



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Factors influencing the employment of young people

CANBERRA

Thursday, 29 May 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Members

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Peter Baldwin	Mrs Gash
Mr Barresi	Mr Marek
Mr Bradford	Mr Mossfield
Mr Brough	Mr Neville
Mr Dargavel	Mr Pyne
Mrs Elson	Mr Sawford
Mr Martin Ferguson	

Matter referred for inquiry into and report on:

Factors influencing the employment of young people.

WITNESSES

CAVE, Mr Matthew, Student, Member of Vocational Education Group in 1997, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806	1655
COLLINS, Mr Wayne Douglas, Coordinator, ECHO Inc., 5 Church Street, Emerald, Victoria 3782	1667
DEWAR, Mr Timothy John Thomas, ECHO Inc., 5 Church Street, Emerald, Victoria 3782	1667
GRAY, Mr Stuart, Ex-Student, Employed from Vocational Education Group in 1996, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806	1655
GRIFFIN, Miss Naomi May, ECHO Inc., 5 Church Street, Emerald, Victoria 3782	1667
GRIFFIN, Miss Christina Joy, ECHO Inc., 5 Church Street, Emerald, Victoria 3782	1667
JOLLY, Mr Owen, Student, Member of Vocational Education Group in 1996 and 1997, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806	1655
MADDOCK, Ms Sarah Victoria, Youth Support Person, Breaking the Cycle, 29 Ballantyne Street, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205	1645
MARK, Mr Joshua Ben, ECHO Inc., 5 Church Street, Emerald, Victoria 3782	1667
McKESSY, Mr Paul, Founder/Director, Breaking the Cycle, 29 Ballantyne Street, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205	1645
MITCHELL, Mr Robert, ECHO Inc., 5 Church Street, Emerald, Victoria 3782	1667
PELL, Mr Brennan, Ex-Student, Employed from Vocational Education Group in 1996, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806	1655
TREVENA, Mr Terry, Assistant Principal, Coordinator of Vocational Education, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806	1655
TURNBULL, Ms Rebecca, Graduate of Pre-employment Program now gainfully employed with Esprit, Breaking the Cycle, 29 Ballantyne Street, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205	1645

WEIR, Ms Rosemary, Graduate of Pre-employment Program, Breaking the Cycle, 29 Ballantyne Street, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205	1645
WILLIAMS, Ms Adele, Student, Member of Vocational Education Group in 1996, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806	1655
YETTE, Mr Chris, Student, Member of Vocational Education Group in 1996 and 1997, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806	1655

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Present

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Dargavel

Mr Neville

Mrs Elson

Mr Sawford

Mrs Gash

The committee met at 9.00 a.m.

Mr Charles took the chair.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing on the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people. Today's videoconference link between this committee in Canberra and witnesses in Melbourne is an historic first for a House of Representatives committee, a first which I hope will pave the way for all House of Representatives committees to use this type of technology when it can assist an inquiry.

The purpose of the inquiry is to consult widely and to produce recommendations for government action that will help promote the employment prospects of our youth. The committee has received over 100 submissions and conducted public hearings in school forums throughout Australia, including many in regional and remote areas. This is a very broad ranging inquiry. Matters raised in submissions so far include: the attitudes of young people; the work ethic of young people, and their familiarity with the requirements of the workplace; the adequacy and relevance of the education and training system; the importance of developing better linkages between schools and the business sector; the need for a more flexible industrial relations system; and the effectiveness and efficiency of government programs to assist young people to find employment.

That is not meant to be an exhaustive list of issues the committee will consider or which might be raised. We are entirely open to the views of everyone who wishes to make an input into the inquiry. We are here to listen, to learn and to help improve the prospects of young Australians. Before I call witnesses, I introduce my colleagues: Rod Sawford, the deputy chairman of the committee, from South Australia; Steve Dargavel from the ACT; Joanna Gash from New South Wales; and Kay Elson from Queensland. I am a Victorian. I now call representatives of Breaking the Cycle.

McKESSEY, Mr Paul, Founder/Director, Breaking the Cycle, 29 Ballantyne Street, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205

MADDOCK, Ms Sarah Victoria, Youth Support Person, Breaking the Cycle, 29 Ballantyne Street, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205

TURNBULL, Ms Rebecca, Graduate of Pre-employment Program now gainfully employed with Esprit, Breaking the Cycle, 29 Ballantyne Street, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205

WEIR, Ms Rosemary, Graduate of Pre-employment Program, Breaking the Cycle, 29 Ballantyne Street, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205

CHAIR—Welcome. Would you like to make a brief opening statement before the committee starts to ask you questions about your submission?

Mr McKessy—Certainly. Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you this morning and congratulations on this issue. I guess, for us, many of the issues you have outlined are key points in terms of what we believe is important for creating more successful job opportunities for young people in Australia.

Essentially, as far as Breaking the Cycle is concerned, our experience has been that when you create the opportunity for young people, regardless of background—by ‘opportunity’ I mean a full-time or real job in the private sector—and you provide them with the challenges that are required for that, they begin to get a sense of who they really are and their real potential. When you provide them with some skills and some strategies as to how to be successful in a workplace—better still, in life, as the workplace is a significant part of that—and provide people with those sorts of skills, opportunities and challenges, our experience is that the vast majority of them will be successful in the workplace. In our case, that is 85 per cent after six months. In fact, we have a couple of fantastic examples of that this morning. We would like to express some of that as well as sharing the experiences of Rosemary and Rebecca, and Sarah who works with the young people on the work site over six to 12 months after they complete the program.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. Could you tell us roughly what your budget is and how many young people are included in your program?

Mr McKessy—Let me start with the process. We have an agreement with DEETYA whereby when we secure 28 to 35 job opportunities—we do that by talking to the private sector and people in business and saying to them, ‘Let’s create this in a way that works for you’—we then recruit young people via the CES and case managers. That triggers off a contract with DEETYA. That currently sits at about \$120,000 per program. We intend to do 15 programs this year, and we are on track to do that. That, primarily, is

the source of most of the financing of the program.

This year we intend to have 450 to 500 young people go through our programs. As I said earlier, 97 per cent of those will graduate into a full-time job and 85 per cent are still there six months down the track.

CHAIR—Would one or all of your young people there like to tell us about their experiences?

Mr McKessy—I think that would be great. Maybe Rosemary can start, as she graduated some 12 months ago.

Ms Weir—Before I started 'Breaking the cycle' I was quite unmotivated in finding a job or sticking to anything I started. I was given the opportunity to join 'Breaking the cycle'. It was a very good opportunity for me. The whole program taught me endless amounts of things, from believing in myself to how to continue when things get bad. It was a wonderful opportunity. The work that is being done is fantastic. It has been nearly 12 months since I graduated from the program. I am working at a Spotlight store. It is a great place to work. I was made a department manager after about a month, so I am fairly happy with that. I believe that Breaking the Cycle has helped me gain my goals in my career.

CHAIR—How long were you unemployed before you found out about the Breaking the Cycle program and became involved in it?

Ms Weir—About two to 2½ years—it was quite a long time.

CHAIR—Does someone else want to tell us about their experience?

Ms Turnbull—I graduated about a month ago. I had a great time away at Breaking the Cycle, out in the wilderness. I learnt a whole lot of stuff that I had never learnt before. I have not been long-term unemployed. I have always just quit and run away if I did not like what was happening. I really did not have a stable life, and that was my solution.

Since I have been to Breaking the Cycle, they have educated me so that I can actually stick at this job now. I am confident in myself that I can do it and I feel that I am actually a worthy person to be employed. I know that I would never have been afforded this position that I have now at Esprit otherwise. It is a good company and they promote quickly, and that is where I am heading. I would really like to do well and I am really grateful to Breaking the Cycle for giving me the opportunity, because it is really hard to build confidence in yourself without somebody believing in you.

Mr SAWFORD—Would you tell us a little about the process that you go through

in recruiting your jobs up front?

Mr McKessy—Essentially, we talk to a range of people who have the capacity to make decisions. It is a lengthy process, in a sense, and it is like anything else: it is about building relationships. We need to build relationships with the business community. We are beginning to create a reputation, where people have heard what Breaking the Cycle is about. Essentially, it is about building relationships. For example, we will go and talk with managing directors of companies.

From a starting point through to securing a job could be anything from three to five months. It is quite a lengthy process, largely because big companies have processes that need to be adhered to. We have very good networks within the business community, largely because we have spoken to people who have great networks and asked them a bigger picture question, if you like. We have asked them what they are prepared to do about the atrocious rate of youth unemployment. We can talk about youth unemployment until we are all blue in the face but, essentially, the fairly simple solution is to employ more young people—it is not really rocket science.

What we need to do is to make that work for the company. The sort of thing that works for a company is the jobstart subsidy, the subsidy for the employer. Some employers say that that is not a highly motivating factor, but often it can make the difference if they are just thinking about employing someone. The subsidy is an important ingredient.

The training that we do in looking at young people's behaviour is important. Nine out of 10 employers that I talk to say, 'You give me a good attitude in a person and we will train them for skills.' I hear that time and time again. I think that is one of the factors that makes what we do successful. We say to young people that it is not about whether their attitude is good or bad; we ask them whether their attitude is useful in any given environment. A feisty attitude can be really useful if you are on the streets but not particularly useful if you are negotiating with your boss. We tell them about context and let them know.

Essentially, what we do is go around the country. We operate in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and, as we speak, we have got 27 young people from Tasmania in our first program based out of Tasmania. It is really networking and going to employers and saying, 'This works. It has worked across the country. It can work for your company.' Our experience with young people is that, once they have been through the program and they have got a 16 or a 20-week subsidy, by the time they are starting to get paid the going rate, they are making a contribution to the bottom line, which is, of course, what they are largely interested in.

Mr SAWFORD—Congratulations on that. Too often in some of the study that we have done on this, people in your position have taken a rather superficial attitude to

employers. I was pretty impressed to hear you say that you take three, four or five months to develop a relationship with employers. I have a question in terms of wage subsidies. You have a very successful take-up of subsidies, from what I gather from your submission. Could you give some explanation for that? Does that go back to that relationship again?

Mr McKessy—It is. The thing about it for me is saying to the employer, ‘If you are doing it for the subsidy, you are doing it for the wrong reason. If you are doing it because you want a charitable feel good, you are doing it for the wrong reason. If your company cannot sustain the growth by taking on a person’—or in the case of a Spotlight or an Esprit, 30 people or more at any given time—‘then our advice is, don’t do it.’ I have walked away from employers and said, ‘Please, when you are at a point when you are wanting to take on a person and it is in your interest to do that from your strategic plan’—if they have one—‘in terms of the way you are growing your business, then come and talk to us. This is a really smart way to recruit.’

We minimise all the sorts of distractions that employers absolutely detest. We support the recruiting process, we take the pain out of having to deal with any given bureaucracy, and we just do our best to make it work for the employer because, at the end of the day, if it is not working for the employer, it is not going to work for the young person and if it is not working for those two ingredients, it is certainly not going to work for Breaking the Cycle or the government. Our philosophy truly is: make it work for everyone.

Mr SAWFORD—What are some of the things you do in your program that build the confidence and self-esteem of young people?

Mr McKessy—Virtually everything we do in the program is aimed at building people’s confidence and self-esteem. I am a believer in letting people experience what they are truly capable of. We challenge behaviour that we believe does not work for the young person and is not particularly useful. We will also put them into situations where they experience what they are truly capable of. I was talking to Rosemary in the car on the way up. We did not have to tell her about her potential after she had been through a fairly gruelling eight-day wilderness experience where her body wanted to reject her. She had been through a pretty extensive experience and she knew at that point. She had an experience whereby she had some choices she could make—the choice whether to quit or to continue on and work with the rest of the team and experience what she experienced.

It is the same with all the young people who go through it. If you asked any young person who goes through the program at any given time whether they were enjoying it, if they were truly honest, at lots of given moments, they would say, ‘No’, and you would say, ‘Well, that’s great, you are getting your money’s worth.’

It is really about giving people the opportunity to demonstrate what they are truly

capable of. I am a firm believer that you get what you expect. We expect young people to be successful because we have seen it time and time again. They need to appreciate what their potential is. We are firm believers in acknowledging successful strategies that work. We are very much about letting people know when they are doing really well and we are very much about letting people have a look at what has not worked for them. They are the ones who know that; you do not have to tell them the obvious. They are the ones who know whether they have succeeded in something or not.

When somebody has not, or they are willing to quit and it is all too hard, et cetera, we ask what they would normally do and what did they do differently this time. I reckon that in a program like *Breaking the Cycle* as much learning happens between the participants as it does from those who are facilitating it.

Mr SAWFORD—I hope you set up in South Australia in the near future. I was very interested in your programs for employer training or mentor training for the young when you placed a young person in a position, could you tell us briefly about that?

Mr McKessy—Yes, and then I will pass that to Ms Maddock because that is what she does very successfully. Again, what is important, if we look at the overall objective of *Breaking the Cycle*, is that we support the recruitment after we secure the position. We have young people participating in what is a challenging and exciting program. As part of our recruitment of employers we ask them to make two commitments: one is to employ the young person for a minimum of 12 months—our experience is they do not put the young people off after 12 months because they have made such an investment at that point—and, secondly, they provide a mentor. The mentor is somebody, in our model, who wants to support a young person and who can look out for that young person in the work environment—somebody that young person can relate to and go to if there is anything that is out of the ordinary. In many cases it is the first time a lot of the young people that we have through our programs have ever worked anywhere.

We then spend a day training the mentors themselves. Most mentors enter the morning reluctantly because they are all very busy people. They always end the afternoon saying, ‘This is fantastic and we ought to be doing more of this in our company.’ That is pretty well in every given situation. Part of the afternoon session of the mentor training is when we connect them and introduce them to the young person, then we set up a contract between the mentor and the young person and that becomes the contract that they work towards. Then somebody like Sarah Maddock, who is the youth support person, supports the young person and the mentor for up to 12 months. Our experience is that often it does not take 12 months. Usually it is six months and everything is working very well. I will hand over to Ms Maddock now and she can tell you more about that.

Ms Maddock—My role, as Mr McKessy said, is youth support, but it is also mentor and employer support. I make regular visits to the young people in the workplace, usually during their lunch hour, and we talk about how work is going. If there are any

issues that come up in the young person's life, and they may be personal issues that sometimes can get in the way of work, and if the youth support person is proactive along with the young person, then we can talk about strategies in dealing with those personal issues that may come up at home. It may be issues around accommodation, budgeting or relationships with family that get in the way of them being the best possible person that they can be in the workplace. Often I speak to a young person about those things and also about how they are going in the workplace. They might say, 'This situation happened and this is how I dealt with it. What do you think?' and we might discuss that as well.

Not only do I spend time with the young person, I also spend time with the mentor and the employer, getting feedback from them and discussing various strategies with them at the same time. Usually the support goes for six months, during which I make those visits. But normally after the six months the communication is working so well between the mentor and the young person and the employer that I step away. If they want to contact me they will. I am on pager 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If anything does arise that is an emergency, they can also contact me. My role is more or less post-placement support.

CHAIR—Thank you, Sarah, and thank you, Paul.

Mrs GASH—Paul, were you a local in the community that you are operating from now?

Mr McKessy—Was the question: was I a local?

Mrs GASH—Yes. How did you gain the respect of the business sector?

Mr McKessy—Briefly, my background was that I was working in the youth welfare industry for a number of years and I had met a lot of captains of industry during that time. To be quite honest, whilst constrained by a lot of the thinking in that industry I was unable to operate in a way that worked with the business community. So whilst they probably all thought I was a very nice man and all the rest of it, they probably could not find a way of connecting. One of my greatest frustrations when I was in the welfare industry was that whenever you had a young person who was ready to get on with their lives and get out of the welfare system, there were very, very few exit points.

One of my motivating factors for starting Breaking the Cycle was to provide an exit point for people in the welfare system. In fact, one of our objectives is to break the cycle of welfare dependence. That is not to be misunderstood as making welfare wrong: I think it is a very important factor in society. It is just not good enough, in my view, to say that that is the best we can do as a society, to provide growing numbers of young people with better welfare, often perpetually. We are starting to see generational welfare families. I am saying, 'Excuse me, if that's the best we can do, we've got some serious problems.' I really believed that it was possible to create positive change in the lives of people and

make this work for everyone. In order to do that I really had to step outside the welfare system somewhat.

Hence I went to speak with a previous supporter of some of the work that I had been doing—his name is Hugh Davis—who at the time was the director of personnel and corporate affairs at Mayne Nickless. I went to Hugh and I asked him to join me and help me form a company, one that could probably be closer aligned to the business community—the corporate world—than the welfare community, on the basis that what I had been attempting to do for a number of years was not working particularly well.

Hugh took up that challenge and he was a great asset in terms of supporting me in building credibility and building connections in the business community, and it has been one introduction after another. I think a lot of the people in industry have a lot of respect for the work we do—largely because I do not think they could do it, but whether they provide resourcing or job opportunity there is a role for them to play. Often they very much admire the work we do, particularly in the early days. It literally started with one or two people and we grew. The first program was financed by myself and a friend; nobody else wanted to know about it. There are a whole lot of people, particularly in the welfare industry—

Mrs GASH—How many have you got now, Paul? How many are in the training—

Mr McKessy—Eight.

Mrs GASH—Did you say eight? How many people are in the training program now that operate with you?

Mr McKessy—How many people do we employ, do you mean?

Mrs GASH—Yes—how many staff?

Mr McKessy—I can't understand the question.

Mrs GASH—How many staff have you got now?

Mr McKessy—Probably about a dozen across Australia. What we do is that we keep our core staff to a minimum and then we subcontract a lot of our program staff, largely because it does not make a lot of sense to have fixed overheads. We keep our costs out so they are variable in case we do not run a program in any given month. So we have not—

Mrs GASH—How do you promote the program?

Mr McKessy—Any way we can. We promote the program through the networks

throughout the business community. We do not have the resources to do what I think we could do, which is to market the program's success with other business communities. If we were able to do that, if more people were able to know about what we can do, I think we would be able to do far greater. We market the program and the organisation. Often the graduates and the people who have employed young people are our greatest advocates, because they tell their friends.

We find it is the same evidence that is stated across the country. A lot of the jobs that we generate, if you like, or we shake out, are not advertised. Largely, it is a word of mouth process. When we are talking about 500 young people across Australia, it is a lot of people talking to a lot of people. If it was better marketed and we had some resourcing to do that, then we would probably be able to leverage that number into the thousands.

Mrs GASH—My last question is to Rosemary: how did you hear about the program?

Ms Weir—I was looking through the screens at the CES and I just applied for the job. My case manager did not know what the program was, so it was just a matter of by applying and going through the process of that, that I found out what it was. I had never heard of it before, but it sounded like something that would work for me.

Mr McKessy—Can I just add to that one more thing. To answer your question: I am a local person in the Melbourne community. For all of the jobs that we create, if you like, or we generate within the business community, we recruit the young person from that particular area. So if we have a Spotlight store, for argument's sake, who say they want to employ somebody from Cairns, then we do the recruitment via the CES for a young person in Cairns. We may bus that person down to Melbourne, at some extreme, or hopefully to Brisbane. We will move the program so it is centralised in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Albury or Tassie. But the young people will come from the community that the job is generated from, because we are very strong on inviting local communities to assume greater responsibility for their young people and this is a fantastic way to do it.

Mr DARGAVEL—Good day, Paul. It's a long time since I saw you. I think the last time I saw you, you had a big red beard or something. What is the retention rate after 12 months?

Mr McKessy—It is very nice to see you too, by the way. Our figures are the same as they are for the six months, yet we do not have enough of them because we are not particularly old enough. But 85 per cent appears to be the best number we can get in terms of those who are still in work after 12 months.

My attitude to that is that the other 15 per cent do not learn less. It is really about what they are experiencing. Some people go through this program and say that the last thing they want to do is go into a full-time job, because they have discovered something about themselves or rediscovered something within themselves that says, 'I want to do

something else.' So some will go back into school.

We have actually bought the backpack for someone who is still travelling around Australia. They went 2½ years ago and I get the occasional card to say they are doing really well or they are having struggles, et cetera. The thing is that they get out of the thinking that the world owes them a favour, it is the state's responsibility to look after them. As far as I am concerned that is a really good outcome.

CHAIR—I have got a question for Rebecca and Rosemary. You undoubtedly have heard about proposals for the work for the dole scheme. We have asked high school students all around Australia what they think of that scheme. Could you tell us your views?

Ms Turnbull—I think that it is quite a good idea. I would have taken the opportunity if it was there for me. Anything that would give any usable job skills I think would be a good idea. I was not getting any skills at all sitting at home, looking through the paper. I was not getting anywhere. Any opportunity where you are going to get some skills that are going to get you somewhere in your career I think is a really good idea.

Ms Maddock—I agree with Rosemary, totally. If I had been given the opportunity as well I would have acted the same as Rosemary would. I would have taken it.

CHAIR—Very good.

Mrs ELSON—Paul, to what extent are difficulties with fundamental skills such as literacy and numeracy behind the collapse in confidence and self-esteem of young people you assist?

Mr McKessy—These are rough figures, but we find that probably one-quarter of the young people who go through our program have significant literacy and numeracy difficulties. They were basically let down tremendously by the education system. The education system failed to educate them in the measures that we hold as important. People get a battering in terms of their self-esteem and confidence—it tends to go hand-in-hand. My observation and experience is that they check out very early or fall out of the education system and yet get promoted throughout it because it does not look good to have a 14-year-old in grade 3. It really does affect their ability because we hold it in such a dear measure.

Those young people are very capable of learning. They are not stupid people. They have just been let down pretty significantly, I believe, in a system that did not work for them. For the people who go through that system that it does work for, it is terrific. Let's not kid ourselves in thinking that it works for everybody—it doesn't.

One of the things we do in the program is enable people to really get a sense of

their capacity to learn, much to their great surprise, to be quite honest, because, based on the evidence so far, they think they may be a slow learner or there is something wrong with them. That is certainly not our evidence.

Mrs ELSON—Can I also ask about the young ones you are helping. Have many of them gone through to grade 12 or the highest level of their schooling or did they drop out at an earlier time?

Ms Turnbull—No, I didn't. I went to year 10.

Mr McKessy—I would say that the majority of them are similar to Rebecca. We have had people with teaching qualifications go through this program. So it is really not about that as far as we are concerned. It is about where they are at at the time and, more importantly, what they want to have in their lives.

One of the important ingredients that I think works for us is that we invite young people to begin to get clear about what they want to do with themselves in terms of their own futures. If they want to work full time in a given situation, this is an appropriate avenue for them to do that. If that is not what they want to do, obviously, it is not. Most of the young people go through to about year 10 or 11.

Mrs ELSON—Can I ask Rebecca the reason why she dropped out in year 10? Was it because she felt the system let her down or the education system was not teaching her what she wanted to learn?

Ms Turnbull—I found that I was not learning that much. I actually went to Queensland. While I was away on Breaking the Cycle, I thought one point was really good because they recognised that people learn in so many different ways. At school it was just a case of having to learn this way and if you did not learn this way, you were stupid. That is what I did not like about it. That is basically why I left school.

Mrs ELSON—Do you want to go back to school now or into a college system? Are you happy to learn more or are you happy with what you are doing?

Ms Turnbull—I would definitely like to go back and learn more—maybe in the artistic field, because that is my passion. I would like to go back and learn in a way that suits me, in a way that I can learn, and from somebody who is more educated.

CHAIR—Paul, Sarah, Rebecca and Rosemary, thank you very much for talking with us this morning. We certainly appreciate your input. It has been a very long inquiry. We have been going now for over 12 months. We hope to wind up our hearings in June. We will try to bring down a report in August or early September at the latest. We will certainly make sure that you have a copy of the report. We thank you for your very valuable input.

[10.22 a.m.]

CAVE, Mr Matthew, Student, Member of Vocational Education Group in 1997, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806

GRAY, Mr Stuart, Ex-Student, Employed from Vocational Education Group in 1996, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806

JOLLY, Mr Owen, Student, Member of Vocational Education Group in 1996 and 1997, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806

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TREVENA, Mr Terry, Assistant Principal, Coordinator of Vocational Education, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806

WILLIAMS, Ms Adele, Student, Member of Vocational Education Group in 1996, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806

YETTE, Mr Chris, Student, Member of Vocational Education Group in 1996 and 1997, Berwick Secondary College, Manuka Road, Berwick, Victoria 3806

CHAIR—Good morning, Terry, students and former students. I welcome Berwick Secondary College in appearing before the committee in its inquiry into youth employment. This is a first for the House of Representatives. The Senate has for some time been allowed to use videoconferencing for its formal inquiries but the House of Representatives has not. So we are a test case for the rest of our colleagues in the other committees.

Terry, could you tell us a bit about your program so that my colleagues are up to speed with what you do, how you do it and how you fund it—at least up to the present time?

Mr Trevena—Last year we started a subject called vocational education, or Voc Ed. It was based on the fact that we chose a group of students who we believed were at risk of dropping out of school—students who were not really achieving at school for a variety of reasons. We are a reasonably large school. We have 1,300 students, and we had about 20 students who were vanishing each year. We are very heavily into dual recognition programs in years 11 and 12, but our argument was that nothing was being done in the middle school, in years 9 and 10. A lot of the students were actually vanishing before they got to years 11 and 12.

What we did at the start of last year was to select 16 year 10 students and offered

them the course. At the half-year mark we added 16 students from year 9, so we ended up with 32 students in the course. The course basically was one subject, but the students were involved in several periods a week of job and life skills and on a Friday they would do a considerable block of work placement. Generally the students found their own work placement positions. The school helped in some instances and then we followed up with the employers. The notion was to try and put together a course that would do one of several things. Our measure of success was students staying in some sort of education, training or going on to full-time employment.

That is why I have invited several of the students along. The two students on my left, Stuart Gray and Brennan, were both students who really did not find school all that easy. They obtained employment through the position that they actually had in their work placement. Stuart struggled in school, but through the Voc Ed program he actually ended passing every subject at the end of the year which was a first for Stuart for a long time. Brennan got a placement this year in a panel shop. Another student, Adele, elected to do the course. She had a number of personal hassles for all sorts of reasons and wanted to get involved in child care. We were able to place her in child care. She has since come back to school and is now doing a TAFE course in child care as well as doing her VCE.

Two others, Owen and Chris, were both in year 10 and in the program last year. They have continued on in the program and both of those students have been given real raps in their work placement. They had hassles at school in terms of getting their school work done and motivation, et cetera, but in work placement they have really gone ahead in leaps and bounds. It is Matthew's first year in the program and once again he is a tremendous worker when he has gone out on a job. We are trying to combine work placement with something that is at school and to produce a course that is going to help them to be employable.

Bob mentioned funding. The answer to funding is zilch. We have done it on absolutely nothing. We have chased around trying to get some degree of funding. I read with great interest the comments that were made by Dr Kemp in parliament regarding ASTF moving back to year 9 and 10. I await with eager anticipation the details of that, because these sorts of programs are very difficult to run and quite labour intensive.

The last comment I would like to make concerns an application I have made for DEETYA funding in answer to an advertisement in the paper. I have been shortlisted for that. It is to develop a year 9 and 10 course where I would be involving an academic, someone from TAFE, someone from a work placement agency and several schools to develop a cohesive course. I think that is where we have to go. That is a quick summary of it.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. Could you tell us how many young people you have involved in this course now?

Mr Trevena—It is supposed to be 32, but we have now had another four put in for next semester, so it will be 36 next semester. We could probably put in about 60 if we went on student requests.

CHAIR—How many have you lost?

Mr Trevena—At the end of last year we had lost none. Since then we have lost two and on my criteria the rest are all still either in education, further training or employment.

CHAIR—What happened with the two?

Mr Trevena—One of them we had actually placed late last year in a job and then he had a blow-up at home and actually left the place where he was living. That happened at the same time. I have met the student several times and he is unemployed. The other student is now going back into training, hopefully, in the next couple of weeks. He had a great deal of difficulty. He was given a bad work placement or bad advice. It was strongly suggested that he would be employed and then that offer was removed. I think young people tend to be very naive and tend to believe when employers tell them that there is a job there for him. Two weeks ago I arranged an interview and he is now going back into training.

Mr NEVILLE—I have a couple of questions. When the students go into placement, are they paid or is it a work experience type of thing?

Mr Trevena—It is on a work experience basis, but some of them get paid. Did anybody get good dollars?

Mr Jolly—I am getting \$20 a day now, but I was getting \$10.

Mr Trevena—It is a minimum of \$5.

Mr Cave—I got \$40 a day.

Mr Trevena—It tended to vary enormously. It is a minimum of \$5, so it is a work experience stipulation.

Mr NEVILLE—And the unions do not have any objection to that?

Mr Trevena—Not at all, no. Apparently it is going to be amended. We have a little bit of a problem, because the work experience legislation presently only caters for 12 days per half year per placement. That is why we have to be very careful. We cannot have a full day every week. We have to make sure that we stick within those guidelines. I am of the belief that that is going to be changed, so that we will have a bit more freedom in

that regard.

Mr NEVILLE—I have a model in my electorate where the students are actually going out to work two days a week, being paid award rates and being at school for the other three. Have any of your students actually gone into these new part-time apprenticeships?

Mr Trevena—No, it is something that is supposed to be going to be big in Victoria this year.

Mr NEVILLE—In your classroom situation, do you draw the students from various classrooms or do you set up special classes for these students? Do you take them at random through the school from the existing classes, and if so, is there a disruption factor there?

Mr Trevena—Yes, that is probably one of the most important features. We do not use what I call the dirty dozen syndrome, which a lot of schools were doing. These students are only together in Voc Ed time; that is all. They are drawn from all over the place. In terms of disruption, on a Friday this subject Voc Ed is timetabled for four periods a week. Two periods of the week is where they will actually learn the life and job skills, and that is done in a classroom set up together. Then on a Friday two periods again are timetabled as Voc Ed and then the other two periods they miss. So they will actually miss two periods of class. That is the disruption. They are missing two.

In the past what used to happen is that students were only put out on work placement if they behaved badly enough. They would then go out as a last resort. Then they would come back and they would be way behind in their work. What we have found is that for the students in general their class work has improved significantly. They have passed more units when they have been involved in the Voc Ed course than when they were not.

Mr NEVILLE—Do they still retain a normal academic load for three-fifths of the week or are they all vocational educational subjects?

Mr Trevena—Yes, it is only one subject, Voc Ed. On top of that we have a huge elective system at our school. If I had the 32 students present, no two would have the same course. They would all basically be doing various courses. That is one of the things that I would want to do. When I spoke about a cohesive course, I believe we have to extend it probably into two subjects, but no more. Because one of my aims is to have people like Adele, who will move into mainstream VCE with no problems. I am not of the opinion that these students should be separated. They should not be together for every period of the week with a totally modified course. The students that I had varied from being in the upper five per cent of the group in intelligence to the lowest five per cent. So there was a huge variation.

Mr SAWFORD—In today's society, we are seeing an increasing amount of young people without adequate family and peer support. Do you have young people like that in your program? If so, how do you help them?

Mr Trevena—The answer is yes. A number of the students involved have problems outside of school, and the answer is that we have not done it on a formalised basis. What tends to happen is that the person who is running the course gets fairly close to the group. I knew quite a deal about all the students who I dealt with. It is done on an informal basis.

If I am successful with this current application for funding, I would see the welfare side of it being a formalised part, so we would have access to agencies to assist in those particular areas. We have had problems with housing and other issues with the students, and I would know what was going on and make sure that I got someone else involved at that time. It is not sufficiently formalised for my liking.

Mr SAWFORD—I have just one other question about confidence and self-esteem of young people. Do you find it linked to a lack of fundamental skills in literacy and numeracy?

Mr Trevena—I would have said yes, but I would like to tell you about Stuart Gray. Stuart really struggled with his school work, and I do not think he would mind me saying that. Stuart, after being in the program for a while, was able to totally organise his work placement and do the whole lot by himself. I would have considered Stuart to have virtually none of the skills required for that. Stuart does not rank highly in some of the areas you mentioned.

In the past, I would have said, 'Definitely, yes. Numeracy and literacy are almost a direct measure.' But I now believe that some of these students have achieved enormous self-confidence by seeing that they can achieve in the actual work placement, and that has enabled them to do a lot more than they thought they would be able to. The reports that we have had back from the employers were sensational.

Mr SAWFORD—Can I just put a question to Stuart, since you have named him. Stuart, how did you come about joining the program? What interested you in joining the program? What are some of your thoughts about it? What gave you great pleasure out of it?

Mr Gray—I thought I could do something with my life if I joined the program. I wanted to do the skills as well, so I thought it was a good idea to join. I enjoyed it as I was doing it. When it came to the end of the work experience program, I asked for full-time job there. They said, 'Yes, that is not a problem.' Then I went to school and I asked to leave and they said, 'Yes, no problem.' Now I am working full time in the Casey Transmission Centre and I am enjoying it very much.

Mr SAWFORD—When you first joined the program, did your mates or your family influence you or did you make that decision yourself?

Mr Gray—I made that decision myself.

Mr Trevena—Adele said she would like to comment on your question, if that is okay.

Mr SAWFORD—Certainly.

Ms Williams—Just on what you said before about outside help, I appreciated a lot the support I got from Mr Trevena when I had personal problems at home. It led me to come back to school. My ambition in life was not to go back to school and complete the VCE. But during this course, I realised how much I did actually like school and how far I could get, which is why I am doing a child-care course now.

Mr SAWFORD—Was it the influence of Mr Trevena that influenced you to join the course, or how did you come to join?

Ms Williams—I have always wanted to be involved in child care and with children, and I was not sure how to go about it, knowing that I needed my VCE to do a mothercraft course. Now actually doing placement made me feel that I was definitely there for the job and I would really like to complete the course, which is why I am doing it now. Hopefully, after I have finished my VCE, I will be going on to further mothercraft courses and things like that.

Mr SAWFORD—Thanks, Adele.

Mrs ELSON—What prompted the school to start the idea of the program?

Mr Trevena—It was a perceived problem by me that we discussed. It is a middle school problem, years nine and 10—really eight, nine and 10. I was just very, very concerned. I am one of those people who worries enormously that there is nowhere for them to go. I had to come up with a political proposal that I could get through in the school, because it is very difficult to introduce new things into a school. So I just searched around and spoke to lots of people. I was heavily involved, as I mentioned before, in dual recognition programs at years 11 and 12, and I saw the benefits people were getting from work placement. It was just an idea that I had to try to get them involved. It has grown from that—and, I believe, grown beyond me.

We actively recruited a new teacher this year with a huge amount of experience in a similar field in England to try and bring some new ideas in because it was becoming too much me. That is why I really need to get people like academics and other people involved who can help formalise the course, because there is something there. There is

really something good there.

Mrs ELSON—What about the business community? Did you get a lot of support from them? How did you go about getting that support?

Mr Trevena—Once again in a non-formalised manner. Initially I attempted to go to the local chamber of commerce, and with reasonable success. I never imagined that the students would find their own work placements, but that has become one of the strongest parts of the course. That is why I admire someone like Stuey so much. I would have thought he would have had no chance of doing that, but he has gone out and not only got himself a work place but got himself a job.

Once again, it is an informal set-up that I think probably needs formalising now if we are going to continue to place the students. It is just on an ad hoc basis. We then visit the employers, recognise the employers with a certificate and a thankyou, and they all say, 'It's great; we wish there was something like this when we went to school', and 'Why aren't there tech schools', and all these comments. It's the same story. There is not a formal set-up like there is at the VCE level, where you have formalised log books and all that sort of thing.

Mrs ELSON—Owen, would you recommend it to your friends?

Mr Jolly—Yes, I would.

Mrs ELSON—Why?

Mr Jolly—The first place that I worked at was down at Beaconsfield, which was probably five minutes from the school. I went there for my interview during the vocational education class. It took me about five minutes. I introduced myself to the bloke, Peter Willis, and we just spoke about a few different things and whatever. He said that I was someone he was looking for for what was going on, because we were actually moving places to further down the road and there was a lot of heavy stuff to move around and whatever. We went down to the other place and we had all moved in and I ended up getting a lot of work over the Christmas break. I have finished working there now but I ended up getting a really good resume. So I would really recommend it to all my friends.

CHAIR—We have not heard from all of your students, Terry.

Mr SAWFORD—Can we hear some other points from the other students on a whole range of things they may wish to comment on? For example, why they joined the program; who influenced them to join the program; what they personally got out of it; and what they see it doing to help their employment prospects?

Mr Trevena—Do you mind if I asked the students a few questions and they can

respond?

CHAIR—That is fine.

Mr Trevena—If I could start with Brennan, who we have not heard from. Brennan was the terror of the school, basically, at that stage. I would safely say that I had more blues with Brennan than with any other student at the school over the year. I would now say that Brennan and I get on exceptionally well. School did not suit Brennan at all, but as he went through his work experience, different things happened to him. Brennan, could you tell us for a start why you were in the program and what happened at your work experience?

Mr Pell—Mr Trevena influenced me to do the program. I really was not going to, but I spoke to Mr Trevena about it for a while and he made me do it. I had some work experience at Elite Motor Body Repairs. They asked me if I wanted to work there and I said yes. I worked there on vocational education for about eight weeks or something like that. On the last day I asked them if there were any positions going, and they said there was a spray painting position if I wanted it. So I took it and I have been working there ever since.

Mr Trevena—Interestingly enough, they had contacted me and said, ‘We are thinking of offering Brennan a position,’ and the way they described how he had changed was quite staggering. There was a gain in confidence as he went through.

The point has been made that some of them were self-referred and some of them I leaned on fairly heavily to join the program, but I would not accept anyone who did not eventually agree. I had to get them to agree and their parents to agree for them to be in.

Maybe if I can ask Matt some questions. It is Matt’s first year in the program. All the rest are second year or are out now because they have gone on to something else. Matt, could you tell us why you went into the program and what was your work experience?

Mr Cave—I went into the program because I had feedback from my friends and they told me it was really good. I wanted to be a plumber when I am older and I just wanted to find out if I really wanted to be a plumber and do that for the rest of my life.

I wrote an application letter to a plumbing place in Seaford and they said they would take me on. Because it is in Seaford, which is a bit away from Berwick, my mum takes me every second Friday. I go for the whole day and I work there all day. I really enjoy it and I am doing really well. I found out that is what I want to do.

Also, a lot of kids in the class had the idea at the start of the year that they wanted to finish year 10 and then give it away. A lot of the kids now want to stay on and do the

VCE. They found that it is not what they want to do.

Mr Trevena—That is an interesting comment that Matt made, because when I asked the 32 kids last year, 28 of them were going to leave at the end of the year. Off the top of my head, I would say that it is probably the reverse. Probably about 25 are still at school, so they have changed their view.

Chris, who is on my right, probably had a major motivational problem in terms of getting his school work done and getting to school. It was only through talking to the people at his work placements that I found that he had some skills. He could sell ice to the Eskimos when he went into retail. Maybe Chris could tell us about some of his work placements and what he thinks of the program.

Mr Yette—I did my work placement at Brashs in Fountaingate shopping centre. I went really well there—I sold a lot of stuff and they were really good to me. So I passed on the information to my friends to do the program because it is reasonably good.

Mr Trevena—I think you have heard at least some comment from each of them but, if there is anything specific, we are happy to tell you anything we know.

Mr SAWFORD—Just a general question to you, Terry. You made mention of the tech school thing that must be put to you quite often. Do you feel that criticism of secondary school systems in Australia is valid: that 30 per cent go on to university, 70 per cent do not, yet the curriculum is heavily geared towards the 30 per cent and not the 70 per cent. Would you care to comment on that?

Mr Trevena—I agree. There are all sorts of problems. They tried to create secondary colleges in Victoria, but our school was built as a high school—even though the builder of part of it was a Mr Charles, and he is very aware of what is there. We did not have the facilities to provide a lot of the technical subjects so we are now in the process of trying to upgrade our technology areas to provide for that. It needed a real mind-shift for teachers who were used to a high school as distinct from a tech school.

The problem, which I think is a massive problem, is the fact that the response has been that vocational education has been linked directly with years 11 and 12. I think that is a disaster for several reasons. I have explained one, that students have already vanished before years 11 and 12. Also, the students who are going on to do vocational subjects in 11 and 12 are not well prepared to go into that. So I think everything has been concentrated at that level and nothing at the middle school where I believe the majority of the problem lies. So yes, I agree with your point.

Mr SAWFORD—Many on the committee would very strongly agree with the point you have made, Terry. Can I just go a bit further? Do you have any links with feeder primary schools, and what are they?

Mr Trevena—We have a very strong transition committee. We have probably six main feeder schools although I think we had students coming from 31 primary schools last year. We are a very big and growing school, but there are basically five main schools.

Mr SAWFORD—In terms of your program, it is a very concentrated program for 36 students. That is not the norm in other schools. Yours is a particular program. Can you see the program that operates at Berwick being more widespread and acceptable to some of your secondary colleagues in other schools?

Mr Trevena—Yes. There are similar programs now running at Doveton secondary college, Upwey, Upper Yarra—there are about five or six. People I have been involved with are developing similar programs. There are probably 100 around Victoria. That is my argument, that everyone is doing their own thing. There are great things going on but it is not being formalised.

Mr NEVILLE—On that last point, I mentioned before the model in Queensland but I have a worry that it might be too formalised, that they have to go to work two days a week; they have got to go to school three days a week. You talk about diversity and you say a lot of good things are coming out of it. Is that possibly the secret of it—that by having a number of models you are picking the eyes out of the system?

Mr Trevena—Without doubt. My comment is that several models can be developed, but I need expertise. It is fly by the seat of the pants stuff. I plan out courses not knowing anything about what I am supposedly doing and what is the best way to go. I am always consulting people, but we need expertise to develop several models that can be put up and this is one way we can go.

With regard to the notion of work placements, we are letting the students down at the moment because we cannot visit these students in work placements on a regular basis—we do not have the personnel. The only reason this subject started is because I was the assistant principal and have a very low teaching load and was able to teach it. There was no-one else to take them. There are no resources at all being put into it.

CHAIR—Terry, if this becomes a model for other schools, for other districts or other parts of Australia, how do you marry this concept with the proposed apprenticeships and traineeships in later years of secondary school? What sort of resourcing do you think you would need to be able to accomplish that?

Mr Trevena—I think it is an absolute natural to go into apprenticeships and traineeships. If one could imagine a model where you were going to do two days off campus and three days at school, it would lead directly into it. The skills that these students are obtaining, the experiences they are having and the things like Matt suggested—finding out what it is all about—would work in really well in terms of leading into that because I think a lot of the students would go into part-time apprenticeships and

traineeships.

In terms of what resources are needed, I am really not sure. All I know is that when I have spoken to the CES people, they just cannot believe how many clients we are dealing with with so few resources. If these people were unemployed and became assigned to a person for a case study, it would take up a huge amount of resources. There is no doubt that we need something extra in the schools and that is why I am very interested. I have already contacted two gentlemen from Monash University who lecture in vocational education to ask them to act as consultants, if I am funded, to help us develop this course. We would definitely need expertise in pathways programs and also some expertise from the academics who can point us in the direction of linking these things together because I do not believe I have the skills to do it.

CHAIR—Rod has one last question and then we will have to wrap it up.

Mr SAWFORD—Terry, if you are promoted next week to director of vocational education in Victoria, what would happen to the program at Berwick?

Mr Trevena—Good point. I am virtually out. I started it and I have now got someone else running the program basically because of the reasons I said. I think it is a fantastic idea but it was too much me. The students took a while to adjust to the new teacher—they gave me heaps for ages—but I think that has happened now. That is part of the deal: you have got to have someone coming along. That is how I operate. I try to get something going and then drum up support. If I am successful in this funding application, I will be building it into our middle school coordination team as well. They will be part of the group that has to develop this program. I do not see that as a problem. It is no longer just me.

CHAIR—On behalf of the committee, let me thank all of the students for coming along today and thank you, Terry. One of the advantages I can already see from video conferencing is that we have had this opportunity to talk to you today without our having physically to get on an aircraft and come to Victoria. By the same token, it also would have been an expensive and difficult task to ask you to get on an aircraft and fly to Canberra as it would take a day out of your busy schedule. We appreciate the time you have taken out from school to talk to us.

Thank you once again. It has been a valuable learning experience for us. We wish all of you well. We will wrap up our inquiry at the end of the June and bring down our report in August or early September. We will certainly send a copy of our report.

Mr Trevena—Thanks, Bob. I would just like to say how proud I was of the students. You have got to remember how I said these students were initially selected. I think they have done themselves very proud today in the way that they have stood up and been able to answer your questions. I really hope that you take heed of some of the things

that have been put across. I really think there has got to be a mind shift from this vocational education being just 11 and 12 and get it back into the middle schools. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—We congratulate all the young people there as well. Thank you very much.

[10.22 a.m.]

COLLINS, Mr Wayne Douglas, Coordinator, ECHO Inc., 5 Church Street, Emerald, Victoria 3782

DEWAR, Mr Timothy John Thomas, ECHO Inc., 5 Church Street, Emerald, Victoria 3782

GRIFFIN, Miss Christina Joy, ECHO Inc., 5 Church Street, Emerald, Victoria 3782

GRIFFIN, Miss Naomi May, ECHO Inc., 5 Church Street, Emerald, Victoria 3782

MARK, Mr Joshua Ben, ECHO Inc., 5 Church Street, Emerald, Victoria 3782

MITCHELL, Mr Robert, ECHO Inc., 5 Church Street, Emerald, Victoria 3782

CHAIR—We have not received a submission. Would you like to tell us what ECHO is all about, the range of its programs and how we could help young people to become more employable.

Mr Collins—ECHO is a volunteer based organisation that runs on a peer ministry model or a peer working model. Each of the teenagers who are sitting here work with their peers, both in the school and within our programs. The organisation was set up about 14 years ago. We are really an extension of the Anglican Church in Emerald. Our role is, in one sense, to work with young people and to develop a sense of hopefulness, but at a more practical level, to actually equip teenagers just to live life.

It has been interesting in the last two or three years. There has been some good research done on where teenagers are at and how they feel about society and the world around them. It has been encouraging for us to see that some of the things that we have been saying for the last 14 years are being echoed in that research. Particularly, Richard Eckersley, who has spoken to the Commission for the Future, researched in Australia. He was looking at youth suicide and he was looking at the protective factors. His research among 3,000 secondary students came up with the facts that the three biggest protective factors were a sense of connectedness at home within the family, a sense of connectedness within the school environment and a sense of connectedness spiritually, which was a surprise for the researchers in Melbourne.

At the same time, Michael Resnick, a professor in the United States that the Department of Health and Community Services brought out on a lecture tour, was conducting similar research with a view to finding out what actually makes an adult productive: what are going to be the indicators that help us understand how an adult is going to progress through life productively? He had researched 36,000 teenagers in a longitudinal survey over 10 years and came up with the same three factors. We believe

that, at one level, we are working with families intensively. We work with the school; I am an honorary chaplain there. We also work with the student welfare teachers in the school.

Certainly, we are helping young students to explore what is now a big issue for the generation that is going to take us into the next millennium and that is the whole issue of spirituality. Out of those three areas flow the programs that we have developed.

I suppose our method has been to think seriously about what we are about before embarking on programs. The programs are just a reflection of some of our thinking. Our programs are fairly typical in the sense that we run what you would call the regular youth group type activities. We run special events in the school on a weekly basis during lunchtime, which are voluntary, and have up to 100 students attending those activities each lunchtime. We certainly do some fun things, but we also discuss life issues from a Christian perspective.

We have an emergency accommodation network. We are heavily involved in helping the teenagers within our network find employment; and we have a large camping program as well as a lot of side issues. But I think the key thing for us is that we are not about just structuring some programs and then trying to launch programs out to help teenagers. We were a group of individuals that actually cared about what happened in the lives of these people sitting here and their peers.

As I have looked around Australia—and I just came back from the States two days ago after visiting Chicago and speaking to about 1,500 professionals over there—it has become quite clear to me that the programs that succeed do not necessarily succeed just because of the program. They succeed because of the people behind them and the intensity and the passion they feel about teenagers and the work that they are doing.

I would underscore most of what this group is going to say with the fact that we care about the people that we are working with on a long-term basis. We are ready to pour ourselves out for them and they know that. Teenagers catch on to that pretty quickly. My advice for the committee would be to think seriously about programs, but think more seriously about the philosophical underpinning of the programs that are put in place. I do not know whether that is comprehensive enough, Bob.

CHAIR—Thank you for that, Wayne. One of the things that we have heard over and over again as we have travelled around the country and as people have come to Canberra to talk to us is that employers look at young people's attitudes—that is the first thing they look for before they even look at skills. The employers tell us that the attitude of the young person that they are interviewing for a job is of critical importance. They tell us that sometimes they find attitudes that are less than desirable with respect to the young person trying to convince the employer that they really want a job, that they want to work and that they would like to participate in that company's activities. Can you tell us a bit

about what you do to help young people with their attitudes? Perhaps we could hear from some of your young people and what they think about attitudes and work.

Mr Collins—I think the first thing to say, before I hand over to the group to make some comments, is that we use the term ‘building in’. We actually want to build in to young people’s lives a sense of hopefulness. Hopefulness comes out of identifying positively with the society that you are part of. I think to get young people coming out of the school situation or the university environment with a positive attitude—the sort of attitude that you are talking about that employers crave—means that they have to feel connected and have to feel comfortable about the society that they are living in, and, more than that, they have to start taking ownership of it. Before someone can take ownership of the world that they live in, they have to feel positive about it and feel that it actually offers them a future and is worth hunting for.

In the States I got the privilege of hearing George Barna—the author of the Barna report. He is a bit like the American Phil Ruthven and is doing research all the time with teenagers. One of the things that has come through quite clearly in the States is that teenagers only expect to survive life now and they will be happy with a comfortable sort of laid back survival mode. I would hope that the programs that we institute have a philosophy behind them that goes beyond that and encourages teenagers that, first of all, they matter and that they are actually unique and that, second of all, they can actually make a difference in the world today.

Programs that target those two areas are crucial because we can put all the emergency accommodation networks in place and we can encourage people by teaching them life skills. We can do all of that. But unless there is a massive intensity about the fact that they can actually make a difference and that they can find methodologies and programs that they can tap into to prove to themselves that they can actually make a difference it is a bit of an uphill battle. I might hand over to the group to make some comments for anyone who wants to pick that up.

Mr Mitchell—I think attitude varies enormously amongst kids. I think all of it falls back on their parents and their upbringing because parents give them their outlook on life. I think families that encourage independence and encourage kids to get their own jobs and stuff are prepared. If they get a job on their own accord—a part-time job or something after school or on weekends—they get work place experience and people skills. I think that helps immensely in employment later on.

Miss C. Griffin—People’s attitudes towards part-time jobs and being able to get a job can come from being involved in sporting activities and community-based activities such as ECHO. I am a rover and a cub leader, so attitudes can be developed through the scouting movement as well. Having back up when you do something with younger people—for example, with the cubs—gives you a positive outlook when you can see things working with younger people, see that you are actually doing something in their

lives and feel like you are actually worth something. It gives you that added edge when you know that you are doing something.

Miss N. Griffin—I think some students have a high expectation of where they are going to end up, working or looking for jobs. It was quite interesting the other day. I was speaking to our careers teacher and a couple of other teachers about it. One thing that came out when I was talking to them is that students who get average or average to high results in school have a more optimistic view of getting a job when they leave or of actually being able to go on to further education and having a future.

But those who are receiving results that are below average or less than satisfactory are the ones who are very pessimistic about whether or not there are going to be jobs for them. Not only that, we find that they are the ones who actually drop out of school before they finish their VCE. If they are the ones dropping out before they finish their VCE, and they are very pessimistic about getting a job, you will find that they will probably get into a rut if they do not get a job fairly quickly. It will just be repetitive. Their optimism will not be there and they will not have the attitude that employers are looking for so they will not be employed.

Mr Dewar—I have just talked to my friend about the attitudes that they had towards work. I feel that they are a little bit naive about the expectations that employers have. They often do not understand the big picture and what they are to do at work and what the level and quality of work is.

Mr Mark—Building on what Tim said, when speaking to a lot of my friends at school, their attitude towards work is that you go and help an employer out and get paid for it and that is pretty much it. They do not understand that, involved in getting the job, employers are looking for qualities among young people such as showing initiative and leadership. So a lot of students think it is just a matter of walking out of school, walking out of their university course and into a job. These are very broad generalisations, I would like to add, but that is a feeling I have got from speaking to a lot of my friends at school.

Mr SAWFORD—Can I put a question to anyone. What does ECHO do? In modern society an increasing number of young people do not have adequate family or peer support. In other words, they do not have the connections that Wayne spoke about before. What sort of things can your organisation offer those young people? If you have young people like that in your Outreach centre, what sort of things do you do for them?

Miss N. Griffin—As people come into the program or they are introduced into ECHO, you find out a bit about their home lifestyle or whether or not they actually have that connectedness there. Friendships build up. With some of my friends I have actually gone through the fact that they are leaving home or they have had hassles and they do not want to live at home any more, or they have left school and want to get a job. Because it is a peer ministry, they are not only hearing what the adults have to say but they actually

get a bit of commonsense from their friends.

I have sat down and counselled people who have decided they do not want to live at home any more and they do not want to listen to what adults have to say. If it is coming from a friend who is a peer, it can be the same thing; it is just presented in a different way. I guess they start seeing a different side of the story instead of a clouded view of what they see. In doing that, it gives them a bit of hope and it makes them look at the situation.

But for some people who do not have a connectedness at home and are actually struggling in that situation, it helps them work through the issue on an emotional level and on a physical level. Sometimes it means having to go back home and work things out with their parents, which is an extremely hard step to take.

In other cases, it is the fact that that cannot happen. With peer support, I guess it is more the fact that they know they have got someone there to lean on and it is not an adult. It is not somebody that has to do it because they are being paid to do it. It is not somebody that is doing it because they are expected to do it. It is actually someone their age who kind of knows what they are going through—and the emotions—right now. In that sense, it gives them a relationship where they can come and say, 'I'm going through this' or they can just dump it on somebody and have them talk it through and work it out. And they can probably go back and challenge them about how it is going to happen or what is going to happen about their situation.

Mr Collins—I might just make a comment. One of the hardest things about the programs that we run is the fact that they are run as peer ministries. Sometimes they might be a year or two out from the peers that they are working with. What Naomi is saying is crucial and that is a 15-year-old is going to listen to a 17-year-old not to a 21- or 22-year-old who is paid to do a job; they are not going to listen to a 45-year-old, like me, who is a parent because we are just like mum and dad. In a sense, it is to have someone that they can trust—who is part of the solid network, who has got a reputation and allows them to listen to someone who talks their language—and who is connected to a group and has some solid support so that, if the wheels do fall off, they know there is some backing to what their friend says. It is not like picking up gossip in the schoolyard. It is not like someone in the schoolyard saying, 'Yes, I understand what you are going through.' It is a bit more than that. It is someone who says, 'Yes, I know what you are going through. I have seen this happen before. Here are some suggestions. But if things go radically wrong, there is a network behind me that can actually help you.'

Mr SAWFORD—This is a youth employment inquiry. In terms of talking to young people in your organisation, what sorts of things do you find work in encouraging and linking up young people with employers and job placements?

Mr Collins—Let us start with one of the things that has not worked and that is the

employment agencies which have come into the town and opened up a part-time office. They found that teenagers just did not attend. They tried that for a while and closed down. What has happened is that kids have used the informal network where they know that, if they come to us, we will listen to them and talk to them. We usually get to hear about their situation through their friends. We will actually try and link them up informally with a job prospect through a government agency or through an employer that we know of. We are now getting employers who actually ring us and say, 'I am looking for someone to do X, Y and Z. Do you know anyone who will fit the bill?' So we have become a bit of an ad hoc employment agency. I think the reason that people—both from the students end and the employers end—are coming to us is that they know that we know the kids that we are dealing with. It is not as if it is a cold call.

One interesting thing I found out only recently was that students just did not like going to an employment office not because they did not believe that the employment agency could not find them a job but because it is a cold environment. It is an adult environment and it is a difficult environment for a teenager to step into and feel confident with. Whereas if there is someone they know in a local community—whether it is a suburb or a community based organisation—they are far more likely to come in and talk to them. In a sense, you are actually buying in much more to the person that you know locally than someone who is coming into an agency.

When I stepped off the plane the other day, the first phone call I got from one of our youth workers was not, 'It is good to have you back from America. This has happened and that has happened' it was 'Chris found a job' and everyone was just celebrating that. This was a long-term unemployed kid who lacked motivation. We had worked with him for a long time and everyone thought this was absolutely fantastic. There is much more of an emotional buy-in to where the kids are at when local agencies are dealing with them.

Mr SAWFORD—Tell me about the kids you come into contact with that give your organisation the flick?

Mr Collins—There are kids who give our organisation the flick and at that level we cannot work with them. That is the reality.

Mr SAWFORD—Can you give us some reasons why that is so?

Mr Collins—Yes. I think there are probably three big ones. Firstly, we are a Christian organisation and, for some kids, that is an area they are not going to touch. We have a particular feel to us that some teenagers will just not come near. Secondly, for some kids to actually get involved in our programs that are not their scene, we are not all things to all teenagers. That is a reality. Thirdly, some of the kids we come into contact with will tab into our programs so we will have guys rolling up stoned or drunk on the fringe of some of our Friday night senior stuff, but they will not actually take the next step and start building relationships. They will come along and enjoy the program but will

not build relationships. There is not a lot we can do about that.

I think the thing I would say is that we are not all things to all people. I do not think any agency can be. We certainly work with a specific group and a specific type of teenager. It is not necessarily limited to socioeconomic grouping or academic ability; it is just a particular sort of person.

Mr SAWFORD—Do any of the young people wish to make a comment on that question?

Mr Dewar—Yes. I guess we are not limited to the programs, either. Naomi said that we talk to our friends and give them counselling. If we have a problem with our friends we can go to Wayne and ask his advice so that we can pass it on. We are not limited to the people who come to our programs and do not like our programs or do not like the people they get up-front and what we are saying. We also do other things and through that we are helped by ECHO to support the other people, our friends.

Miss N. Griffin—I can give a classic demonstration of that. We had a girl who was involved in ECHO and she kind of stepped out of that ring—she was a friend of mine through school. She went through a very difficult time and at school I actually had the opportunity to speak to her and to counsel her. She came to me quite often for advice and things like that and often I did not have the answer. I used to come back to ECHO and say, ‘This is the situation. How do you deal with this?’ It took probably a few months for her to work it through. She moved out of home, she moved back in, she moved out. But she decided she did not want to come to ECHO—it was more like an emotional feeling. She had already used up the resources there and she did not want to have to face the people who knew her. But through school, just the opportunity I had with her, she was able to work through the same issues but in a different environment.

Mr NEVILLE—I would like to go back to the American book you referred to earlier. You said that the American experience is that a lot of kids are falling into dole type payments as a survival mechanism. Is that experience starting to manifest itself in Australia? If it is, to what extent is that debilitating young people in getting themselves ready for work or seeking work?

Mr Collins—I do not think I have enough experience nationally to make a general statement on it but locally it is certainly the case. Because we have been where we are at for 14 or 15 years, we have been able to see trends change. One of the things that is very, very clear is that the generation coming through now, who are going to take us into the next millennium, have a very different view on the future to the teenagers we were working with 10 years ago. They are far less optimistic and certainly much more comfortable with just getting a university place or just getting employment whereas, 10 years ago, teenagers were very aware of the specifics that they wanted out of life.

The other thing that has come through quite strongly is that teenagers now are willing to live with incredible contradictions, both in their lifestyle and in the statements that they make through it. Integrity has become not integrity as to whether I lie or I cheat. Integrity now means, 'Have I got integrity towards myself?' There is very much more focus on the individual and integrity has taken on a whole new meaning.

My generation saw integrity as integrity across the board. Teenagers now talk about integrity and then go off and do things that just curl my hair. They do not believe that that falls into the integrity basket. They are some of the things that I have seen. I do not know that I have enough national experience to make a general comment. They are just local comments.

But it is certainly the American experience, particularly in the major cities. I was in Chicago and Los Angeles and they may be a few years ahead of the other minor cities in the States but, in visiting a couple of schools and talking to workers over there, they are convinced that just the whole ethos and feel of teenage culture over there has changed dramatically. One of them said to me, 'Is it any wonder when our kids sit down and watch the news each night? It just confirms that the people they should be trusting are letting them down every step of the way.' It is a very media literate society and, in a sense, they are getting a biased view of life through the multimedia that they expose themselves to.

Mr NEVILLE—But are they more or less motivated to look for work or see a work ethic as desirable than, say, the teenagers of 10 or 15 years ago? Even though they have these mixed up values you have talked about, are they more or less motivated to want work, look for work and see the work ethic as desirable?

Mr Collins—The answer is yes. Again, Barna's research is American research. I do not know of any recent Australian research that would help us. Varma's work in the States over the last three months found that teenagers want the things that their parents are experiencing not having. They want a stable relationship for life—they want one partner; they want financial security; and they certainly want stable employment. They are the wants of the teenagers now so they certainly want the same things that you and I wanted. They certainly aspire to the same things that we want.

An interesting glitch that came out of some of the work over there is that, when they first did the research, one of the things that kids wanted to do was to achieve academically. They were very interested to find out why that was so when, on the other hand, they were talking about the massive competition for college places and for work places. They found that for kids 16-plus, one of the reasons they wanted to achieve academically was because it was a way of getting noticed by their parents. Their parents saw academic achievement as important and would actually pay attention to the kids when they started talking about school work. That was an interesting side issue.

But certainly their needs and wants are exactly the same as ours. So I think there is

great hope because human beings are human beings. It is a matter of working out what their culture is at the moment and setting up whatever we need to set up to deal with that.

Mrs ELSON—Wayne, I was interested in the program you told us about before where you go into the schools in the lunch hour and you get up to 100 students coming to listen. What message are you portraying to get 100 children to give up their lunch break? Are you there just as an information source to tell them, for example, that Naomi is in school as a leader so they know who to turn to if they do have problems? Is that the whole idea of going into the schools—to make them aware of the people who can help them in the community?

Mr Collins—The program we run in the school is a program that is running in about 130 schools around Australia now. Youth Dimensions is the organisation that provides the program. They are a Christian based organisation. The program is designed for youth workers, particularly out of churches, to go into a school and they are run predominantly for junior to mid-highs. It is a fairly exciting lunchtime program of activities in a classroom and they then present a message on the Christian lifestyle—in other words, what is important in life.

It is a voluntary program. We have teachers drop in to the program. They can understand kids coming in for the entertainment side of it, but what they cannot understand is that kids will actually voluntarily sit still for the message. I think one of the biggest hooks is that teenagers want to hear some real stuff from adults about what life is. They certainly go to life skill classes and that is teaching you how to live, but this is a challenging message each lunchtime about: where are you at, what are your values, what are you on about, what do you think about in terms of life in general? There is particularly a message on probably five occasions during the year that is a fairly clear Christian message.

It is interesting, from my generation who did not want to listen to the church, that this generation is very open to listening to what any denomination or faith has to say. They are issues that they are exploring; they are free from denominational hooks. They do not buy into Christianity necessarily as their first port of call when they are checking these things out. They will try a whole different range of areas to tap into their emotions and their feelings about what the world is about, who they are and how they got here. They are very inquisitive.

CHAIR—Wayne and young people, we are going to have to go now. We thank you very much for coming to talk to us today. This is a historic occasion because it is the first time that the House of Representatives has used videoconferencing techniques during the course of a public inquiry. We found it very useful. We thank all of you for coming.

I want particularly to take this opportunity of thanking the Berwick campus of Monash University for allowing us, remotely, to use their facilities to allow us to have this

video conferencing today.

Thank you, Wayne and young people. We very much appreciate your input. I am particularly impressed by your work and by the outcomes that you achieve. I wish you all the success in the future.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Sawford):

That this committee authorises publication of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day, including publication on the electronic parliamentary database.

Committee adjourned at 10.57 a.m.