it will fall flat.

It is really important to get in there and do things about basic health needs and matters of life and death. Do not get me wrong, I think that is important, but in the case of providing education or counselling or whatever, we really have to work with Aboriginal people in those communities in constructing that. If you want to have a good conversation with an Aboriginal person you start talking about family and they will talk about your family. Their way of viewing family and the family network is something that we do not understand. We have had counsellors who have drawn geneograms on whiteboards of Aboriginal family and not only have the Aboriginal people been interested in it but you run out of board, you really do.

It is a whole new way of looking at it and rather than us impose something we have really got to go to them and say, 'We have some money generally for relationship education so let us use your elders and the appropriate person to do something. What are we going to do?' That is innovative. Potentially, LAFS has the ability to take that on board and be flexible, with a little bit of help.

**CHAIR**—Leaving the Northern Territory, one of the other suggestions made this morning was that there ought to be a peak body for marriage and relationship education and not the structure at the present time where you have Centacare, Relationships Australia and Family Services Australia. Do you have any comments about that? I presume your organisation is a part of Family Services Australia. By definition it would have to be.

**Mr Fisher**—Yes.

**Ms Kirkegard**—It has been an issue which we wish to take up.

**CHAIR**—It seems to be a largely artificial structure that was imposed upon the field by the Attorney-General's Department.

**Mr Fisher**—It could be argued that if Centacare is a peak body and funded by the department, why shouldn't we be the same. Everyone understands the history of this, that there were five peak agencies and for some reason Relationships Australia and Centacare had a strong lobby to remain there. Given it was impractical to have five, the also-rans were then just lumped in the one pot. I think that should be reviewed. I think it is inequitable at the present time.

**CHAIR**—Do you have any suggestions about how it ought to be structured?

**Mr Fisher**—One suggestion is to create more peak bodies, but then that is costly. I think that it should be rationalised and that maybe the answer is fewer peak bodies. We struggle as a peak body to pay Sue and it would be great to get a little bit of funding to support at least bringing together the agencies that we have who are supported by Family Services.

**CHAIR**—Does the Family Services Council serve any useful purpose?

**Mr Fisher**—Yes. As an agency—and I am director of Anglicare in the Northern Territory—in the Northern Territory we work with many government funding bodies, both federal and territory. There are things that we need to change and make better, but I am personally very impressed with the LAFS department and the principle of having a council that comes very close, advising the department and the Attorney-General about what is happening on the ground.

If the Attorney-General is to turn up at the family council meeting, there for example is just one step between him and Murabuda Wurramarrba, who is a clan leader in the community on Groote Eylandt. I think that it is fairly important that we be very close to the decision makers in the department, the people who are on the ground. If for no other reason, I think that that is very important. You are also bringing in expertise. I am not necessarily speaking for myself, but other people on the council; there is an incredible amount of expertise there with people who have experience in mediation and family counselling and what it means to run relationship education in the community. So what we are doing here happens, in one sense, on a regular basis when the Family Services Council meets. I say this in the light of my term ending. I may not be there.

**CHAIR**—Do you have any thoughts about the current evaluation of marriage and relationship education at this stage?

**Mr Fisher**—Yes. They are good thoughts, as long as the intention is carried out in the evaluation. The evaluation is pushing very strongly to look, as I said earlier, at the types of relationships that exist in our community, what ones are most at risk—the risk can be debated—and what are the best ways of providing for those education needs. If the evaluation achieves that, I think that is tremendous.

**CHAIR**—I must say that I have been busy for the last few weeks and I have not chased up what is happening there, but have the individuals or the group been appointed to do the evaluation yet?

**Mr Fisher**—No. It has been advertised. I think that there is a group meeting to make a decision and it is due to do that fairly soon.

**CHAIR**—I thank you very much. We will get you on your plane on time. Thank you very much for your submission and also for coming along this afternoon. We appreciate that. We want to go to a regional centre at least. One of the thoughts we had was Darwin. But then we were thinking that one of the northern Queensland provincial cities might also have an Aboriginal community as well as provincial issues.

**Ms Kirkegard**—If there are any contacts we can make with that, please get the secretary to be in touch because we have big centres, certainly in Rockhampton and Toowoomba.

**CHAIR**—We were thinking, perhaps, that Rockhampton or one of those cities might be relevant.

**Ms Kirkegard**—They would have some good comments to make.

**CHAIR**—But it will not be until next year now. We have squeezed as much as we can in this year to get it in. Thank you for your time.



[4.15 p.m.]

**ZIBELL, Mr Kevin John, Client Services Manager, Ballarat Children's Homes and Family Services Inc., 115 Lydiard Street, North Ballarat, Victoria 3350**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. 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 proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament.

We are in receipt of your submission, which we have before us. Would you like to make some introductory remarks?

**Mr Zibell**—To begin with, I have only been in this present position for a bit over two months. Prior to that I was centre manager at Relationships Australia in Ballarat, so when the invitation to make this submission landed on my desk I felt as though I was on home ground to some extent. But I would like to stress that I am speaking through the eyes of Ballarat Children's Homes and Family Services rather than Relationships Australia and perhaps trying to put our particular focus on that.

Ballarat Children's Homes's commitment is to work with very vulnerable families and couples. A lot of the work that we do is one step removed from protective intervention and as such we come across people who are in crisis for much of the time. I suppose a description of the people who we work with is that they are people who are experiencing chronic multi-problems. What we are finding in terms of relationships with some of our clients is that they are often breaking down under the weight of external pressures, which are outweighing limited or strained internal resources in the families that they come from.

We also see that there are critical developmental points in the lives of individuals and families, at which times they are more likely to separate from a relationship or to experience a relationship crisis. We identify that relationships that are undergoing certain strains which I have talked about in my paper are also at fairly predictable high risk. So I think it is possible to identify some of the relationships which are at high risk and perhaps what we could look to do is to work out ways to target those relationships.

Another point that I would like to make is that many of the most vulnerable, particularly some of the families who we work with, feel excluded or alienated from formal structured counselling and educational services. I do not think it is a reflection on those services simply to say that the methods that are adopted, the formats in particular, the need to run to formal interview times, office interviews and charge a fee for interviews, often preclude many of the people who we are working with.

I think that it is possible to be pro-active and I think it is possible to use outreach and flexible approaches to work with the very vulnerable families who I am talking about. However, we need to move outside of the normally accepted models of marriage counselling and marriage education in order to do so.

Finally, I did not include this but I really felt as though I would like to reflect that rural or remote settings are further alienated, particularly from specialist services, and I highlight the need for innovative

approaches particularly in the rural and isolated areas to reach couples who are geographically isolated.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. What you were saying about life stage transitions is something which has come through over and over again in submissions and in evidence to the committee. It seems to me that there are certain transitions in life about which programs of education can be connected and act as a trigger to get people to participate, and then there are other, as you say, high risk situations which can be identified as well. Without neglecting or downgrading the importance of other situations, given that there are limited funds and resources in this area as much as in any other area, not simply because of funding but because of personnel for a whole lot of reasons, what do you think we should be recommending?

I have not discussed this with my colleagues, but if there was a recommendation from us, should it say something along the lines that there ought to be a national strategy about this? We should not just leave it to the historical accidents of the past. We are having an inquiry so why do we not recommend a way to go forward? This is the strategy, and that strategy ought to identify those life stage transitions as key points and try at least to identify, without necessarily being exhaustive, some of the other high risk events around which, in whatever form they are provided, some education programs should be offered.

**Mr Zibell**—I think that is important. One of the first things is just to alert people that marriages change and that relationships change. I think one of the reasons why relationships break up is when one partner experiences a change and the other believes that they are still in the same marriage. So you need to educate people that their relationship will go through changes.

Perhaps also, to take it a little further, in terms of targeting the at-risk groups and the ones who perhaps are facing predictable high risk, I think there might be a couple of ways to go. In the first place, I would like to think that the mainstream services, the existing services, were made more accessible and some of the barriers to that at present are, I think, that counsellors generally believe that they probably cannot work with someone with an intellectual disability, for example, or someone with a psychiatric illness. Those might be contraindicators for counselling, and in some cases I think that is quite right.

However, I think that with education of counsellors as to what is going to be an appropriate form of intervention that is one way to go. For the other people who probably are not going to attend a counselling service in a pink fit, then we have to look more at the outreach techniques that we are talking about.

**CHAIR**—On the specific problems of rural areas, Ballarat I suppose is an interesting example of a major provincial city not that far, transport-wise, from Melbourne these days, so presumably there is a lot of driving up and down the Western Highway, particularly I suspect by young adults. Are there peculiar problems first of all in a city like Ballarat that are different from what you would find in metropolitan Melbourne? Secondly, what specifically—if you can identify them—are the additional particular problems of the outlying areas? I see you have centres in Ararat. We will take somewhere like Ararat, which is a bit further away again.

**Mr Zibell**—I think provincial Ballarat has a lot more in common with metropolitan Melbourne than the outlying centres have in common with Ballarat. An interesting reflection by a former colleague of mine—she is a relationships counsellor—who came to Ballarat from Shepparton was how like Melbourne she

thought it was compared with Shepparton, which was much more rural, much more isolated. So I think that Ballarat is much more metropolitan in its range of services and the kinds of issues that people are facing.

On the other hand, with places such as Ararat, Daylesford and even Bacchus Marsh, even though the geographical distance is not great I think many people do feel as though they are excluded from Ballarat services. The public transport is quite poor between Ballarat and Daylesford, and Ballarat and Ararat, for example. People will not make those journeys. They want a service in their home town. They do not mind where it comes from, but they want it located in their home town. I think it is important that we are able to do that as much as possible. A lot of what the Ballarat Children's Homes does is to try and provide those sorts of services.

I can talk about the dilemma I faced as centre manager for Relationships Australia. To provide an outreach service to, say, Daylesford requires an hour and a half round trip. That is for an interview, it is \$20.00, and that equation is very tight. The other thing that is faced in Ballarat by Relationships Australia is that people who do have the funds will often travel to Melbourne for their counselling. They will not necessarily stay in Ballarat. So the Ballarat service tends to be focused very much on low income people and, again, that makes the equation very tight for them.

**CHAIR**—If I can take this as a microcosm of Australia, is there enough demand for services in a town like Daylesford or Ararat so that you can provide them for half a day or a day a week? Going back now to your Relationships Australia experience, how do you operate?

**Mr Zibell**—It would normally be a day a week that you would look at outreaching to those sorts of towns. It may be that in a place such as Ararat, where you also have Stawell fairly close, you would spend, say, two days in that area. But with a couple of counsellors going out I think you could provide a viable service on the basis of a day a week, provided there was an acknowledgment in the funding arrangement that they were travelling and the time was taken into account.

**CHAIR**—What about the smaller places? I am trying to think of the geography of western Victoria. What about a place such as Skipton, or a small town such as Glenthompson at the southern end of the Grampians which has probably got 500 to 1,000 people at the most. What provision of services is there for towns like that?

**Mr Zibell**—I think there comes a point where you just cannot do it. You have got to offer something in a reasonable sized centre for, say, a day a week. But in a place of the size you mention, I wonder whether you would fill your appointments. From the indications Relationships Australia have, only a minority of people—maybe five to 10 per cent—will seek counselling even if their marriage is in trouble. It is not a high proportion. So in even more isolated towns that is just not going to be viable.

**CHAIR**—Tell me if I am wrong, but I suspect that the more rural the community becomes, the more peer pressure against it may rise. That is because everyone knows. Having grown up in a small town, I know that.

**Mr Zibell**—Yes, anonymity it is an extremely important aspect. Working with Relationships Australia

in Ballarat I have found that people who were able to are willing to travel for up to two hours—that is, in a radius of about 100 kilometres. For some people that is a preference—they would rather preserve their anonymity by travelling. The other service that was offered from Relationships Australia in Ballarat was a 1800 telephone service to all of country Victoria. We found that a proportion of people actually preferred the anonymity, the privacy, the accessibility of that service to a face-to-face service, so I do not think a local face-to-face service is always the way to go.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—I do not have a knowledge of exactly what you do. Do you provide any sort of residential care or crisis housing?

**Mr Zibell**—Yes, we have both of those. We have foster care adolescent community placement, supported accommodations programs and some specific accommodation for women escaping family violence.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—That is all based in Ballarat?

**Mr Zibell**—No. A lot of it is, but for each of the outreach centres, Daylesford, Bacchus Marsh and Ararat—not so much Ararat where they are provided by another organisation - we provide those direct.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—So you are providing crisis care and things like that in those areas?

**Mr Zibell**—Yes, that is right.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—That is very interesting. And your organisation has been going for a long time by the look of the notes we have got.

**Mr Zibell**—It started as an orphanage.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—I gathered that from the name. Have you got any historical records that track the changes in the causes of family stress and breakdown? Have you got any research studies which are longitudinal and have been going on for any progressive length of time?

**Mr Zibell**—I have not seen any studies. I have heard some anecdotal accounts which have to do with the particular times of the gold rush and people leaving home, and families returning from the war and the father deciding that life was greener somewhere else. There is no research that I have seen.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—There have been no records kept?

**Mr Zibell**—There would be records kept. I think that it is a matter of probably someone getting them together.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—It sounds like a good research project.

**Mr Zibell**—I am sure it would be. It would be fascinating.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—What comments have you got on the levels of funding that are provided for you as they affect you and your operations—everybody could always do with some more—and the procedures for applying for these funds?

**Mr Zibell**—At about the same time as I made this submission there were submissions for marriage education for Ballarat. We thought that we would have a go. I think that there is only \$50,000 for the area and it is probably going to go to either Centacare or Relationships Australia. We were being pretty optimistic, but we felt as though we had to put these issues on the table to say, 'There are a group of people who are not going to be reached by this funding even if it does go locally.'

I do not have any trouble with the funding model per se. I guess what I would like to see is that we actually do start to target some of the high risk groups and to think in terms of what is going to be the best way to reach these people. The mainstream marriage education programs are absolutely essential. However, they are not going to reach a lot of the people we are working with and I think that we really have to think about what the innovative ways are of reaching those people.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Yes. You list in your submission a group of predictable high risk areas—children with disabilities, the death of a child, infertility, psychiatric illnesses, et cetera. You know them all. You have written them.

**Mr Zibell**—Yes.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—These are the sort of areas that we should target and be aware of?

**Mr Zibell**—Yes.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Have you any suggestions as to how we should go about targeting these?

**Mr Zibell**—Early intervention. If we take a child with a chronic illness, or the death of a child, I think that a lot of the focus of the couple at that stage is on just keeping it all together. If it is a child with a chronic illness or a disability then a lot of the focus goes into caring for the child. I think that what gets neglected is the relationship. So there should be early intervention which highlights for people what the risks are and allows them the respite to attend to their own issues. Often people become polarised around one doing all of the caring and one getting on with life. These are the sorts of things that a few years down the track can really develop into a split between the couple. So early intervention, I think, is the important thing. When people are identified, a talk with someone at that stage to offer the chance to talk through their grief and their relationship issues would be a good way to go.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Right. Putting it quite bluntly: how do we get at them?

**Mr Zibell**—If we are talking about children with chronic illness, I think that we get at them through the hospitals and the doctors.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—The death of a child is easy enough because you have got that.

**Mr Zibell**—Yes.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—But what about people who have got psychiatric illness or—I suppose this is the same thing—where you have got someone who is diagnosed with schizophrenia or something like that?

**Mr Zibell**—I do not think we have to get at them; they are trying to get to us, in the sense that a lot of their service providers are saying, ‘Hey, our people have got relationship needs. Who is going to look after them?’ A lot of the mainstream agencies feel as though they cannot. I think that that referral source is already established.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—Do you feel there should be funding for training counsellors and educators, not just specifically in that area but in handling of people with mental problems, be it psychiatric or intellectual handicap?

**Mr Zibell**—Yes. There should also be the flexibility within their work to be able to address those because they do not fit into the 50-minute counselling interview terribly well.

**Mrs ELIZABETH GRACE**—We had someone point out that deaf people have similar problems and there is cost involved in getting someone in as an interpreter for them and of course ethnic groups that fall into the same category. Do you again see the need for special training of counsellors and educators in these areas?

**Mr Zibell**—There are probably two ways it can go. The choice is whether you would train the counsellor in the psychiatric illness or whether you help the people who are managing the psychiatric illness with the counselling skills that are needed to work with a couple. I think it is hard to say exactly which one of those would work but, exploring the second option, people who are dealing with someone with a psychiatric illness often feel as though they do not have the skills to address their relationship issues. One way to go would be to support those people and give them some basic training with ongoing consultation.

**CHAIR**—Is there sufficient integration between services, say, in a provincial city like Ballarat? For example, I am thinking in the context of your saying there is \$50,000 to go to marriage and relationship education. Does that all go to one agency, say, Relationships Australia or Centacare? Is there integration then or does one get it and the others miss out and it is too bad?

**Mr Zibell**—I think there is the potential there for integration or cooperation and in some instances it already happens. I am thinking back to a couple of years ago where there was a group of people who were interested in relationship education issues. They were meeting regularly to write articles to the press and so on. The potential is there and I think also that there is a high level of goodwill and cooperation between the various agencies. There is potential, but the actuality does not happen very much at present.

**CHAIR**—So that could be improved upon?

**Mr Zibell**—I think it can be improved upon, yes. If there were something like a joint project I think that that might work quite well.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for both your submission and for coming along today. It has been most useful, particularly to get a perspective from a provincial city which we have not had to date. Thank you very much.

Resolved (on motion by Mrs Grace):

That, pursuant to the power conferred by section 2(2) of the Parliamentary Papers Act 1908, this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Subcommittee adjourned at 4.38 p.m.**