



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

MONDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2000

LAVERTON

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Wednesday, 1 November 2000

Members: Mr Lieberman (*Chair*), Mrs Draper, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Mr Katter, Mr Lloyd, Mr Melham, Mr Quick, Mr Snowdon and Mr Wakelin

Members in attendance: Mrs Draper, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Mr Lieberman, Mr Lloyd, Mr Melham, Mr Quick, Mr Snowdon and Mr Wakelin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The present and ongoing needs of country and metropolitan urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Among other matters, the Committee will consider:

1. the nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians, including ways to more effectively deliver services considering the special needs of these people;
2. ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements;
3. the situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas, especially relating to health, education, employment, and homelessness (including access to services funded from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program);
4. the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including, where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged;
5. opportunities for economic independence in urban areas; and
6. urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties associated with urban areas.

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Committee met at 3.28 p.m.

Participants

CONDON, Ms Sally Anne, Member, Wongatha Wonganarra Aboriginal Corporation

DOUGLAS, Ms Jan, Member, Wongatha Wonganarra Aboriginal Corporation

McEVOY, Mr Phil, Member, Leonora-Laverton Cross Cultural Association

THOMAS, Councillor Murray Gilbert, President, Shire of Laverton

Councillor THOMAS—I welcome the chairman and committee members. From the shire's point of view, we feel that the shire is probably doing as much as, if not more than, some other local governments in catering for the needs of our indigenous population, especially when it comes to the services that we currently provide. I refer in particular to our road services to the Aboriginal communities. We have got several fairly remote Aboriginal communities here and our roads are in very good order, especially our main Great Central Road, which is part of the Outback Highway, running from here to Warburton. Those 450 kilometres of the Laverton Shire are in excellent order and the road is quite capable of being driven on by normal two-wheel-drive vehicles.

The road to the north, to the Mulga Queen community, is quite good. It has just had a lot of work done on it. The road to Mount Margaret is also very good. Cosmo Newbery is serviced by the Great Central Road, which runs past the community. Unfortunately, the Cosmo community decided that they wanted the road to bypass them. I felt that that was something they might have thought better of. However, that is how they wanted it, so the road goes around them. Really, they could have had it going through their community and probably could have reaped a bit of benefit from sales of artefacts and fuel.

Our swimming pool here is first-class. In terms of use, there is probably about 90 per cent Aboriginal use, especially by children in the summertime. The shire supports the Wongatha night patrol, which has only just started. It keeps an eye open at night for people who have had a bit too much to drink or who have been petrol sniffing. The shire also intends to support a youth worker, which has not yet come to fruition but will shortly. We hope that will address some of the problems with boredom on the part of Aboriginal kids.

There is probably not much else I can say on behalf of the shire. Quite a lot of Aboriginals now live in town. Since the mining company left the town and took out a lot of the transportable accommodation, a lot of the other houses have been purchased by private individuals. There are quite a lot of Aboriginal people living in accommodation owned either by Homeswest or by various other people around town.

CHAIR—Thank you, Murray. The committee is especially honoured to be here in your shire at the commencement of your centenary. I think the celebrations start on Friday. On behalf of all members of the committee, I thank you for your hospitality and for your generous and warm welcome and also congratulate you, your council, staff and people in this area for their contribution to this great nation. The centenary of Federation is coming up next year, so you

were ahead of the pack in that regard. I understand that Barry Haase, who is one of the members of our committee as well as your local member, is moving his residence here for the next few days in order to join in the celebrations. We are very envious of that because I can imagine that this town will open its heart to people and I am sure people will have a wonderful time. Our visit today is largely informal. We are here to listen to communities such as your own. Today we were in Kalgoorlie, tomorrow we will be in Murrin Murrin and the next day we will be in Perth.

Our visit this week marks the commencement of an inquiry across the whole of Australia, which will go for some months, certainly well into next year. The reason for the inquiry is that the minister, John Herron, has asked this parliamentary committee—which is made up of members of parliament from all the political parties in the House of Representatives, that is, the Labor, Liberal and National parties—to have a look at the way in which the services the taxpayer of Australia is providing to indigenous people are working in urban communities such as yours. We will also be looking at the services in the larger cities as well—in Melbourne and Sydney—but the urban communities in regional Australia probably have a greater involvement than any other community in the concentrated way in which indigenous people live part of their lives, if not all of their lives now, in places like Kalgoorlie.

The government is now expending a record amount on indigenous services: \$2.3 billion. From our discussions this morning—and I am sure we will learn about this this afternoon—there is a very great sense of enthusiasm for developing partnerships that work and that ensure that indigenous people can access services well and can have them provided as quickly as possible from the ground up. That is the strong passion of all of my colleagues on this committee, and we know Senator Herron intends that that should be the case. But it is not that easy to achieve.

Today, we hope we can swap some wisdom and experience. We would appreciate it very much if the shire would like to remain as part of the forum we are having this afternoon. Murray, you are most welcome to lead it and to participate in it. Take whatever role you like in the discussions. We have four community groups coming in. It will be a roundtable informal discussion, with all of us sitting together. Thanks once again, Murray, and it is a delight to meet you.

Proceedings suspended from 3.35 p.m. to 4.03 p.m.

CHAIR—Ladies and gentlemen, I will reopen the meeting. This is an informal roundtable meeting. The committee welcomes Phil McEvoy, representing the Leonora-Laverton Cross-Cultural Association. It is very good to see you, Phil, and we appreciate the effort you have made to be here. Would you give us a quick overview of what your organisation is all about?

Mr McEVOY—My organisation is a three-way partnership between state and federal governments and the mining industry. On my staff is a lady who runs training programs for Curtin University and an Aboriginal employment and economic development officer, who goes around the community. We place Aboriginal people into jobs. If they are not quite job ready, we arrange training, which can be in literacy, numeracy, computers, et cetera, and when they get into a job we can support them there by mentoring, et cetera. We also stick our nose into any other community initiatives that are looking for support. That is basically what the LLCCA is all about.

CHAIR—How many people are currently being assisted by your organisation, Phil?

Mr McEVOY—Since 1997, approximately 200 people have been placed in full-time employment and probably 380 people have received training of some form or another with us.

CHAIR—How are you funded?

Mr McEVOY—We are funded primarily through the mining industry, and that includes Placer (Granny Smith), Sons of Gwalia, Anglogold and Roche Bros. They pay my wage; they also pay the ongoing costs to run the centre—phone, fuel, et cetera. The WA Department of Training and Employment funds what they call an AEEDO, an Aboriginal economic and employment development officer, whose job is to place people in employment. The other one, as I said, is Curtin University.

CHAIR—How do people get referred to you? Is it by word of mouth or is there a more formal way of doing it?

Mr McEVOY—No, it is by word of mouth.

CHAIR—Is there a minimum age for entry?

Mr McEVOY—No, the main employer is the mining industry in this region. We are trying to change that, actually. Some mines have no restriction—16 is okay—and others have a blanket 18 and up.

CHAIR—From some of the documents you have sent us—and I appreciate that—I notice that you have been pioneering a pre-employment training approach. As I understand it, people leaving school are seen not to be job ready and your organisation has obviously identified that. I suppose that by not being job ready they were not able to successfully fulfil the entrance into job situation, so you have now developed a technique for pre-job training. Could you give us a quick overview of that, please?

Mr McEVOY—Yes. A lot of people leave school at the end of year 10 but their education is often equivalent to, say, year 7, and they need ongoing training in literacy and numeracy. Generally on a mine site there are labouring jobs—menial jobs—but people have to have a certain level of numeracy and literacy skills. They have got to be able to handle safety documents and inductions and all those sorts of things. So there is a bit of a gap there, and I am not just talking about kids. There could be other things like extreme shyness, very low self-esteem, low work ethic, or low motivation. Let us hope that the development training will kick-start this kind of thing and get people into jobs.

CHAIR—How long is a typical pre-employment training session?

Mr McEVOY—A certificate of general education could take four to five months. It includes computer skills, et cetera. It is a whole new thing for us. I have managed to get a little bit of money from the government so far to fund this kind of thing. We have got about 12 people over there tonight. They are doing their computer course. Tomorrow night, they will be doing literacy. So it is an ongoing thing. I could not tell you exactly how long it will take. Everybody is at a different level.

CHAIR—So you have a hands on, almost case by case approach?

Mr McEVOY—Yes. And we are open all day. If someone wants to do some extra work, the computers are there.

CHAIR—Is it too early to get any feedback on this program as to how effective it is?

Mr McEVOY—So far we have only been going for two months and we have placed three people in full-time employment—people who were not actually looking for full-time employment at the start of the program—and a couple of casual people. So I would say it has been very effective.

CHAIR—From your experience, without this pre-training education, is it your view that the probability is that they would not have made it?

Mr McEVOY—Extremely low; they would stay on, say, CDEP—perhaps for years.

CHAIR—It sounds like a very valuable innovation.

Mr McEVOY—The reason is that really capable and talented people are already out there working in the mines, and we have to take that next step.

CHAIR—I know you are not here to bag education in this state, but as a committee we have a duty to look at all things, even though sometimes they might be a little embarrassing to some people. It is not meant personally; it is not a judgment. How widespread is this recognition that indigenous people are coming out of secondary schools not ready for employment? Anecdotally, do you think this is unique to this region?

Mr McEVOY—No, it is not. I have been to plenty of conferences.

CHAIR—It is widespread?

Mr McEVOY—Yes. I cannot see how anyone who is actually involved in the system could not be aware of it.

Mr QUICK—How do we rectify that? Do we set up something totally different because the mainstream education system has let people down?

Mr McEVOY—Yes, some type of alternative schooling. Aboriginal people, in my experience—and my experience is only in the goldfields—are terrific with their hands and are very talented. But the curriculum here is purely academic. So anybody who is struggling with English and maths basically thinks they are hopeless at school. In the old days, there used to be manual arts and design technology teachers. There is a big shortage of those teachers.

CHAIR—Metalwork and woodwork.

Mr McEVOY—Yes. Kids who were not good at academic work were often very good at that, and we are finding that here. There has recently been an initiative by a couple of mining companies to get a bloke up here for one day a week. There is a beautifully equipped manual arts room which has been shut for four years because we cannot get a teacher up here. This chap has come in, and kids who were hopeless at school and not turning up are there every Thursday to do manual arts. They have got good skills and they are proud of what they are doing. All of a sudden, they are not useless at school anymore, just at those subjects that they are not good at.

Ms HOARE—Can I ask what has happened to the girls?

Mr McEVOY—They are in a class as well.

Ms HOARE—There would not be as high a proportion of girls being trained to go into the mining industry?

Mr McEVOY—Almost. I have found it is very much harder with the girls. They are much closer to their families and do not want to be away from home for very long. It is very difficult.

Mr QUICK—Going back to the education system, my experience has been that quite a few indigenous people speak four or five languages and English is their fifth. We have still got the education system centred basically around an Anglo-Saxon view of education, haven't we?

Mr McEVOY—Sure.

Mr QUICK—Is anyone doing it better than others?

Mr McEVOY—No. All the kids who I know here have got a good grasp of English. It is related to the isolation. For a lot of the teachers we get, it is a last resort. They could not get a job anywhere else, so they come to Laverton, do a year or so, and count the days down from when they get here. There is that problem. I think they need to pay them a bit more, in order to get the good people to come here.

Mr QUICK—Does local government have a role? Does the mining company? Do you somehow get a consortia together to say, 'Our kids should have just as good an education and just as good a health system as other areas. We have the financial capacity, because we are generating an enormous amount of wealth in the area that contributes to Australia's wellbeing. Someone should put their hand up to say, "We are going to have the best teachers, not the third- or fourth-best"?'?

The shire initially made a presentation about just how good the roads are here. Having spent a lot of time in the Northern Territory, where local government has been appallingly lax in putting decent roads out to indigenous and remote communities, I commend the council. It amazes me, stuck out in the middle of nowhere—in Tasmanian terms—to see such fine facilities for the community. So do you bypass the system and set in place something, as you say, for these kids? If they have got good hand and eye coordination, why not bring in the experts, generate some job creation and do something different, because the system is letting them down?

Mr McEVOY—Like I said, we get this chap up one day a week, but that is not sustainable. The mining companies are paying for that, but that is always dependent on gold prices and that kind of thing. A couple of years ago in Kalgoorlie we had a committee that met to solve the problem of this manual arts room. In the end, the education department agreed to give us a manual arts teacher. The mining companies were going to pay the top-up to make it more attractive to get someone, but that person never materialised, because there is a shortage. I do not think a big enough priority is put on it. If you had a chap full time in there, you could be bringing people in from four or five surrounding schools, and you would solve that problem.

Mr QUICK—Finding that money there would mean that there would be less social dislocation in another area, which would mean you would not necessarily have to pay as many police to be out there to keep the lid on some communities. There is a youth suicide problem that has been generated, and a whole lot of other things that are costing a hell of a lot more money than the amount needed to pay for a decent teacher to generate something innovative for the kids. So how do we get the community, as close-knit as it is, to say, 'Let's get the money out of 10 bags and put it in one bag'? Rather than trying to go to 10 individual, solo mentality, little groups—none of which have enough money because there's pressure on them—how do we get out of the square and think differently?

Mr McEVOY—Sorry, I do not understand what you mean—where would the money come from?

Mr QUICK—My understanding is that there are lots of bags of money in the community—this is the way the communities operate. There are lots of government agencies funding various groups within the community. Each of them always says they do not have enough money, because they have this solo mentality—there is no interagency approach to solving solutions. The bureaucrats do not like that, because you have got criteria and submissions—it is all that sort of way to operate, rather than looking at a holistic approach, and saying, 'Our kids are underachieving, they petrol sniff, they substance abuse, they occasionally play up, the police have got to go and sort them out.' There is this deficit cost to communities. It might be, for example, \$50,000. All you are asking for is \$6,000 to get a woodwork teacher up here. Perhaps an additional \$6,000 to generate a whole lot of things for these kids would mean you do not spend \$50,000 picking them up somewhere else down the track later on, as a cost to society.

Mr McEVOY—As a matter of fact, that is exactly what is happening here as far as getting a youth coordinator for the town is concerned. All the agencies in town have got together, we are all part of the Laverton interagency forum, and we are getting pretty close to getting that youth coordinator here. In that way, that is working, but I think we really need the education department to help fix that problem.

Mr QUICK—And if they don't, what happens? Are we just going to say it is all too hard? What do we do?

Councillor THOMAS—There is one way, especially when it comes to state governments that are collecting the mining royalties. If the mining royalties, or a percentage of them, were coming directly back to the area from which they were gained for education, health, road construction—you name it—then that could be one way. There are all sorts of things that that could be directly channelled back into. We have fronted this one with the state government and

the Premier but they are not very interested in listening. However, I still think it is one way around it.

Mr McEVOY—I agree wholeheartedly. It is actually what happens in New Guinea. You get tax credits from the area. The company I work for, Granny Smith Placer, pay \$2 million to \$3 million a year in gold royalties. If a percentage of that money came back to the communities where the wealth is created it would solve a lot of the problems.

Mr WAKELIN—Phil, you made recommendations about traineeships with small businesses and Aboriginal organisations and you made the point that the significant barrier is the strict guidelines for wage funding subsidies, particularly CDEP. It seems inherently practical and sensible. Can you just develop that a little bit? It is very well written here but can you talk a little about that?

Mr McEVOY—A lot of people are on CDEP, and have been and will be for long time. There are a lot of terrific traineeships around in retail, administration, mechanical areas and that kind of thing. A condition for someone taking one of those traineeships is that they must come off CDEP. That makes it hard for an organisation that cannot afford \$20,000 a year to fund that position. If that person could stay on CDEP for the 12 months, he or she would then have a certificate or a traineeship and be very employable even if that particular organisation could not afford to keep them on.

Mr WAKELIN—That is a matter of continuity, work ethic, skill development—the whole picture can build communities. You have made the point a number of times.

Mr McEVOY—And when people receive training in CDEP it is often not structured; it is ad hoc. But if you have actual modules to follow it seems an obvious way to go. Up here they get \$194 a week on CDEP. It makes it so much easier for an organisation to take someone on.

Mr WAKELIN—In your recommendation 3—the third dot point—there is the issue of driver's licences and the Post Office trying to keep up with fines and where everything is ending up—the transient nature of things. Obviously it is very difficult. Are the courts able to accommodate some of this stuff? You made the point about an extraordinary driver's licence which, I presume, would be employment related, or something like that, and which is something that the courts can do. How do the courts handle that here?

Mr McEVOY—What people really need is an extraordinary licence before actually applying for any job. It just makes them so much more employable. I am not talking about when they have killed somebody or something like that—it is just traffic fines. About half the people who come to see me pay thousands of dollars in fines and they are not going to get a licence back for a long time. Generally, we cannot get them jobs. They cannot pay the fines because they do not have jobs.

Mr WAKELIN—Yes, so it is a circle.

CHAIR—They could probably do community service at weekends if there was a structured community service obligation.

Mr WAKELIN—On community service, that would be probably more easily said than done, wouldn't it, in terms of the structure which would make that work?

Mr McEVOY—Yes. You have to have people to run that and they have got to work weekends.

Mr WAKELIN—Particularly in small communities in terms of who and where.

CHAIR—It is a mixture of all—if your worship pleases.

Ms HOARE—I have a question about the extension of the CDEP program to provide a wage subsidy to employers for traineeships and apprenticeships. I used to be involved in the delivery of those types of programs through the CES—the delivery of the Aboriginal training programs—and they worked very well. Not only did they give the young person the opportunity to work for a proper wage but they also, in a regional centre, gave an employer an opportunity to have Aboriginal people working for them, and that proved to work very well. What you are recommending here is a reversion to those types of programs but under the auspices of CDEP as a wage subsidy?

Mr McEVOY—Yes.

Ms HOARE—I just wanted to clarify that one. On the other one, when you are talking about where your funding comes from, have you ever applied, under the tendering program, to be a Job Network provider?

Mr McEVOY—That is a bit of a sore point, actually. The previous manager forgot to do that and we should have been involved in the last round. That would have ensured that the association had the funding attached to that for years to come. We actually do everything that a Job Network provider does.

Ms HOARE—Yes. It sounds as though you do.

Mr McEVOY—We do even a little bit more but we do not get any funding for placements. I am currently talking to Mission Employment, who have the contract for this area, and they will come to an arrangement with us to share the Job Network funding for the people that we place.

Ms HOARE—That is great.

Mr McEVOY—The other thing, just on the CDEP positions: you will visit Mount Margaret tomorrow. They have got an administration office and a general store that they have just reopened there. You could have a retail trainee in the general store and a couple of people in admin there still on CDEP but receiving top-up and, as you say, receiving a worthwhile wage.

Ms HOARE—A proper wage for a proper job.

Mr McEVOY—But they cannot afford to pay it all themselves.

Mr LLOYD—My point is more a statement than a question. I just wanted to thank you for your submission. The thing that I would like to point out—and I think it is great—is that you have actually made recommendations. We often get lots of submissions and lots of things wrong but nobody actually bothers to make recommendations where they see improvements. I think your recommendations are well thought out. I have seen the problems you have highlighted in so many other communities all around Australia with mining companies, but I would say that I think that your association seems to be a lot more successful in finding people work and in the number of Aboriginal people who you have got into work than some of the other associations. Well done.

Mr McEVOY—I think there is room for a lot more centres around like that, yes.

Mr QUICK—How many unemployed people are in this area? What numbers of people are out of work who would like to get into work?

Mr McEVOY—I could not put a number on it.

Mr QUICK—One thousand? Five hundred?

Mr McEVOY—No. In Laverton, there are maybe 30 or 40, so it is not a big number. Those are people who are looking for a job. There are maybe 200 or 300 in Leonora—not a huge number.

Mr QUICK—If your recommendations were accepted and funding was available, what sort of hard-core unemployed do you think you would end up with in this area?

Mr McEVOY—If they came along to do the training, I guess the numbers left would be very small. We currently place 40 to 50 a year in employment. I think we could increase that to 75, say. And I am only talking about \$30,000 to \$40,000. You have only got to get two or three people into employment out of that. They come off CDP, they start paying tax and that is paid for, so it is not big money.

Ms HOARE—What is the retention rate of that 40 or 50 people in employment?

Mr McEVOY—Not extremely high—33 per cent, perhaps. There are a whole lot of factors that come into that. I could probably nearly tell by now whether someone is going to be around for a while. But a lot of these people are young and, like any young kids, they get itchy feet and move on. I find that, once someone has gone out to work and developed the disciplines and things, though generally they may leave that job, they will go and get another one somewhere else without waiting too long.

Mr HAASE—I believe that while I was talking to the chairman you in fact answered the question. I wanted to know how many of these people receive training, secure a job and stay in the job, and what abandonment of job percentage there is. I am interested to know that.

Mr McEVOY—I was just saying that I think retention is perhaps 30 to 40 per cent.

Mr HAASE—You were talking about Job Network. You are aware of the New Apprenticeships scheme and that it provides employers with \$4,000 per annum for each employee?

Mr McEVOY—Yes.

Mr HAASE—Is that something employers in the area are aware of?

Mr McEVOY—Generally, for mining companies, \$4,000 doesn't make any difference. If they are going to make the commitment, they are going to pay these guys \$25,000 a year and probably another \$15,000 to accommodate them; \$4,000 is not an incentive to them, really. They will claim it and they are made aware of it—that is our job—but it is not a driving force. Apprenticeships, to me, have got to be pushed a lot harder in the industry. You get a young bloke or lady come along and they are thinking four years ahead with an apprenticeship. Traineeships are good, but a lot of kids just want enough money to buy their first car; with apprenticeships they come with the right attitude and they are looking down the track. I think that is about the most meaningful thing the mining industry could do for Aboriginal employment. We have five young blokes out at Granny Smith who are going like trains; they are great. I think apprenticeships are the long-term answer. I don't know why more apprentices are not taken on in the goldfields—I know apprenticeships are offered in the Pilbara.

Mr HAASE—We seem to have spent most of this discussion time finding solutions to providing better incentives, new schemes, different packaging et cetera. It always concerns me that we rarely look at identifying the motivation of the individual, be it the student or the family of the student. Sure, the quality of teachers is such that possibly they would scrape to get a job elsewhere. We all know how difficult it is to get teaching staff of any calibre into remote areas regardless, I might say, of salary and level, and much of that difficulty, I am sure you would agree, is due to the often disrupted nature of remote area classes. I wonder what your thoughts are on a cooperative solution and what we might do to encourage more personal contribution on the part of students and parents of students so that they value education. I say this in light of the very obvious problem today that secondary school leavers are not equipped satisfactorily to take up even the most basic paid work in the mining industry. When are we going to really give some teeth to the rules regarding truancy?

Mr McEVOY—I know it is a huge problem, and so is transiency. I don't know how you are going to get kids to go to school. A lot of the parents have bad memories of school, or they think it is something the teacher should handle. We have got a new principal here who is doing a very good job. He goes around knocking on doors and saying, 'Why isn't your child at school?' Short of doing that, I don't know how to get the community involved with the school. Only about three to four per cent of parents of Aboriginal children attending the school come down to the school.

Mr HAASE—I believe there is a fairly successful situation in Wiluna. The principal there seems to have a fairly good attendance record. A great deal of effort goes in, of course, with a feeding and clothing program with the assistance of CDEP amongst the local adult population. But that seems to be equipping primary school students and into the first years of secondary reasonably well. It strikes me that it has to be a two-way street—

Mr McEVOY—Yes, of course it does. That occurs here, the breakfast and lunch—

Mr HAASE—You have breakfast and lunch?

Mr McEVOY—Yes, that is a partnership between the mining companies and Wongatha/Wonganarra CDEP workers. One of the things is that school has to be made more interesting. The standard curriculum is not doing the job.

Mr HAASE—Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR—Phil, to wind up, tell us briefly the story about how the young apprentices are motivating some of the younger people through basketball. You were telling me about that before. Do you want to share that little story? It is a nice note to finish up on.

Mr McEVOY—There are five young people out there—four blokes and one young lady—who have all come through the Laverton school system. A lot of the local kids actually still know them, so we bring them in here to talk to the kids and the kids ask them all sorts of structured questions—what they are going to do with their money and all that sort of thing. That is always a bit stuffy and forced and we found that basketball seems to be more the go. Kids love basketball, and they are just starting to mix with our guys and to get to know them. Really, the guys are providing a role model where there is often a bit of a vacuum.

CHAIR—So it is a sort of mentoring system that you are developing, using the young apprentices?

Mr McEVOY—Yes, and it has been fantastic for them as well.

CHAIR—And it is in a voluntary capacity too.

Mr McEVOY—Yes, they are very keen to help out.

CHAIR—I thought that would be a nice note to finish on. Phil, thank you very much and good luck with your work. We will look forward to keeping in touch with you. Ms Douglas and Ms Condon, as you have gathered, we are having an informal discussion and we appreciate very much your coming along. Thank you for being with us. Would you like to give us a brief overview of what your organisation is all about?

Ms CONDON—Wongatha has been an Aboriginal community organisation, in various forms, for over 20 years in this town. It has been registered for many years with the Aboriginal registrar. The core business at the moment of the organisation is housing. We have on the outskirts of town Wongatha village, which we manage, and we also have a number of houses in the town area which we manage that are Homeswest and some that are ours. We do municipal housing. Through ATSIC we also do an Indigenous Women's Initiative program in art and culture. We do a NAIDOC program. In the past we have done sport and recreation; that has not been available this year. We have done a number of cultural preservation programs. Last year we completed a fairly major NAHS—National Aboriginal Health Strategy—program initiative at the village with new and renovated housing and infrastructure. We have been unsuccessful this year in our bid for more housing, which is something that Sally might talk about more..

Through Aboriginal affairs we were traditionally funded for infrastructure type activities. That has now changed and it has been moved over to the ministry of housing. We have some moneys that seem to be quite tenuous and which come through from the ministry of housing to cover some aspects of the housing management. Then we have wardens funding which comes from AAD, which has just started, and we have a lotteries commission vehicle, which the community made a considerable contribution towards.

We are an outpost of the regional CDEP. Currently, there are 26 places in the waiting list. We have an environmental health worker, through the Department of Health. We run the Centrelink agency here. As Phil mentioned, we also provide a breakfast and lunch program in partnership with the mining companies to provide food for the schoolkids. In the past we had a family violence prevention program through Family and Children's Services but that has been a difficult road to follow and I think it will end quite shortly. It has been a fairly inappropriate project for this area.

We also have a longstanding partnership with Curtin University in Perth and we have fortnightly visits by volunteers and various staff members. That has been developed over a number of years and is supported by mining companies. Placer, in particular, supports that initiative. The focus of that has largely been on cross-cultural activities. A lot of our volunteers are overseas students. Quite a number of them have done significant projects for us. One young medical student from the States did an adolescent diabetes study and we also recently had a placement by a social work student from RMIT in Melbourne, who did a fairly significant youth needs analysis for the area.

Those are the sorts of things we do. We also do general advocacy. I work for a management committee of local Aboriginal people who are elected annually. We also run an MSP program—management support—through the housing ministry. We have a number of CDEP trainees who have been able to bypass what are huge issues for us of training and CDEP. They are training in construction under a supervisor and are currently doing capital renovations to some houses in town. That is the core of what we do.

CHAIR—Sally, do you want to make your contribution now?

Ms CONDON—Although we have houses in town, we still have a lot of people who need to be housed—single people and couples. Most of the housing is for families, so we still have overcrowding. As Jan said, this year we applied for funding for single persons accommodation but we did not get that. Housing is still a major matter. Funding is a major need. We have transient people who come in and live with family and we need something to cater for those people.

CHAIR—Could you give us a snapshot of the size of the population that you try to serve? How many indigenous people would you estimate that your demand comes from?

Ms DOUGLAS—I think we usually say that it is around 300, as a stable group here, but at any time there are always people from other areas. Given that this is a semi-traditional area and the links for this community are primarily with the lands rather than with the urban centres of Kalgoorlie, Perth or wherever, we quite often get influxes of people for various reasons, be it funerals or cultural events, or people who need to travel from the lands to a centre for various

reasons. So there are always anywhere between 50 and 100 extra people passing through. On big occasions there can be several hundred.

Mr HAASE—Jan, for the benefit of all, would you explain ‘the lands’?

Ms DOUGLAS—After you leave Laverton, you move into reserve land which is closed Aboriginal land and which is part of about three different states. The main road comes out at the Olgas. There are probably 40-odd communities between here and there.

Mr HAASE—Pitjantjatjara, Ngaanyatjara, the Olga people and further up to Kirrikurra, almost up into the Kimberleys. So when ‘the lands’ are referred to, we are talking about those Aboriginal reserve lands for which people here have a great affinity. There is a great deal of constant migration backwards and forwards for family business, et cetera.

CHAIR—Your funding, then, comes from Commonwealth government, state government and where else?

Ms DOUGLAS—The major funding comes just from those departments: ATSIIC, AAD, Health Department, Ministry of Housing. The local shire here makes a small contribution to our wardens program. But the main bulk of our funding is department funding.

CHAIR—If you were Prime Minister for the day, what would you do to improve the administration and delivery of the taxpayers’ funds for indigenous people in this area? What would you do that would make a good impact and improve the delivery of services?

Ms DOUGLAS—We have a list of things that we think are issues that Sally and I went through this afternoon. Some of the major ones for us are things like the impact of regionalisation—that funding and decision making happens within the increased regionalisation pressures. So our CDP, our health services—all the things that people rely on—are in Kalgoorlie. There is a bus to Kalgoorlie three times a week. If you choose to go to Kalgoorlie, to go to a bank or go to the Aboriginal Medical Service or participate in decision making, you either need to have a vehicle and fuel and several days, or you need to catch buses at \$100 return and accommodation in Kalgoorlie. I would look very carefully at the that whole regionalisation and the supposed benefits of the push for that to continue and to grow. The other thing that we are constantly frustrated with is across-department coordination—the lack of it at all levels and the lack of national, state and local level coordination of programs.

CHAIR—That is a pretty significant statement which you have made. I think the committee would probably say we have suspected some of that, from the talks we have had with people.

Mr QUICK—So, Jan, should we give the money that you need to the shire and say to them: you are responsible for 3,227 people, which makes up X number of families? ABS can give you the age cohort. You need so much per school, so much for aged care. Do we give it to the shire? The shire are closer to the community than state governments or Commonwealth departments or the regional centres. Do we hand it back to the shires and do it better that way? Involve local government more strongly?

Ms DOUGLAS—I am not sure. I think that at the moment it is neither here nor there. There is a sort of a facade that there is community control of projects and moneys and that huge amounts of money are flowing into communities like ours and into community organisations like ours, when in fact the community, at a real grassroots level, has very little control because we can only bid for funds within the parameters that the funds are made available. So we have to almost design, out of our bucket of needs, what will fit into that bucket of funding. Family violence in this community is a huge issue but we could not make the levels of funding and the way in which the funding was available to us a viable operation. We wasted money, but we had no choice. I think there has to be some hard looking at who is really controlling at what is going on, because at the moment it is not the communities. The communities really have a very clear idea about what they need, but it does not always fall into the funding parameters for housing or for violence programs or for training or any of the other things.

Bill talked about the CDEP. We have a lot of CDEP workers but they leave and go to the mines. Most of them invariably come back to us later because they do not want to work there or they are not doing appropriate work. But we cannot put them on traineeships within our organisation, which is a fairly significant organisation, in order to be able to retain and train good people to maintain their own communal organisation. We cannot marry the CDEP with the training funds. We are desperate for good people.

CHAIR—For your services.

Ms DOUGLAS—To maintain all these houses we build or the paperwork we do. As you can imagine that is significant across all those departments. We need to be able to train staff to continue and manage the projects that we have. We cannot find ways to do that.

CHAIR—So you are short of tradespeople to do the maintenance work and administration people.

Ms DOUGLAS—We are short of opportunities for our young people and community members to take on those positions and continue them because we cannot get the training money. We can put them on to CDEP but we cannot put them onto a training program that is meaningful or give them a full-time wage. We do not have the excess funding. That would then mean that in five years time we would not need a plumber or bookkeeper as we would have those people in the community. People who really want to do those sorts of things are moving out and going to mines or moving out of town. There are no opportunities for them to come into their own organisation.

CHAIR—That is obviously a complex issue. I understand the principles.

Mr QUICK—How would you arrange for funding? Do we say that there are x number of people with obvious needs in the community? How do you qualify that at dollars per person or per family. You could easily say you need another 27 houses but those houses need to be two-bedroom units or one bedroom units. That will address your housing problem. But how do you quantify the housing crisis that you have now as contributing to domestic violence and dysfunctional families to links into what Phil said about underachievement at school, the inflexibility of the education system and the training programs we used to have. It does not matter who invents them; they do not seem to work the further away you get from the CBD.

How do they give you the flexibility and the bags of money to achieve what you want to achieve and yet still say to you that taxpayers in Australia want you to be just as accountable as anybody else? Do we have to get away from submission funding?

Ms DOUGLAS—I think there is the whole area of across department coordination so that, if there is a major project, it is not forever being cut off at the edges with various components missing and there is some comprehension that things are multilayered. In order to deal with housing you need to deal with employment and schooling. Those projects get a combination of funding that is appropriate. I also somehow feel that the regional process seems to be taking up more and more of the actual funding rather than that funding being sent directly to an organisation like Wongatha. CDEP funding goes through Kalgoorlie and employs x amount of people and then does this and something else.

Mr HAASE—How often do you see your elected land council representatives here in Laverton? Who are they and what sort of service are you getting from that democratic process?

Ms DOUGLAS—The land councils or ATSIC?

Mr HAASE—ATSIC is made up of land councils and—

Ms CONDON—Individual councils.

Mr HAASE—Yes. Who represents Laverton?

Ms CONDON—Vanessa Thomas. She lives out at Mulga Queen.

Mr HAASE—The Vanessa who was due to be here today?

Ms CONDON—The other person, I think, lives at Menzies.

Mr HAASE—So Vanessa is from Mulga Queen. She was the democratically elected representative of Laverton for indigenous people. She is not here today?

Ms DOUGLAS—No.

Mr HAASE—It says a whole lot about the efficiency of ATSIC and the service it gives to Aboriginal people, doesn't it?

Mr LLOYD—I would like to follow on with that, because I am really interested in how much interaction you have with ATSIC. You have made the comment that, like most other areas, you say, 'We need more money for housing; there's not enough housing.' For 2000-01, ATSIC has allocated \$304.9 million to indigenous housing. That is a huge amount of money. What is the interaction between your group and ATSIC, and how do you lobby them for additional funds?

Ms CONDON—They have meetings here every so often. I think they go around to each area and have their own meetings. They have been to Laverton twice so far, I think—once this year

and towards the end of last year. We do get to talk to the regional council but, again, it is on what they see as a needs basis, I guess.

Mr QUICK—How many extra houses would you need—20, 30, 40?

Ms DOUGLAS—For the last two years I have submitted for between \$80,000 and \$100,000 to construct a single person's dwelling—it is basically like something you would see on a mining site. It is rooms, with a dining area at one end, ablutions at the other—female and male—and a covered walkway. That is particularly for our older people, although we are not allowed to do aged care so we cannot actually justify it with this. We have some older people who need to be in smaller dwellings—they cannot really manage a house and yard but they need a room that is theirs. We have quite a number of young men who quite often come and go to jail, and they need a place to stay. We have other single people moving out of family homes for the first time, perhaps, and who do not need or desire a house but obviously need somewhere to live. So this was a design that the community came up with which would allow those people to remain in the community and have their own space but not necessarily have to fend for themselves with a whole house and yard.

Mr QUICK—Who is responsible for aged care in Laverton? Another group?

Ms DOUGLAS—I do not think anyone does aged care housing, but the hospital has a home and community care program which does a number of activities.

Mr LLOYD—When your land council and your ATSIC commissioners come here do you feel that you have a meaningful input or do you think they turn up, listen to you and go away? Do you feel as though you have an input into the meetings?

Ms CONDON—No, not really.

Mr LLOYD—It is a point I am making when we move around the areas because these people are like we are—elected members. I am responsible to 80,000 people in my electorate and if I am not listening to them and not turning up at meetings, they will toss me out. These people are your elected representatives as well, so I just make that point. I think that the people on the ground are not getting the services for which there is funding. What I see in a lot of areas is that there is a lot of money coming in at the top end but it is not coming down to the bottom, and I think that from a community point of view we need to be turning it around somehow. That is my comment, for all it is worth.

Mr McEVOY—You said the ATSIC council is democratically elected, but it appears to me that we are then ending up with people who have got no idea how to handle the issues that are happening on the ground, anyway, and they are just cruising around at meetings and things like that. I do not know how effective they are.

Mr HAASE—We would like to hear that more and more. Sorry, that is not quite true; what we would like to hear more and more is the factual opinions of people at grassroots level at hearings such as this, because we hear, as individuals, so much anecdotal material but rarely is it vocalised at committee hearings. The outcome of that, of course, is that no changes are made. Nothing is done, because at an official level there is no reasonable critique expressed.

Mr McEVOY—There should be a job description or something for that hearing.

Mr HAASE—There is, but no-one tells us.

Mr McEVOY—That is a pity.

CHAIR—I think at this stage there are a number issues about to emerge, including Cathy Freeman running, but I just want to be sure that there are no more people here to make submissions? Ladies and gentlemen, the meeting is closed. I thank you very much for your help today.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Wakelin**, seconded by **Mr Quick**):

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

Committee adjourned at 5.00 p.m.