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Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL
AFFAIRS

Reference: Crime in the community

THURSDAY, 4 MARCH 2004

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Thursday, 4 March 2004

Members: Mrs Bronwyn Bishop (*Chair*), Ms Julie Bishop, Mr Cadman, Mr Kerr, Mr McClelland, Mr Murphy, Ms Panopoulos, Mr Sciacca, Mr Secker, Mr Somlyay and Dr Washer

Members in attendance: Mrs Bronwyn Bishop, Mr Cadman, Mr Kerr, Mr McClelland, Mr Murphy, Mr Sciacca, Mr Secker and Dr Washer

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The extent and impact of crime and fear of crime within the Australian community and effective measures for the Commonwealth in countering and preventing crime. The Committee's inquiry shall consider but not be limited to:

- a) the types of crimes committed against Australians
- b) perpetrators of crime and motives
- c) fear of crime in the community
- d) the impact of being a victim of crime and fear of crime
- e) strategies to support victims and reduce crime
- f) apprehension rates
- g) effectiveness of sentencing
- h) community safety and policing

WITNESSES

SPENCER, Mr Donald Richard, Founder, Australian Children's Music Foundation 1598

Committee met at 9.18 a.m.

CHAIR—I declare open this public meeting of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs' inquiry into crime in the community: victims, offenders and fear of crime. Throughout this inquiry the committee has taken much evidence on juvenile crime: how to punish young people when they have committed an offence and also how to prevent them from committing an offence in the first place. There are many very positive initiatives in the community that are aimed at providing a safety net for young people in the hope of preventing them from entering the cycle of offending. The Australian Children's Music Foundation is one such organisation that aims to provide alternative social outlets for young people, particularly those of disadvantaged backgrounds, with the aim of keeping them out of that cycle. Today we will hear from a well-known Australian songwriter and entertainer, Mr Don Spencer, who is the founder of the Australian Children's Music Foundation. I now call on Mr Spencer to give evidence.

[9.19 a.m.]

SPENCER, Mr Donald Richard, Founder, Australian Children's Music Foundation

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee has received your submission and accepted that as evidence for this inquiry. Would like to make an opening statement?

Mr Spencer—Yes. I will preface what we are doing for the disadvantaged with a little bit of background about the foundation. We have research that proves that participation in music and the arts is of great advantage to all children, particularly the disadvantaged because it gives them a chance to level the playing field, as the saying goes, and it gives them a chance to express themselves and get out of their environment. It is equal to sport in one respect. We have a great regard for sport in this country and I think that if we had the same emphasis on arts and music we would have a different and better society.

Briefly, the foundation was formed to actually bring music to all children—to give everybody the opportunity to participate in music. We have a lot of different functions, including national songwriting competitions for children at school, disadvantaged children and children in special needs schools. In one of our programs we work in detention centres. We have had great success working with organisations like the Ted Noffs Foundation and we are now embarking on a program which we intend following through as a module to prove that children who are in detention or are disadvantaged will respond so much to music that it can open their lives in a way that they have never been exposed to. We not only do the courses within the detention centres; we are providing extra help after they leave the detention centre, so that it is not just some intense thing where they get excited and then they leave. We are going to make sure that when they leave we provide them with musical instruments, if that is what they need. If they are writing, we will provide them with a support base after they leave. We have a variety of teachers at this stage. We have a tremendous amount of people who volunteer. We do not have the funding to necessarily provide all these things, so we do rely heavily on volunteers.

Another thing we are doing which is very relevant to what you are talking about is creating an orchestra in the suburb of La Perouse in southern Sydney, just near the airport. It is a very disadvantaged suburb and, as an Aboriginal headmaster there has told us, it is an area in crisis. We are creating an orchestra and choir of at

least 100 to 140 children who will never previously have been able to participate in music. We are giving them free music lessons, mainly through volunteers, we are giving them free musical instruments, and we are going to show just what this can achieve to get these kids who are so disadvantaged back to being engaged. The schools have even doorknocked the homes of those children who do not attend school and got their parents to get those children to come to audition with us and work with us.

We have a variety of other things for disadvantaged children. For sick children we have a program for hospitals whereby we can record 3,500 to 4,000 songs on an iPod and put them into a notebook computer. It then attaches to a small amplifier which has three radio mikes. We get these units into any and every hospital that we can get them into, and then the children always have music. Again, music—whether they are sick, disadvantaged or whatever—is the key.

There has been some incredible research into this. There was a research program that took place in America about three or four years ago into participation in the arts. It concerned 25,000 children in five different states. I will quote a couple of things from a paper on that:

This closer look showed that high arts participation makes a more significant difference to students from low-income backgrounds than for high-income students. Catterall also found clear evidence that sustained involvement in particular art forms—music and theatre—are highly correlated with success in mathematics and reading.

These findings are enriched by comparisons of student achievement in 14 high-poverty schools in which the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) has developed innovative arts-integrated curricula. The inspiring turnaround of this large and deeply troubled school district is one of the most important education stories of this decade. Schools across Chicago, including all of those in this study, have been improving student performance. But, when compared to arts-poor schools in the same neighbourhoods, the CAPE schools advanced even more quickly and now boast a significant gap in achievement along many dimensions.

And it goes on:

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same neighbourhoods, these schools advanced even more quickly and now boast a significant gap in achievement along many dimensions—and it goes on. All of this is in your folders. There is lots of information there although it is only a small part of the research that we have got. There have been experiments by one of my contemporaries in the music business—not my contemporary, I am sorry; he is much younger than I am—Eminem, would you believe. He has had a program in Riker's Prison in New York: they have put music in for these pretty desperate criminals and the results have been quite phenomenal. I do not have that research in here yet: it is still coming through.

So basically our premise is that we believe in music for all children, and we believe that a way of involving troubled children and children in detention and stopping them recommitting offences is to give them something that inspires them. Everybody in the world relates to music and yet we do not pay it that much significant interest here. I think we have let our children down in Australia. Music is not a major subject in many schools. Those schools that do have a high musical content are so different and are so proud of what they have got, and they have got a tremendous atmosphere. A lot of schools do not have those opportunities.

The other thing we do is recycle musical instruments. We collect them from people who do not use them and we beg and borrow—just borrow; we do not steal—from wholesalers and retailers and we give free musical instruments to anybody who we feel wants them or cannot afford them. You will see on this piece of paper that we have distributed at least \$17,000 or \$18,000 worth of instruments and we have got about another \$20,000 or \$30,000 in store that we give to various schools' individuals. We are not looking necessarily for talent; we are not even looking for talent. We are just looking to give people an opportunity to participate in music. I think that is enough for the moment.

CHAIR—Thank you, Don. I wondered if I could just ask one question, and then others will have questions to ask. When you say how beneficial music is, and I believe you, there is also that aspect that is creeping into popular music—with very violent lyrics and really horrible stuff. Do you have a view about that?

Mr Spencer—Yes, I am very much opposed to it. I have been a songwriter for 35 years. I find it just appalling and I find it totally irresponsible of the recording industry that they release such music. At the risk of sounding old-fashioned, I think some of that music should be banned, personally. If I had anything to do with it, I would ban it. I cannot believe they have music that says the things that it says. Young children are exposed to it, of course, because they cannot help but hear their bigger brothers' or sisters' CDs or what is on the radio. There are a lot

of us in the music industry who just find that absolutely appalling. It is unbelievable. I do not believe it should be called music. That is an aggressive side of people being expressing, but it is unnecessary.

CHAIR—Is it fair to say then, just as music can have a good effect, it can also have a bad effect if it is this sort of lyric that is out there?

Mr Spencer—Yes, sure. I guess if there is already somebody who is going along on the wrong path and they are listening to the wrong piece of music it might make them feel that this is the way they should behave. But a lot of those songs are brutal and disrespectful to authority, the police or whatever. But I would say that it does not in any way alter the fact that music is overall a fantastic thing to do.

CHAIR—A terrific thing to do.

Mr Spencer—This is another bit of research. These are some of the things that music can do: it stimulates learning; it gives a sense of identity; it improves motivation; it encourages self-discipline; it helps problem-solving skills; it develops reasoning skills; it improves maths ability; it increases tolerance and understanding; it helps memory; it encourages peer interaction; it adds to cognitive development; it attracts disengaged students; it helps disadvantaged students; it encourages the expression of beliefs; it appeals to boys, which is sort of an important thing, although it sounds strange; it improves behaviour; it enhances verbal skills; it generates creativity and originality; and it is fun. Why wouldn't we all be doing that? Why wouldn't every school be trying to do that?

CHAIR—With your foundation you are able to do things like you are doing at La Perouse—reaching children by lending them instruments. When I was at school I remember that we certainly had a music teacher, and music was strong, in all elements, through primary and secondary school. Is that still the case?

Mr Spencer—No. There are only two schools in New South Wales, as far as I know—unless something has changed in the last few months—at which music is compulsory. There are music programs in private schools and at some schools where they have the support, usually of the parents—and there are some wonderful public schools that have fantastic musical programs—but it is not a compulsory subject. There are not as many music teachers as there were. The sale of musical instruments is on a downward spiral. In fact, there is an association called the Australian Music Association, who have actually helped fund our song writing competition. But they have a commercial interest because the sales of

musical instruments are on such a downward graph that they are trying to help anybody who is trying to get music across. They have come to us and said, 'We will fund your song writing competition.' And obviously, for all these things we are doing, we are not a rich organisation. I started it myself and for the first two years, to get it started, I had to fund it myself to get things established. So we are not rich, but we manage to get quite good funding for certain projects. In fact, the federal education department funded our web site, and it is fabulous. And they have funded the second stage of that. Our biggest problem is administration. We have lots of projects and things we want to do and people we want to help, but we do struggle pretty badly for wages, as most organisations do.

CHAIR—From the policy point of view, ideally you would like to see music as a compulsory subject. But do you think it is particularly important in primary schools—in those early stages?

Mr Spencer—I think it should be taught from the day they start school, from infant school—the earlier the better. You cannot exaggerate how people react to music. I have done so much with preschool programs—*Play School* and things like that—for 30 years. You can all see how a child reacts to music. That never changes, and the earlier you get them into the music, the earlier you get those thoughts stimulated and that creativity and that imagination. I am sorry to digress a little, but one of the reasons I started this foundation was that, although I have managed to make a reasonable living out of television, partly, as well as my song writing, there is too much television now. Parents are busy; parents are flat out. They want to entertain their kids. The kids watch television, video games, computer games or computers and they are not stimulating their imagination. The world is worried about obesity. I would say that obesity has an equal problem: they are getting undernourished mentally as they are getting overnourished physically. While they are getting fat they are not using their brains either half the time, because when you are watching television you are in shut down mode, particularly children.

People are busy. I know that we have to educate parents, but that is part of what we do too. We are not anti-television, but we try to get out the message that you have to be selective—you have to be sure that your child is watching something that is suitable. It does not do any good to think, 'I will keep them quiet by putting them in front of the television'—even if it is *Mary Poppins*, or something, 54 times. You have to get them stimulated; television is just a way of switching off. People of my generation had to do things, because we did not have television out in the bush. I know how much music inspired me, from a pretty disadvantaged

background. That is one of the reasons why I have so much faith in what it does; I know what it can do.

Another thing is that we are trying to start children's radio again. People do not realise it, but there is no children's radio any more. Children's radio is a great source of stimulation and interest, yet there is not a children's radio licence out there. We are trying to recreate children's radio. There are children's stories. Apart from the stimulation for children, there are sick children, blind children, children in cars. There are plenty of reasons to have children's radio. That is a source of imagination.

The other thing is that at least 90 per cent of what children watch on television is foreign. There is no outlet for Australian music or culture. We have to preserve that some way, too. That is gradually being swamped because children's music is heard only on television shows. No-one plays children's songs. You can make a CD but unless you are on television no-one will buy it. If we can get radio or get out there and get more musical things we will protect Australian culture.

Another part of our foundation that I did not mention because it did not seem relevant is that we are accumulating a children's music library because there is no children's music library in Australia. We have records of every piece of music by adults—classical, whatever. There are great centres like the AMC, with unbelievable facilities, but they have nothing for children. If you want to find a children's song you have to go and ask someone who may have one or you may have one you had when you were a kid or your aunty might have one. You cannot go to a central place and say, 'Is there a song written about Ayers Rock?' or a boomerang or whatever. We are gradually accumulating that for our website. Our website is going to be interactive.

CHAIR—Music has always been part of my life. As far as I am concerned, it keeps me sane in this political business.

Mr MURPHY—Congratulations, Don, on what you are doing. I take your point that the culture of Australia is to put emphasis on sport. When I went to school, sport was compulsory; the arts and music were not. So the first question I would put to you is: what do you think we can do to change that culture? I support what you are doing. I know the value of music. I often say that I am a politician who is a frustrated musician. I was privileged to come from a very musical family and music was my best subject at school right up to the Higher School Certificate. I am like the chairman; music keeps me sane, too.

I am very interested to change the culture in Australia and to take the emphasis off compulsory sport or put some equality into the arts and music. Those subjects have all those values that build a better society. What do you think we can do as politicians to change the thinking of people like us—I am not the typical one, I suppose, in this case—to make music and the arts compulsory at school? Kids are more likely to respond to the arts and music in all its manifestations than being forced to play cricket or football or whatever their parents expect them to do. Have you got any ideas about that because I am very interested to foster the arts?

Mr Spencer—I am not sure how to answer that because I do not really know how politics works, to be honest.

Mr MURPHY—Neither do we!

Mr Spencer—This is a new learning curve for me for me to be involved in something like this. I have just been a songwriter and a performer and run my own race. I would have thought that the best thing we can all do is to fly the flag and speak to everybody we know in a position of power, in the education department or wherever. There is a groundswell. People are becoming more aware that we have so many problems here and there has to be a reason for it. We have more behavioural problems than we have ever had; we all know that. There is not just obesity; there are many other things. We have to do something. Music and arts—I am in music—should be a fundamental part.

As to how we go about it, the only way I know of doing it, from my simplistic way of looking at things, is to say to everybody I meet who might be able to help, from corporations to wherever, ‘Have you thought about this?’ A lot of people have not thought about it. I am not sure of the political process; I am not sure how to answer that except to say that certainly, with organisations like mine, the more work we do the more aware people become, as I said. Every program we do is a module. We are not just doing it and forgetting it; we are doing it to show that that is what it is. It will be an orchestra in La Perouse; it will be a country band in Moree. They will be ongoing. We want that going. But as to how you guys do it, I am not too sure.

CHAIR—One of the things that seems to be a problem with kids that get into trouble is that there seems to be a lack of something they are good at. I will take my own electorate as an example. We have magnificent beaches; we have magnificent facilities; we have schools that excel in music. Yet we still have a problem where, on a Friday or Saturday night, you can find hundreds of kids swarming. They can be on stuff; there can be terrible problems with the

gatecrashing of parties. You very often hear the statement made that there is nothing to do. I often wonder if that statement translates into 'nothing to do that we are the best at' or 'nothing to do that we excel at'. They put their energy into doing something where they feel that they are part of a strong gang mentality. The music is there in schools, but it is always going to be kids who are really good who are going to be the ones who are going to stand out and do the parts.

Mr Spencer—It should not be like that.

CHAIR—I am not saying that the others are not engaged. You have said that with La Perouse you are just reaching out to ordinary kids and bringing them together. How do we reach the sort of kids who say, 'I'm smarter than that,' or who want to big-note or whatever? How do you engage those kids?

Mr Spencer—There are a couple of things. For a start, with this approach to music that I have, we are talking about schools like here. We are not talking about elite; we are talking about everybody. I do not know why, but it does seem to be the case that most people will say, 'I don't play that because I am not very good,' or they think that they should not play the piano because they are not that good or should not sing because they are not that good. I say—as I say to the kids who are a bit shy to begin with when we are doing music classes—'Listen, if we all had that attitude to sport, none of us would play tennis, golf, cricket or anything, because we are not all world champions. Yet we don't mind going out there and playing at fifth division or something. Why does everybody have to be brilliant at music?' That is one of the things that we espouse: music is for everybody. Everybody relates to it. In that respect, I am saying that, when we are talking about musical programs, this is for all kids, not just the elite or the ones who are talented. Everybody should be exposed to music for what it can develop in other areas—whether they become musicians or not. It is just the whole experience.

As to the Saturday night binges and stuff like that, they are social issues. I am not saying music is going to solve everything. There are social issues like a lot of kids growing up not believing in anything and a lot of kids growing up, to use a cliché, wondering what it is all about. They forget their troubles and go and pop a pill or something and binge. I guess they are social issues. You would have to probably look at our sportsmen. I was a sportsman too. I played a lot of sport. But with our role models in sport, it is always a drink or they way they celebrate. You cannot change that culture, I guess, but that probably gets the kids to thinking, 'If it's good enough for them it's good enough for me.'

CHAIR—That is one bit of that culture that we have to change quick smart.

Mr Spencer—Drugs are another issue. Let us face it; everybody has been trying to sort that one out. I do not profess to know the answers for everything. I just know that this is a good start to a lot of problems. Those other ones are social issues. Sure, we might save a few of those who might get involved in something else, but—

CHAIR—If you save one, it is a good thing.

Mr Spencer—I wish I could answer that.

CHAIR—Do other people have some questions?

Mr SCIACCA—Your emphasis, obviously, is on music programs for disadvantaged youths.

Mr Spencer—Yes.

Mr SCIACCA—To me, that is very commendable. I am a product of a public school environment; I never went to any private schools. I think music is more available in some private schools.

Mr Spencer—Yes, it is.

Mr SCIACCA—That is not meant as a criticism; it is just a matter of fact. I have to tell you that, at the schools I went to—and I would say that at the time I was quite disadvantaged in the sense that my parents did not have any money and I used to do whatever I wanted—I wanted to play. I loved music. I still do. I probably have two guitars all over the place. I cannot play it very well—only when we have had a few drinks.

Mr Spencer—It's fun all the same.

Mr SCIACCA—It is good fun. But the point was that I would have jumped at the chance—as many of the kids in my state school at the time would have done if the school had enough money to buy instruments and have a good music teacher. But we just did not have any of that. Admittedly I am going back 30 or 40 years—perhaps 40 or even 45. But the point is that my view would be that there is no question at all—none whatsoever—that music can be one of those things that gives people a purpose and lets them have some self-dignity, lets them have some worth and lets them know that they are good at something. Even if they are not good, it lets them know that they can join in.

I can tell you now that, only a couple of months ago, I met up with a friend of mine who is now a very successful architect. He was no big deal at our high school in Brisbane except that he could play the trumpet. Robinson, his name is. He was fantastic. He would play on Anzac Day and then we would go to the school dance and he would be up with the trumpet. He was a hero because he could actually play a musical instrument. I have never forgotten him. I sat down and told him, 'The only reason I remember you is that you used to play the trumpet.' I can understand perfectly what you are doing. I guess what you are saying to us today—and I think, Madam Chair, that it is the only way we as a committee looking into crime in the community can be of any help—is that we need to encourage it and perhaps make it part of our recommendations that we look at preventative measures and we say to the education department how important it is, for instance, in particular in our public schools, to make moneys available for the purposes of ensuring that, if they want to, kids can have access to music programs. Looking at what you do here, obviously you pick them up and say to them, 'Bang, bang, bang, this is what you have to do.' I want to congratulate you. I have no real questions for you. I guess what I am saying is that I think I understand what it is that you are trying to do; it is a good thing, and keep it up.

Mr SECKER—I congratulate you and applaud you for what you are doing. I think it is fantastic. I recall in the United States, when I was there about 18 years ago, one of those overwhelming memories was that every school had a couple of bands and a couple of music teachers. Everyone was involved; it was part of the curriculum. I wondered why we did not have that in Australia. The best we ever had was a bit of choir singing in public schools and maybe a tootle on the recorder or something like that. I think it is fantastic. I agree with Con that perhaps we can recommend that it be more of a curriculum set-up like you are saying. And, yes, get them young—as soon as they are in primary school. It is going to take time to train music teachers and get it into the system, but it is one positive thing we can do rather than looking at the negative side of crime, which is locking them up and that sort of thing—fines and so on. This is a positive, proactive thing to actually stop it in the first place. I was interested when you said that it might be country music out in the country and a symphony in the city or whatever. Do you think it is important to show them all the types of music—whether it is classical, popular or country?

Mr Spencer—Absolutely, all types of music. I do not favour any one. We all have different tastes. I believe every type of music should be there. We are not pushing one genre. On our list of patrons we have people from Dame Joan Sutherland to Richard Tognetti—

Mr SECKER—And Luke Darcy, the footballer?

Mr Spencer—Yes. We have Molly Meldrum, John Laws, Jimmy Little, Leah Purcell and people from all walks of life. In this La Perouse project we have wonderful backing from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. A lot of their role models are helping. William Barton, who is probably the world's leading didgeridoo player, is giving lessons as well. It is all types of music.

Mr SECKER—Thank you.

Dr WASHER—Good on you, Don. I thought your presentation of what you are doing was terrific too. I noticed a media release from Dr Brendan Nelson, the Minister for Education, Science and Training. As you said, the government gave \$18,000 towards your web site and another \$22,300 for technical enhancements in the future. But the most important thing in this press release—which was released on 2 July last year—is that there has been \$100,000 put aside to see what impact school based arts education has on the learning and development of all students, but particularly Indigenous, disadvantaged and at-risk students. It would be of interest to the committee to find out how that is progressing, how the money has been spent, and what the researchers are doing. What I also commend you on, and I do not think it is recognised, is that you have acknowledged—as it says in ‘The Art of a Good Education’, the article which you read out and summarised here—that art appeals to boys. As you know, we are having problems in our schools today with the fact that the girls are now running ahead of the boys. Good on the girls, but we have to get the boys to lift their game.

Mr SCIACCA—We need a bit of affirmative action!

Dr WASHER—We knew they were always going to beat us, but now they are beating us, so we have to lift our game and catch up to them.

CHAIR—They just got liberated and showed their talent. Opportunity is all they needed.

Dr WASHER—I understand that. I am not saying we should hold back the girls; we just have to run a bit faster and catch up. Mr Spencer, one of the things that you have emphasised, and I want to express as important, is that art improves ability in the enabling sciences like mathematics. The world is gradually becoming a more scientific place, and trying to attract people into the sciences has been a problem. It has always been strange that art and science have been so separated. Marrying them again, which you illustrated, is a wise thing to do. If we

want to get people into science jobs and encourage science in schools, music and art are an essential component. I do not know why historically art and science got so separated. It seems that we put them in two boxes—you have to either go down the arts line or go down the science line—when really they should be together, because they enhance one another. I would like you to comment on that.

Mr Spencer—I agree, totally.

Mr McCLELLAND—What are the ages of the youths in the detention centres that you reach out to?

Mr Spencer—They are juvenile—their ages go up to about 15 or 16.

Mr McCLELLAND—From my observations of politicians from all sides of the equation, I have seen that it is very electorally appealing to talk about being tough on crime—locking people up, locking people up for longer and so forth. Do you think there has been too much of a focus on that short-term response as opposed to long-term preventative measures such as your program could introduce?

Mr Spencer—Yes, I do. I do not believe that that approach is the answer; the answer is to rehabilitate, to give people a chance. A lot of people who commit crimes—and I am not telling you anything you do not know—have the most unbelievable backgrounds. They have no idea how the rest of the world operates. Until somebody gives them something to hope for or something to look forward to, they will just keep doing the same thing time and again. It is obvious that whatever we have been doing is not working that greatly, so it would not hurt to try something different. I think we should try programs like music and arts.

If I was a cook, I would say that we should do cooking classes in prisons—we have to do something that inspires them, something that is different—because then they may say, ‘I’m a great cook.’ Anything like that that might equip them when they get out is useful. Those are the sorts of things that people could do in prison. I know that they have training programs and things, but I am particularly advocating things that might lift them out of the ordinary. That is how people can catch up with their peers. If they are good at music, good at sport or a great cook then it does not matter what your education was like—you can do something as well as anyone else can and so suddenly you are equal again. A lot of these people do not feel equal. They do not feel that they have a chance. I feel that there should be a lot more emphasis placed on the positive side of what you can do for people rather than the negative.

Mr McCLELLAND—In that context, I think I saw that the expenditure in Australia on law enforcement—if you add the figures for the federal government, state governments, prisons and so forth—is several billions of dollars each year. Really for a small proportion of that, you could get into some of these longer term preventative strategies.

Mr Spencer—Absolutely.

CHAIR—Mr McClelland, were you including in that—and, Don, you seem to be in your answer—the use of music in prisons themselves as part of, I suppose, a humanising process? This is a question that interests me. You could call that part of the rehabilitation process. Statistics consistently show that, it does not matter where you are in the English-speaking world, of the population that goes to jail two-thirds of it is recidivist and will continue to be so. That means there is one-third that is not. I often wonder what happens to them and what sort of opportunities they then have when they get out of the system. Music to me is a very humanising thing. I think you said there were some studies done in the United States about that.

Mr Spencer—I mentioned Rikers Prison briefly, but that research is not out yet. There have also been studies done in South Africa to do with bands. They went into some of the high crime areas in South Africa and created bands and encouraged dancing and Zulu dancing. They got them totally involved. We are still waiting for reports on that, but they are really excited and are extending that throughout different parts of South Africa. There must be a few people around the globe thinking along similar lines—that maybe there are other ways to get people to think.

CHAIR—Mr McClelland, I did not mean to interrupt.

Mr McCLELLAND—That is fine.

Mr KERR—I appreciate exactly what you are saying and I commend you for all that you are doing. One of the interesting things I note, as I watch what my son watches on early morning TV on Sunday mornings, is the incorporation of violence, the degradation of women and the various things that are put into the musical context these days. I do not think I am being particularly prudish here, I just think that is an accurate reflection of what I see. I do not want to be too condemnatory of it. I am not trying to ban it or anything. I appreciate that music can uplift the human soul, but there is some music which seems to me to be almost on the edge of antisocial.

Mr Spencer—Well it is. What you are saying—and we can apply what you said to this too, Chair—is that is not so much the music but the video clip.

Mr KERR—Yes, that is what I meant.

Mr Spencer—I dislike video clips because they take away the imagination side of music. A lot of them these days are soft porn—it is pretty scary stuff. Again, I do not know how they get shown. I cannot control those things, but I am very much against them. Even if it is a video clip that is reasonable, it takes away a lot of the magic of the music in my eyes because that is the only picture you will ever get. When you see a video clip, that is the picture that you remember when you hear that song, whereas if we do not have a video clip and we play a piece of music here then we all get different images.

It is very important that we have that, that children have that process of imagination. If they just watch a song, it is not the same as if they listen to a song. It can be entertaining, but it cannot be the sole source. So my answer is very much the same as my other answer: not all music is good. I think Duke Ellington said that there are two types of music—good and bad. That was when somebody said to him, ‘Do you only like jazz?’ and he said, ‘No. There are only two types of music—good and bad.’ There is some bad music. I could not deny that.

Mr KERR—I really was not trying to make an aesthetic judgment or any other real judgment. I accept that this is out there, and I am not trying to ban it. All I am trying to say is that—

Mr Spencer—They are bad images.

Mr KERR—Yes.

Mr Spencer—I agree.

Mr KERR—I am trying to say that, if we are doing programs in prisons and what have you, there has to be some sort of management strategy that does not reinforce what seems to me to be the current ugly presentation of being attractive by being almost a gang player.

Mr Spencer—Yes. There are a lot of video clips that should not be there. But if you were doing that in prisons, you would not have the video; you would just be playing the music. I could not agree more with you about the quality—or lack of quality—of some of those video clips.

CHAIR—I think this opens up a question that we have skirted around the edges of when looking at evidence before. Perhaps it would be in our interest to take some evidence from someone who is a psychologist in the area and could look at some of this stuff, to follow it through. There are certainly a hell of a lot of parents who are very concerned about that sort of music. There are all sorts of boards that look after what can go to air at what times, whether it is a film or a television production. We have boards for books and other publications, but we have nothing in this area. With the Internet, maybe it is very difficult to do anything about it anyway—but at least if it were not given the pseudo imprimatur of a legitimate station playing it. Maybe we should be looking at some of those aspects.

Mr Spencer—I agree.

CHAIR—I would like to look a little more at the program that you have set up in La Perouse. Is that a model program? Is it something that you want to replicate?

Mr Spencer—Yes.

CHAIR—Who do you need cooperation from in order to do it?

Mr Spencer—We had to get the cooperation of all the schools. There are three schools in that area. We had to get the cooperation of the Aboriginal elders there and the education department. We also went to see Senator Ridgeway, who was very supportive. We had to do the groundwork. We did not have the right to do things without people agreeing, and agreeing to help. It had to be a project that they were all 100 per cent behind, otherwise we could not do it. The rehearsals and everything are going to be conducted in the La Perouse School hall because that is the most central and suitable place. As I said, we also got the support of some leading Aboriginal elders. It is not going to be an Aboriginal band; it is everybody. But there is a good proportion of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders there. It will be 60-40 or something like that.

CHAIR—Will they perform?

Mr Spencer—Yes.

CHAIR—Some of us might like to come to a concert.

Mr Spencer—I will invite you all.

CHAIR—That would be lovely. This committee went to the Northern Territory and took evidence in a place called Port Keats, where the population of kids under 15 is the highest of anywhere in Australia. It is a place where, on average, 20 people live in a house. They have very big problems and they have elders who are working very hard to try to give skills to those kids. It is a place of great concern. On that occasion we certainly did not see any evidence of music. I am just wondering—

Mr SECKER—There was hardly any evidence of anything there.

CHAIR—That is exactly right. There was nothing for them, except what—

Mr SECKER—They just wandered the streets.

CHAIR—Yes. And it seems to me that this could be—

Mr Spencer—Well, this is a module. We are just trying to prove what we can do, and this is something so that we would then be able to say: ‘It’s there. This is how it works.’ If we had the money, we would be in that area. We have had requests already from different areas to do it, but we have to concentrate on one. We do not have much funding—we are still looking for funding for instruments. There are about \$60,000 worth of instruments that we still have to find. All of the teachers so far are volunteers, but we might have to get a few in. So it is a pretty big project, but it is just a module that could be replicated—

Mr KERR—Sorry, I thought you had finished but I have interrupted you. Please go on.

Mr Spencer—No, that is fine.

Mr KERR—I was just saying, Don, that I think your thesis is that it need not be music. You said that if you were a cook you would do it through—

Mr Spencer—I think music is more important. When we are talking about connections and how it helps learning skills and all the other things we have discussed, music is much more important. I just said, however, that if I were talking about a prison problem I would certainly put music in there first, but I would also be thinking of things like cooking. Maybe they do that—I have not been to prison to find out—but anything that gives them something different and creative and makes them feel good would be a help. I do not mean that cooking is as important, I just mean that—

CHAIR—You only have to see the impact. I have a lot to do with the Special Olympics, and they are the most delightful people. They range from children up to adults, and the excitement once the music starts is just amazing. You have to be with them and in the spirit of them. They can dance all night.

Mr Spencer—I know; it is phenomenal. I have done a lot of concerts over the years in special schools, for autistic children and kids with all sorts of problems. In many cases, music is the only thing they react to.

Mr MURPHY—Don, do your 140 kids out at La Perouse have any Aboriginal musical instruments, like didgeridoos?

Mr Spencer—We are going to have a didgeridoo section, but it is aimed at not being an Aboriginal type band. It is not that at all. It is just that one of our helpers—our role models—is William Barton, as I said. He is one of the world's leading didg players. He plays with symphony orchestras all over the world. He is about to do something with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He was at the Adelaide Festival—he just left. So he wants to have a small section, but it is otherwise just the normal instruments from an orchestra—instruments they would not normally go near. A lot of them do not play the didg either, by the way—a lot of them do not even go near it—so he will have to teach them. It is just musical instruments as in a normal symphony orchestra: violins, trumpets, trombones, bass—all the usual ones.

CHAIR—And volunteer instructors and teachers.

Mr Spencer—Yes.

CHAIR—That is fantastic.

Mr Spencer—Yes, it is quite amazing how many people are interested in it. I have Richard Gill from the Sydney Symphony Orchestra—

CHAIR—Richard is fantastic.

Mr Spencer—He is the most marvellous man.

CHAIR—He connects so well with kids.

Mr Spencer—Yes, he is just phenomenal. So he has volunteered to do the choral work for us. He and I have worked together. We come from different sides

of music—although I love classical music, I am not a classical musician—but we have managed to meet along the way with what he does for the kids and what I do. So we work together. In fact, I am now on his Sydney Symphony education committee.

CHAIR—Fantastic. He is such an enthusiast.

Mr Spencer—He is an amazing man.

CHAIR—He could make that chair over there enthusiastic, couldn't he?

Mr Spencer—Yes, he is phenomenal.

CHAIR—We would like to have any additional information that comes your way out of that work that is being done in the States—

Mr Spencer—Yes, and Africa—I have some from South Africa.

CHAIR—about offending adults.

Mr Spencer—Sure.

CHAIR—I think if we can see how your module develops and get some empirical studies out of it about just what impact it has on the community—

Mr Spencer—We are keeping a record of everything we do, and we will keep you informed.

CHAIR—I think that would be tremendous for us. As there are no further questions, Don, on behalf of everybody here this morning, I thank you for the work you are doing. It is quite inspirational. It is new, it is exciting and it is always impressive to see somebody who believes in something and then goes out and does it.

Mr Spencer—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—We are very grateful that you came and spoke to us this morning. I conclude by thanking you once again. The committee would like to stay in touch—and certainly to be invited to the concert!

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Sciacca**):

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

Committee adjourned at 10.10 a.m.