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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

(Subcommittee)

Reference: Indigenous employment

FRIDAY, 28 OCTOBER 2005

PERTH

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Friday, 28 October 2005

Members: Mr Wakelin *(Chair)*, Dr Lawrence *(Deputy Chair)*, Ms Annette Ellis, Mr Garrett, Mr Robb, Mr Slipper, Mr Snowdon, Dr Southcott, Mr Tuckey and Mrs Vale

Members in attendance: Dr Lawrence, Mr Slipper, Mrs Vale and Mr Wakelin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Positive factors and examples amongst Indigenous communities and individuals, which have improved employment outcomes in both the public and private sectors; and

1. recommend to the government ways this can inform future policy development; and
2. assess what significant factors have contributed to those positive outcomes identified, including what contribution practical reconciliation* has made.

*The Committee has defined 'practical reconciliation' in this context to include all government services.

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Subcommittee met at 9.11 am

COLEGATE, Mrs Kerri, Site Coordinator, Manguri Employment Services

PATERNOSTER, Miss Sallie, Administrative Officer, Manguri Employment Services

TAYLOR, Mrs Cheryle, Chief Executive Officer, Manguri Employment Services

CHAIR (Mr Wakelin)—I declare open this public hearing of the ATSIA committee inquiry into Indigenous employment. I welcome everybody here, particularly guests and members. We are flying by the seats of our pants a bit this morning. I invite witnesses to make a few opening comments. Understanding that our secretary received your call and we had a spare spot, we could say that you are now representing the Western Australian government, who declined to come. You are appearing in place of the Western Australian government.

Mrs Taylor—You said that; I did not. First of all, I would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in this forum. It was sort of a last minute discovery for us. We did not really know much about it. One of our colleagues at work brought it to my attention. Having looked at it, I thought it was certainly a worthwhile opportunity to take up. I thank you very much, and thank goodness for the witnesses who could not turn up so that we could show up.

I would like to have a small discussion around the framework of how we operate. We are in the development of the delivery of a Job Network service. We are a member of Job Futures Australia. I do not know whether you are familiar with Job Futures Australia, but we are one of many members under Job Futures. We also are an Indigenous specialist provider. That means that our clientele or our job seekers are specifically Indigenous people. Having said that, one of the challenges for Manguri regarding our employment services is to address the impact of 200 years of Indigenous people being made dependent on welfare in one form or another. Therefore, it could be argued that the government's welfare reforms will take a very long time and possibly a number of generations to be effective.

We commenced operations as a specialist provider in 1996 in conjunction with another Aboriginal organisation with a similar name, but not the same. That organisation has closed and Manguri Employment Services has been out on its own since then, tendering for these specialist services. This particular service is Indigenous owned and operated, so it is a business. We are very lucky with the staff that we have, because was can operate out of our own local knowledge base and the history of a lot of our people that come through the services and work with us.

We are very understanding of the internal position of the Noongar political context, relationships, alliances, family groupings and cultural norms which actually support our service delivery to the Indigenous job seeker. I am quite happy to give more information on this if need be. I said it earlier, but we did come from a grant funded background to a business model. As I say, I think the business model is very difficult. We have had to learn a lot about business operating in the non-Indigenous world. I think that is very good and very useful, but on the other hand we have struggled too. I think the grant funded model breeds a mentality of welfare and, as Indigenous people, I think we should be moving on from that and looking at more independence.

This business is very lucky, because it has people in it who have got fairly strong knowledge and understanding of the business world and we can manage, but there are a lot of Indigenous people who do not quite have that opportunity. From my point of view, that is another challenge for the government to look at in the future, particularly in relation to employment.

As I said before, we are a specialist provider. Eighty per cent of our job seekers are highly disadvantaged. A significant number, which are not identified by Centrelink, are not job ready and require a lot of personal support. They have multiple barriers. We have heard them all before: educational, social, cultural, health, housing, lack of skills and even down to the point where they have a limited awareness of workplace culture. For the staff, it is a huge challenge to get our people to motivate themselves enough to feel proud and able to actually contest, compete and participate in those environments.

The Welfare to Work policy has been a huge challenge for organisations like ours. In the last 18 months to two years a lot of it has been taking on more of an educational role with our people in terms of informing them of these dramatic changes—and they will be dramatic—that will impact on them as of July 2006. We have activity tested job seekers, like youth and Newstart participants who, I guess, will have to find work. If they do not find work, they will be working for the dole. I think in some ways there are some good things about that, but we need to be very careful about other issues. We will have to be responsible for non activity-tested job seekers—young parents and people with disabilities—which is going to put a huge strain on our resources, though I think the government recognised that. The over 50s is another significant group that we work quite intensely with.

Some of our concerns are the industrial relations changes and the overseas labour supply. We believe there are something like 100,000 a year that might be coming into Australia and competing for these jobs. One of our difficulties is actually finding enough work to place our people in, and if we have competitors from overseas it will make it that much harder for us to do that.

In conclusion, we need to be very careful that these things are not going to completely disadvantage Aboriginal people and put them further back in our social structure. I think the government need to make a much more long-term commitment to the Indigenous specialist service providers. As I said earlier, we are competing against 200 years of how Indigenous people have been treated in this country and I am sure that it is going to take quite some time to overturn that. We need to be given the opportunity to do that. We also need the opportunity to pursue other options so that Indigenous specialist providers can remain competitive with large mainstream providers. We are the people to be doing and delivering these services.

CHAIR—Thank you. Does anybody want to add anything else from your own perspective—just a quick 20-second grab—about what you do or how it is on the street?

Mrs Colegate—I am a site coordinator and mentoring person. We offer what we call post-placement support to any of our job seekers who are placed in work, which is quite difficult. It is relatively easy to place a job seeker—although it is still quite hard—but it is very hard to keep them in work for the first two weeks. Trying to sustain that employment and hang in there is really quite difficult with all the barriers that they face.

CHAIR—I think you were saying that they come from a no workplace culture.

Mrs Colegate—Yes. As much support as we can offer is good. It goes a long way. It can be quite hard and frustrating.

CHAIR—You do not know Cathy Duncan by any chance, do you?

Mrs Taylor—No.

CHAIR—She is from Moree and is involved in Aboriginal Employment Strategy. You may have heard of her and Dick Estens. It just reminded me when you said that it was one thing to get them in and another to get them to hang in. I am a bit full of this, so forgive me; I have been at Kalgoorlie for three or four days. Dick said, 'When we started, say, 10 years ago, we put 10 people in work and within about three weeks there was no-one in work.' So a lot of perseverance is required.

Miss Paternoster—I am in administration, out the front. My role is trying to get job seekers in and helping them with their job search training in the office. I basically help them with other needs before moving them along the path, such as getting all the information out of them before I pass them onto other people. We have a small office and a lot of job seekers, and not everyone can get their needs met at that time. I try to help them as much as I can beforehand.

CHAIR—That is a very good point. I wonder whether Carmen might lead off with questions.

Dr LAWRENCE—I have just a few questions. I gather from what you are saying that most of the clients are referred from Centrelink, are they?

Mrs Taylor—Yes.

Dr LAWRENCE—Do you have many just turn up at the door knowing that you are available?

Mrs Taylor—The Centrelink referral is a government process anyway, but that will be changing. The term for it is—

Mrs Colegate—Direct registration.

Mrs Taylor—So there will be people under the new contract that—

Dr LAWRENCE—Will be able to come straight through the door. I just wondered whether anyone did at the moment in any case.

Mrs Taylor—They do, but we have to follow the proper process and send them back to Centrelink.

Dr LAWRENCE—Go through the cycle. Talking about that, how many staff do you have in your agency, and how many are Indigenous people?

Mrs Taylor—We have two sites, in fact. We have one in the south-east corridor, which is located at Maddington. We have one in East Perth. I think there are about seven in each site; they are roughly the same. In East Perth, we have three Indigenous people. At Maddington, we have four indigenous people.

Dr LAWRENCE—It is about 50 per cent, by the sound of it.

Mrs Taylor—We have found that mix of staff very helpful. Being an Indigenous organisation, it is very difficult to find people who have the skills that you are looking for, particularly when you are working under a business model. Getting appropriate staff has been a challenge in itself.

Dr LAWRENCE—You mentioned that yours is an Indigenous specialist agency and you have to competitively tender. Forgive me, because I am not quite sure of the arrangements you have entered into, but, given the severe disadvantage that you have in the job seekers who turn up at your door—obviously, in a lot of cases, they are going to be very expensive to develop and support—do you get significant additional funds? Is it enough for the task of preparation, education and job readiness et cetera?

Mrs Taylor—I believe it is it. Within reason, money is not necessarily the answer to a lot of it. At the end of the day, of course, it goes a long way to help.

Dr LAWRENCE—Yes, in putting in the time if someone has severe educational disadvantage and needs retraining.

Mrs Taylor—Where it does actually come in handy in that sense is that you can actually provide external staff as support. It allows for us to do that. Just going back to the tendering process, I probably need to make it a bit clearer. Because we are a member of Job Futures, Job Futures puts in the tender and they contract the services out to us.

Dr LAWRENCE—So you do not have to be constantly doing the administrative work although you have to prepare the material?

Mrs Taylor—Yes.

Dr LAWRENCE—In terms of the preparation for employment, how easy do you find it to get the necessary training places for people you identify as needing additional training, or do you have to try and slot them into the market at whatever level of training they appear with?

Mrs Taylor—No, we take the opportunity to vary their training opportunities. One of the main things we have done is develop our own training packages. What we have found, which is no new discovery, is that a lot of our people have a very low level of education. Most of them would have finished school at the beginning of year 8 or something. So we have had to develop our training to fill that gap between when most of our job seekers would have left school through to, I guess, the year 12 level. It is what we call pre-employment training or work-ready transition training—one of the two.

Dr LAWRENCE—And you do that in house?

Mrs Taylor—Yes. We choose to do that in house because it is the environment and the type of delivery that is important. We have obviously realised that people respond to that much more effectively. We have just recently had quite a successful outcome with an external provider, J-Five.

Mrs Colegate—Yes, J-Five Education and Training Services. They run courses such as certificate III in aged care, health and community and those types of medical training fields.

Dr LAWRENCE—Who is J-Five? Is it a private provider?

Mrs Colegate—It is an RTO. It is based right next door to us, which is a huge asset for us. Of the six ladies that we referred there five or six weeks ago—it is a six-week training course—I think we have four success stories out of that. What has helped it a lot is that we are actually based next door, so, for their little breaks, they come in and have their coffee and toast. The connection is there and we have a great rapport with the ladies who run the course. That in itself is really good.

Dr LAWRENCE—One of the big pressures, as you know, in all areas of service delivery is mainstreaming.

Mrs Taylor—Yes.

Dr LAWRENCE—I would be interested to know your views about that. What fate do you think would await clients like the ones you deal with if they were just being dealt with by a great, big agency that had multiple responsibilities?

Mrs Taylor—My knowledge and understanding of the mainstreaming agencies, particularly the bigger ones, is that we have had many job seekers who have gone to them and spent a time with them—

Dr LAWRENCE—And they have come to you?

Mrs Taylor—They have come back to us or come to us. We have a regular referral list to us from other agencies. It would be fair to say there would be around 10 a week.

Dr LAWRENCE—With regard to those big agencies you mentioned earlier like Mission Australia and the other major deliverer Communicare—

Mrs Taylor—Communicare in Cannington.

Dr LAWRENCE—Where you are.

Mrs Taylor—That is exactly right. In the south-east corridor where our other office is, there are three huge competitors that we have to contend with. In fact, that is a much smaller business share that we have out there.

Dr LAWRENCE—From your point of view, what is the specific advantage as you see it of an Indigenous specialist organisation?

Mrs Taylor—Because of the cultural reasons. One of our major assets, I believe, is knowing the community, for instance. It is a very discrete community. People might argue that discrete communities are more around remote areas but, in fact, the urban context in this sense for the Noongar community is very discrete. We would know most of the clan groups. We would know those groups that are feuding. Feuding is a pretty common phenomenon in our communities today. Quite often, we personally know the people ringing up. All that is an advantage for us to work with, because we do not have to then start from the beginning of developing relationships. That is critical in the whole process of building up anybody's self-esteem.

CHAIR—There are many facets. As you know, the inquiry is trying to find the successes. We know we can easily look for where policy has failed, and we all get significantly frustrated over a long period of time for a whole range of reasons. I would like to talk about some of your positive outcomes. I am a South Australian, and this morning I had a call from South Australia. We have fixed a problem and saved 68 jobs and this lady is very happy with me, which is even better and which is unusual in my job. You know how you get a real buzz sometimes and think, 'This is all worth while'? Can you give us a couple of those examples and why you think they were worth while?

Mrs Taylor—One example that I am very happy with at the moment, though we are still working very hard on it, is what we have called a multiple placement. It is in Gingin. The staff there have worked very hard to develop the relationships within that community. It was very difficult at the beginning. There are several industries with whom we have a relationship and who are quite prepared to take on our job seekers. Coming with that are things like relocation and what we call post-placement support—all of those things that are part of our service delivery anyway. Our job seekers have responded to that very well. They have taken on the responsibility. They have participated in helping find their own accommodation. We have a caravan up there at the moment. They now know that that is theirs and they have to be responsible for that. From my point of view, that has demonstrated to me that people can take on that challenge if you give them the opportunity to do it. They do not always but, in this case, we think they have done very well. Gingin is probably an hour and a half away. These people would have families. They have gone up there with the understanding that their families are still here but they are prepared to go up every Sunday afternoon and come back every Friday evening and spend the weekend with their family. I think that is a huge thing and a big ask.

Mrs VALE—Gee, Cheryle, we do that in parliament, and the Western Australian politicians have longer to travel.

Mrs Taylor—That is right.

Mr SLIPPER—We are bit short of the load.

Mrs Taylor—It is a big ask from my point of view, anyway. What is the number for Gingin, Kerri?

Mrs Colegate—It is eight.

Dr LAWRENCE—Who is the employer?

Mrs Colegate—There are Westralian Fruits, the Gingin Meatworks and Loose Leaf Lettuce.

Dr LAWRENCE—So they are basically horticultural?

Mrs Colegate—Yes.

Dr LAWRENCE—Is that seasonal employment?

Mrs Taylor—Yes. One great thing about it I did not mention earlier that I think is important to this whole process is that job seekers along the continuum have a different time of unemployment. I think—and correct me if I am wrong—that a couple of those are what we call 'very long-term unemployed'. That is when you get a buzz—when you can place those people who have been unemployed for three years plus and keep them in work. That is the biggest buzz you can get.

CHAIR—That is fantastic, yes. I want to ask you about the employers and the degree of difficulty faced—the attitude, the perception and, some might even say, racism. I will give you an insight into what has happened to me in the last three days. An Indigenous employer runs his own mining company. It is centred around this one man, and his wife is very much part of the team. He said, yesterday afternoon in Kalgoorlie, 'We are not asking so much for money. In fact, we are not asking for money. We are asking for an opportunity.' That resonated with me: 'Just give us a go'. Can you talk about employers and who will give you a go? You have talked about two or three, but could you talk about the general attitude of employers? How do you find them? Tough, no doubt.

Mrs Taylor—Yes. Kerri can remind me if I have not got this quite right, but one of our aims is to always look for what we call 'friendly employers'. I say to staff, 'Don't waste time looking and pushing if people are not prepared to do it after a first or second visit or conversation.' There is no point. So one of our main aims is to always look for friendly employers. In some ways that is not so hard for us, but they are very few and far between. That is the problem. And they are usually small businesses themselves. They are not those production line sorts of businesses.

CHAIR—About five or 10 people?

Mrs Taylor—Yes. We had a really successful employer until about 12 months ago. He went broke, which was a bit of a shame because he persevered with people who we put in there. We put a lot of support in there too. But they are not out there very often.

CHAIR—The last question I have is on the issue of education—basic literacy and numeracy. We also ran into someone yesterday who was setting up privately a basic skills in literacy and numeracy program as part of a service in Perth not exclusively for, but focused on, Indigenous people. Can you talk a little bit about education, how you find it among your job seeker clients and the issues around the education system? It seems to me that it needs a bit more than a valve grind; it needs a complete overhaul in some places.

Mrs VALE—The program was called ALTA – 1. Have you ever heard of it?

Mrs Taylor—Who was running it?

Mrs VALE—I can get you some information on it.

Mrs Taylor—We have our own on-site literacy and numeracy program that we have developed ourselves. We have found that very useful. It is useful in the sense that you know that while you are running it on site, you have control over how the flow of your job seeker goes. You can monitor it and, once they start improving, you then know where you can start looking for work for these people.

CHAIR—It was very clearly put to us that if you can link the purpose of literacy and numeracy with gaining a job, then that makes sense to young people. It is very hard to get them to connect unless they can see a purpose to what is happening.

Mrs Taylor—Our experience with the literacy and numeracy that we run on our site is that older people seem to take advantage of it more than the younger ones. That is not to say that some of the younger ones do not need it, but they are not so long out of school and are not so bad. Again, if you think about the older ones, they are the ones who would have suffered for longer and been out of school a lot longer than the younger ones. There were also limited opportunities for the older ones.

Mr SLIPPER—The real problem is the education system. I cannot speak for Western Australia but I know that in Queensland, and more generally throughout the states, the system is producing a large number of kids who can go right through to year 12 and are not literate and numerate. Of course there is an undeniable connection between being able to read, write and count and getting a job. I think the fact that someone has recently left school does not necessarily mean that person has the life skills, the literacy and numeracy skills to actually get a job.

Mrs Taylor—They are less keen, though, to want to undertake a literacy and numeracy program, in our experience.

CHAIR—They have other things on their mind, probably.

Mrs Taylor—Exactly.

Mrs VALE—Do you think they are embarrassed?

Mrs Taylor—I do not think they know what the real world is about. This new reform is going to hit them smack in the face and that will have to wake them up.

Mr SLIPPER—Is this the program that was announced a couple of days ago?

Mrs Taylor—Yes, the 2006 changes that are coming in.

Mr SLIPPER—Right. The broader policy from Peter Dutton's ministerial portfolio.

Mrs Taylor—It is our experience that, generally, the older people take that up and take it up with gusto—they love it.

CHAIR—Do you see genuine outcomes there?

Mrs Taylor—Absolutely. We sell it by telling them, ‘You have to be able to read signs. You have to be able to fill out forms.’

CHAIR—We became acutely aware of this from the mining industry. That industry has big equipment, big dangers and big risks. Unless you have literacy and numeracy, you will be dead pretty quick or you will kill someone else.

Mrs Taylor—The mining industry is where some of our people, not a lot, want to go. We say to them, ‘These are the things that you have to be able to do if you want to get into the mining industry,’ and it does involve going right back to the beginnings of numeracy and literacy.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. I could go on at great length. As we know, it is a critical issue.

Mrs VALE—Are there any Aboriginal employers you can access? We know about Carey Mining that apparently operates from Perth. Have you ever had any contact with Carey?

Mrs Taylor—We have tried like damn hell to get our people through there. I think we have had a couple through there.

Mrs Colegate—There is not a very high success rate. Our clientele group have multiple barriers. The basic entry requirements for the mining industry are your police clearance, your licence—

Mrs VALE—And your literacy, particularly for getting a licence.

Mrs Colegate—Yes. Three-quarters of our caseload probably do not have a licence. When one does come through with a licence, it is a success.

CHAIR—The jackpot.

Mrs Colegate—Yes. Not only that, we face a lot of them who probably cannot get police clearances. A lot of jobs nowadays require that, and that is another barrier in itself. A lot of them have been fined and that prevents them from getting a police clearance.

CHAIR—That was the theme the committee heard about yesterday. This issue is a vicious circle. We have some reasonably effective substance abuse diversion programs—and you can be the judge of how effective they are. It seems totally inappropriate that these young people are in jail for that sort of stuff. They have no licence, they have a suspension or they have lost their licence or whatever. There must be a better way somehow.

Mrs VALE—I think we need some innovative solutions in that regard. We heard yesterday that a young person would be precluded from getting a licence because they could not get the police clearance because they had a whole series of fines because they were driving without a licence in the first place.

CHAIR—It is the cheapest way to go to jail.

Mrs Taylor—Carmen might be able to correct me here, but I understand that WA is the only state that actually adds the driving offences onto a police clearance.

CHAIR—I see, so you can have a separate criminality type.

Mrs Taylor—Maybe it is another glitch in the system, but we have found a way around it. In fact it was with J-Five, the group I talked about earlier, that we found it. They said, ‘Don’t worry about that; we’ll see to that for you.’ Apparently you can get a police clearance but it depends on what your record is. I am presuming that that is where they might forgo—

Dr LAWRENCE—That is where they might make that distinction.

CHAIR—I think you are right. I think that came out yesterday too.

Mrs VALE—Cheryle, your organisation is the Manguri Indigenous employment organisation. Is that just a name and you operate all over Perth or is that a particular area, shire or locality here?

Mrs Taylor—No, that is just a name.

Mrs VALE—Do you have a large pool of Indigenous people here in Perth to find employment for?

Mrs Taylor—Yes. Do not ask me the number.

Mrs Colegate—Our active caseload is around 270. That is at our Maddington site.

Mrs VALE—That is quite considerable. Do you have one of our new local Indigenous coordination centres here in Perth?

Mrs Taylor—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Have you had any contact with that centre yet?

Mrs Taylor—No. We are making contact, though.

Mrs VALE—I suppose it is early days to ask how you feel you are being served.

Mrs Taylor—We are just really pursuing what it is and how we go about having that contact.

Mrs VALE—Your feedback and your needs.

CHAIR—They haven’t rung you and said, ‘How’s it going?’

Mrs Taylor—No.

Mrs VALE—Cheryle, if you had the opportunity to articulate what you would like the government to do for you, would you be able to give us, say, three of the most important points?

Mrs Taylor—I think the time issue is really critical. By that I mean that these tenders last for three years and, if you do not perform in those three years, there is the possibility of you losing opportunity to tender. As I said earlier, we tender under Job Futures, but we are still vulnerable. As an Indigenous provider, to really show any impact on the issue, I think it could take some time, even generations, but, say, 10 or 12 years. That is what the government are going to have to look at in terms of a turnaround period. I think the model is a good model but, if they are going to have a model like that, they really need to be understanding and sensitive about how to empower Aboriginal people to do that. It is sort of give in one hand and take away with the other.

Mrs VALE—You have not written us a submission, have you?

Mrs Taylor—No.

Mrs VALE—Perhaps you could let us have the kind of information that you want us to know in a submission. You can think about it too. One of the things that has struck me is that you have used the word ‘relationship’ quite a lot. How important is building relationships with prospective employers? Obviously you are nurturing them all the time.

Mrs Taylor—It is absolutely critical. I encourage all staff to do that. I think it is going to take that for all the staff at the service to understand what relationships are—as I said, from the front desk to whomever else is working there. It is really important to value them. I think through that our relationship is of value to them. That is what we push a lot—that we, as Indigenous people, have a tremendous amount that we can offer non-Indigenous people. That is the motto that we even use with our Indigenous job seekers. They might not have a job, they might not have this, but as Indigenous people what they have to offer back to the community has no price on it. That is extremely important.

Mrs VALE—Yesterday we had a submission that spoke about opportunities—not just the opportunities for employment for Indigenous people but opportunities that the government might be able to provide or support for Aboriginal businesses. Do you have any thoughts on that? I know that you are focusing on employing people—finding them job placements—but have you had any thoughts about how the government could actually encourage Aboriginal business enterprise?

Mrs Taylor—Off the top of my head, the first thing I would say would be something like this. Indigenous people need to learn about business. Most of us want to do it. Most of us have the will and the desire to do it. But we have never operated out of a business model. As much as we want to do it, failure becomes almost inevitable if you really do not know that well what you are going into. Education around that sort of thing is really important. That whole thing about pushing enterprise is critical. But if you push somebody to the edge of the cliff and they do not really know where they are jumping—

Mrs VALE—Perhaps an initiative on a business support program in some way might be helpful for Indigenous people?

Mrs Taylor—One might say: go to business school. But that is far beyond what I think is needed in this sense.

Mrs VALE—That will come.

Mrs Taylor—That will come, yes. There are Indigenous people doing that, but it is a slow trickle. There is ample opportunity in a lot of areas for enterprise, but do we have the capacity. We have to build the capacity.

Mrs VALE—And education is the key to that.

Mrs Taylor—Yes.

Mrs VALE—Thank you.

Mr SLIPPER—You are under the Job Network agency, are you?

Mrs Colegate—Yes.

Mr SLIPPER—You operate as a specialist organisation assisting Indigenous people. Do you have any non-Indigenous clients?

Mrs Taylor—No.

Mr SLIPPER—You operate throughout the Perth metropolitan area.

Mrs Taylor—Central.

Mr SLIPPER—I am sorry if I am dealing with some of the other questions that were asked previously, but what success rate do you have compared with other Job Network agencies? Firstly, how do you compare with non-Indigenous placement agencies? Secondly, what proportion of the people that you place in jobs would go into non-subsidised jobs? And what proportion—maybe that is the wrong word—would go into jobs that have some incentives for people to put on staff who are Indigenous?

Mrs Taylor—The wage subsidy is a great resource for us. We use that quite regularly. It is one of our tools.

Mr SLIPPER—That is the general wage subsidy?

Mrs Taylor—No. There are two wage subsidies. There is the government wage subsidy, which I think they call wage assistance. And then we have a wage subsidy in a service delivery area. So there are two types of subsidy that we can offer. It is certainly the tool that we use to negotiate. Most employers take it up. There are rules for that. They are only allowed the government subsidy if they keep the person on in a full-time job. They cannot use the wage subsidy up and then say goodbye to the person. They have to ensure that it does turn into a full-time job. Some of them take that up; a lot do not.

Mr SLIPPER—And how do you compare with generalist Job Network agencies?

Mrs Taylor—We are 100 per cent on generalist providers, because we are only an Indigenous provider. Generalist providers have to put Indigenous and non-Indigenous people into work. Our numbers might not correspond, but we are 100 per cent when it comes to placing Aboriginal people. In our ESA, which is—

Mrs Colegate—Employment service area.

Mrs Taylor—They call them employment service areas. You would have however many providers in that area. One of the things that we compete against is exactly that. We are rated not against Indigenous but against our competitors.

Dr LAWRENCE—Across the board?

Mrs Colegate—There are 12 providers in our ESA.

Dr LAWRENCE—That is hardly fair at all. That is very interesting.

Mrs Taylor—I meant to say that, because it is really critical.

Dr LAWRENCE—That would put you at a great disadvantage, wouldn't it?

Mrs Taylor—Absolutely.

Dr LAWRENCE—It is more credit to you that you manage to keep getting it.

Mrs Taylor—That is why I proudly say that we put in 100 per cent because we are only working with Indigenous people.

Mr SLIPPER—What sorts of jobs are you placing people into?

Mrs Taylor—They are pretty low skilled jobs. We have no choice about that. A lot of our people do not have skills. This contract first started in 2003, and the contracts run for three years. One of the first things we did was to ensure that we could demonstrate that those job seekers that came onto our books in 2003 were not there at the end of the contract.

Mrs Colegate—There is one thing I wanted to add in relation to the placements. We have targets that we need to reach on a monthly basis. Our target every month is 29 placements for job seekers.

Mr SLIPPER—Do you meet that target?

Mrs Colegate—No. In July we had a good month; we placed something like 27, and it was just wonderful. We need to get them through the 26-week period, and that is just coming up in January. I think at this point in time we have about 11, which is really quite good.

Mr SLIPPER—Mrs Colegate, I asked before about the sorts of jobs, and I think Mrs Taylor said they were low-skilled jobs. You said that you placed 25 in one month. Could you give me an indication of the range of jobs in that month, just as a snapshot in time?

Mrs Colegate—We were quite fortunate; probably half of them were what we call 'FOEs'—they found their own employment. I think they were office jobs—jobs that were higher up than our job seekers would probably normally go to. Normally the jobs would be general labouring, cleaning—

Mrs Taylor—We do a lot of business with labour hire companies. We call them our friendly employers because they are quite happy to take on the wage subsidy and continue to keep our people there. So labour hire companies are really quite helpful. Quite often they are happy to work with us.

CHAIR—It is very interesting in the way it works together.

Mr SLIPPER—This is my last question. I think I may have asked this question at a public hearing in Cairns of an Indigenous person who was helping to place other people in jobs in the general market. I asked him about cultural differences. For instance, in the building industry or the hospitality industry businesses need reliability. You can't run a restaurant if employees do not turn up—even for the best reasons, whether it be for funerals, compassionate reasons or cultural reasons. Do you find that a disincentive for people to take on Indigenous employees is that, for various reasons, sometimes Indigenous people are not able to front at the job? How do you get around that? Similarly, if you are on a building site, you cannot just have someone not turn up. If he doesn't turn up, then there has to be someone else. Do you know what I mean?

Mrs Taylor—The term we apply to that is 'workplace culture'. One of the things we focus on when we are trying to place people is to ensure that the workplace culture is something that our jobseekers are going to be able to cope with. We have had some successes with the hospitality industry. In fact, we have had really good successes with hospitality but not as many as we would like.

Again, we have to get our people extremely used to that workplace culture environment. We actually run training in that. We develop a training package that focuses just on workplace culture, which is really interesting because there is a lot of acting, painting, role-play and other stuff that goes on so that we can ensure they are used to it when people are out there. One way of getting around that quite successfully is to ensure that our job seeker has got something to offer back to that environment. Yes, the environment is there and they are working in it but, as much as that is there for them to be productive and work, they have got a lot to offer back too.

Mr SLIPPER—Like what, for instance?

Mrs Taylor—Information about Indigenous people. One of the things we struggle with is misconceptions, myths, about Aboriginal people and not working, being lazy and things like that.

Mrs VALE—Changing a culture within that organisation by having somebody embedded in there who can understand.

Mrs Taylor—Absolutely. And the experience a lot of people have, back the other way, is being seen as the expert when they are in those environments. That is not a healthy thing in a lot of ways, because it does overwhelm a lot of Aboriginal people. The politics of any community are such that I might be a Noongar, but I cannot speak for Yamatjis—the ones in Kalgoorlie and places like that. That is just who we are and that is how we operate. It works two ways.

Dr LAWRENCE—One last question on that point. When you look at the proportion of Indigenous people in the wider metropolitan area—but a lot of people live in the cities and people forget that—in any workplace there are probably only one or two, if you are lucky. That sense of isolation must sometimes be a factor in people leaving. Is there any sort of capacity for ongoing support in those work environments where they are in a distinct minority and sometimes get to feel a bit cut off? It depends on their workmates, of course—I have seen people who are supportive, but some who are pretty awful.

Mrs Taylor—We have to make a judgment call sometimes too. There are more capable Aboriginal people than others, people with more capacity than others. Not everybody is on the same level, so there is a call you have to make sometimes where you know somebody is quite capable and has the capacity, and you can challenge them: ‘Don’t underestimate yourself, guys: get out there and do it. You can do it.’ On the other hand, there are extremely vulnerable people that you would not do the same thing to, so you have to nurture them a little bit. There is a commonsense approach to all that, too. The bottom line for us is: we have got to find people jobs and keep them there. But, at the end of the day, if you are going to find them inappropriate jobs, you are really just wasting your time. Our effort is to try to put them into sustainable employment.

CHAIR—That is the great skill you develop. That is what you bring to the table, that capacity to make those sorts of judgments, isn’t it?

Mrs Taylor—Absolutely.

CHAIR—Mrs Vale, do you have one last question you would like to ask? I think it was about practical reconciliation.

Mrs VALE—I wanted to know whether you have seen any evidence that practical reconciliation actually assists and helps you in your work and Aboriginal people generally.

Mrs Taylor—Just to clarify, are you using ‘reconciliation’—

Mrs VALE—No, do you see the policy of practical reconciliation—

CHAIR—It is part of our the terms of reference. Mrs Vale just saw something that reminded her of it.

Mrs Taylor—You are talking about reconciliation as reconciliation—

Dr LAWRENCE—No. The Prime Minister some time ago declared that ‘reconciliation’ as generally understood was to be replaced by ‘practical reconciliation’, which is basically focusing

on service delivery as opposed to any assessment of a rights based question or a recognition of Indigenous disadvantage in that formal sense.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Carmen. That was my fault. I dobbed Mrs Vale in! We got caught short.

Mrs Taylor—I will have the question again.

Mrs VALE—Do you have any experience in which you can say that practical reconciliation is actually delivering the services that government hopes it is delivering for the Aboriginal people? That is really about service delivery. It is about practical support. You were talking about changing from welfare dependency to, hopefully, the self-respect that comes from being employed.

Mrs Taylor—If I understand the question as you have put it to me, I will give what I think is a better answer—that is, we have to be assessed a bit differently. As we were saying a while ago, we cannot compete. There is no practical reconciliation in saying, 'You're chucked into an ESA with three or four major providers and, if you don't perform at that level, you are out the door.' To me, that is where practical reconciliation should be at its best, but we are not seeing that at that level. I am not asking for special treatment here; I am just asking for—

Mrs VALE—Understanding.

Mrs Taylor—understanding that no way in the world, given the group that we are dealing with and the huge task of competing that we face, can we then compete with other providers who have the resources. They are huge million-dollar businesses that we are competing against.

CHAIR—Without being patronising, there is a degree of difficultly. Forgive me for being crude, but Cathy Duncan, in talking on the experience of New South Wales, said that to keep black bums on seats once you have put them there is not easy. She is an Indigenous person herself. That is why I can say it and almost get away with it.

Dr LAWRENCE—You want to be careful. New South Wales ministers will come unstuck. Their bums have been off the seats.

CHAIR—Thank you for the warning. What Carmen says is so important. That is why your response is valuable, because that is what it means to you. If you do not do that, that fails the test.

Mrs Taylor—Absolutely.

Mrs VALE—These new Indigenous coordination centres are supposed to be there to deliver practical reconciliation. I understand that yours has not made contact with you yet. Hopefully, if we get to see you in another 12 months, we can ask the same question and we hope that you find that you are getting some service delivery or your needs met.

Mrs Taylor—I hope so.

CHAIR—None of us expected to see each other this morning. I thank you very much for what was a pretty hastily prepared—probably more for you than for us—effort. Thank you for being here. I think you are making a valuable contribution to our deliberations. Do any of you have any last comments? Have you been before committees much before?

Mrs Taylor—I have, but this is a learning curve for these young ladies.

CHAIR—It is a bit different.

Mrs Taylor—I have been before committees before. I hope that each one that I have been before is part of the process of the reconciliation efforts that go on in Australia. I believe the non-Indigenous people that sit on these committees sit on them because they believe in them. As an Indigenous person sitting before these types of committees, I believe that these types of processes must occur for positive change to occur with regard to Australia's Indigenous people. Thank you for the opportunity to present our case.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

[10.12 am]

DANN, Mr Anthony, Chairperson, Yamatji Marlpa Barna Baba Maaja Aboriginal Corporation

HAWKINS, Mr Simon, Executive Director, Yamatji Marlpa Barna Baba Maaja Aboriginal Corporation

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have a short opening statement?

Mr Hawkins—Yes, I have prepared a little statement. First off, I would like to talk about the organisation, just to give you some background. We are basically a native title representative body that represents 30 native title claims across the Murchison-Gascoyne and the Pilbara area of Western Australia. The organisation’s governance structure is multilayered with two regional committees: one representing the Murchison-Gascoyne or the Yamatji region and one representing the Pilbara, and they come together as a governing committee. Neil Finlay, who is the co-chair for the Pilbara, unfortunately could not attend today. He sends his apologies.

Our organisation has an Indigenous employment rate of around 50 per cent of the total staff. We have several Indigenous staff members who are in senior management positions as well as throughout the organisation in administration or technical positions. The way we go about our decision making processes is through the establishment of working groups that represent each claim. That is normally made up of around 10 to 16 traditional owners. They represent the broader community and obviously make decisions and instruct us on what to do with their various claims. Basically, some of the working groups have been in place for approximately 10 years, and people have actually been engaged in native title and negotiations around native title for that period of time.

One issue we want to talk about today is Indigenous employment opportunities surrounding native title. Through our process we deal with future act matters with mining companies and a range of government and other agencies. As part of those negotiations, for the majority there are employment quotas and a number of people to be employed through the various companies.

Basically, we are at the forefront of negotiating on those matters and the training initiatives that can also come out of a future act matter. We do that in isolation or without any support from any employment agencies or any other government organisation. We see that there is a real opportunity to have a whole-of-government approach, particularly early on in the piece, to maximise those opportunities. The reason I wanted to highlight that point is that the working group members or members of their community are invariably the people who may end up being employed by these companies. They are part of the negotiation and also potential employees of these companies. So you have the mix of people—the decision-makers and also the people who are likely to be employed—in the area at the one time. It is a real opportunity for government to perhaps provide the support services necessary to make a successful transition for people to enter full-time employment.

We have raised this on several occasions with government through a variety of submissions. We feel that there has not been enough effort made to realise this opportunity. In the Pilbara, we are dealing with all the major iron ore companies—Rio Tinto, BHP—and also a range of smaller miners which are still large companies, relatively in the Murchison-Gascoyne. We feel that the smaller companies do it better than the larger companies. Certainly we feel that there is a lot of opportunity for larger companies to improve how they go about their employment of Indigenous people.

Dr LAWRENCE—Just before you go on, we are seeing Woodside later today. Do you have any dealings with them or any of their subsidiary companies?

Mr Hawkins—No. We did originally as part of a native title claim, which has now been determined. We do not do any further work with that claim group.

Dr LAWRENCE—I am sorry; I did not mean to interrupt.

Mr Hawkins—That is fine. I think I will just leave it at that point.

CHAIR—Anthony, did you want to add something?

Mr Dann—No.

CHAIR—It might be useful just to describe how you participate and one or two things that may have come across your desk in the last year or two that relate to employment opportunities or negotiations. Is there anything there that comes to mind?

Mr Dann—Just in relation to any mining activities that are happening in our region, every specific claim group has the opportunity to negotiate with the mining companies that they are dealing with. There are sections of that agreement which request that the mining company offers employment and training to a certain number of Aboriginal people from that claim group. That is probably the way we operate. They appear to be reasonably successful, just from my region, for example. We do have some Aboriginal people who, had the mining company not come along and offered that employment and training, would not have really got into any meaningful employment.

CHAIR—I like the way you see it in a positive light. It has been part of a process where the opportunity has arisen and it may not have happened without that offer. I suppose then it becomes an issue of negotiation of access for some exchange in terms of native title rights. I would like to understand that process a little. At that point, I would presume, it would be the state government people mainly.

Mr Hawkins—In terms of the negotiation?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Hawkins—The future act agreements around native title are invariably with the actual company directly. The state government has not really been involved.

CHAIR—It is more that the company does that?

Mr Hawkins—Yes.

CHAIR—I was really interested in your comment about the smaller and the larger. Why and how?

Mr Hawkins—With the smaller companies, you invariably have the managing director or the CEO involved in the negotiations. So you get commitment from the most senior—

CHAIR—A person who is able to make a decision.

Mr Hawkins—Yes, the decision maker. The larger companies invariably use their external affairs staff to deal with the future act or the negotiations, and they do not necessarily have any pull within the organisation to actually deliver on the agreements, compared to the boss who sits down with people and says, 'Yes, we will do this', and has an interest in it.

CHAIR—There are a few layers to work their way through. I would be interested to try and define 'smaller' and 'larger'. You have got one or two companies here that are among the biggest in the world. On the other hand, and with all due respect to Hope Downs and Fortescue Metals Group, I am not that familiar with those companies. What is the scale—what is the difference in outcomes for jobs?

Mr Hawkins—I suppose the smaller companies we are talking about are predominantly those in gold and nickel and those types of resources. The larger ones are invariably in iron ore, in our area, although there are smaller iron ore producers now opening up in the Murchison-Gascoyne area because of the increase in price.

CHAIR—But are they 50 versus 5,000, or 50 versus 500?

Mr Hawkins—When I say 'small companies', they might employ 1,000 people or 500 people. It is most probably not the right term—they may not want me to refer to them as 'small companies'!

CHAIR—They are, compared to the giants—we are talking about world size with some of the bigger people. But it is a really interesting point about how you find the negotiations. In our summary of the submission, there is a quote which I think paraphrases your submission a little but it says: 'The real opportunities for indigenous employment are through the native title future act process'. Exactly what that means, I am probably not as clear as I would like to be. Nevertheless, the leverage from the native title gives the negotiating position. I understand that, and I understand that it creates the opportunity. But I am wary because we are also hearing that it is better to be a facilitator than a benefactor for long-term sustainable Indigenous employment. Understand where I am coming from: the foot in the door is important, but the basic issue of Indigenous employment still seems, to me, to come down to education—that is, to be job ready; and it comes down to seeing a purpose in having a job. I just wanted to raise that general philosophical point. Some of us were with Indigenous people over these last two or three days in Kalgoorlie. Some had just been outright rejected, and had just persevered and become apprentices, and now will own their own mining companies. That is an amazing story—and that

is the story of life, for all of us, I guess; it is not that different in nature. I have this question, though: it is important to have the opportunities from native titles, but is it the right way to have sustainable employment for Indigenous people over the long term? Could we explore that? I think I know what your answer will be, but I just want to try and draw that out a little.

Mr Hawkins—I suppose part of the answer is that the people making the decisions on the negotiations are almost invariably the elders of the group. They are the leaders in their community. They are not necessarily all elders—there are people that have been entrusted to take over the leadership role, and they could be young and they could be female or they could be male. So they are the people that are strategically making the decision that they want to see as part of the development. They want to see employment outcomes and they want to see their people employed. So you have already got people taking responsibilities in the decision, and I think that is a critical part of it. We are suggesting that there should be a process. We know these future act matters are under way. We know that positions are available. We know that not many people take up those positions and there is a list of reasons why. I am not an employment expert to give that advice, but certainly there is a need for support services to make that transition, and education and training and all the obvious ones are part of that.

Dr LAWRENCE—Are you saying that that is what is missing in terms of government provision?

Mr Hawkins—Yes. The other thing that is missing is the monitoring of these agreements. We are under-resourced as an organisation and we do not have the ability to monitor agreements once, because we would just move to the next matter.

CHAIR—I will put the other side of the argument. The basic issue is to try and ask people to be sufficiently educated to want to have a job for its own sake. That is a bit purist; I accept that. But to take it the other way around: without the native title opportunities it would probably be your view—without putting words in your mouth—that these opportunities would not arise, full stop.

Mr Hawkins—I do not think that companies would be exposed to it as much. If you are busy digging a hole in the ground—

CHAIR—But native title is a positive thing in creating these opportunities.

Mr Hawkins—It brings the leadership of the traditional owners together with the leadership of the company, and strategic alliances develop.

CHAIR—An equal relationship type of thing.

Mr Hawkins—Yes. It depends upon the company approach.

CHAIR—Let me go to the companies—you talked about smaller and larger; let us talk about the larger. I think the larger companies are very proud—and it is part of their corporate image—of being involved with Indigenous people. They pride themselves on this and on doing it well. I think there are many examples of where they are doing it pretty well. Can we talk about the

larger employers, the positives and the positive outcomes but also the other side of it and what some of the flaws are?

Mr Hawkins—I will relay a conversation I had with some traditional owners talking about one of the large companies up in the Pilbara. They felt that working for the company there was not any real support provided to their families. Invariably, they have moved from a community elsewhere to a town to work for the company. The comments were that it was fine for the men or the family to go off and work for the company because they had that contact with other males working within the company but for the families at home looking after young children, they are isolated and away from their community groups. The companies were not making any effort to try and resolve that. They gave examples of being located and separated throughout the town in different areas away from their extended family when there was an opportunity to build upon that. That is an example of where companies need to focus on making certain that the home life is right culturally. With a lot of the TOs, if you take them out of their country—when I say out of their country, we represent 19 claims in the Pilbara and all the different skin groups. People clearly identify where their country is, and going to somebody else's country has in itself—

CHAIR—It might be useful to explain the geography. What would the distances be, for example? Would it be 100 kilometres, 50 kilometres or 10 kilometres?

Mr Hawkins—It could be 500 kilometres.

CHAIR—It could be as much as that. The interesting thing with the larger corporates is they are talking: we're employing locally; we are not fly in, fly out. So that is a different view of it.

Mr Hawkins—I think in the Pilbara, while I do not have any data on it here, the data that is provided by the large companies should be questioned. The local information that is provided to us in discussions is that the locals are not being employed. They are not being employed by the company. Invariably, it is Aboriginal people from elsewhere.

CHAIR—It is a very interesting point because we know of a an example of where that is clearly happening—not with mining companies but with another organisation. Also, one company I can think of in particular is giving the figures of locals employed and Indigenous people employed, and they are two different figures. I have noticed that coming up in the last little while.

Mr Hawkins—One of the things that we would question is the employment figures of the large companies. They undertake a lot of heritage work throughout their areas of interest, and we have a feeling that when they employ Aboriginal people to do heritage work—as in, on their own country and they get paid for undertaking that work—that they are most probably part of the employment numbers that they talk about.

Dr LAWRENCE—So these are people contracted for a short term.

CHAIR—For a week or a fortnight.

Mr Hawkins—Rather than a machinist or whatever for the company.

CHAIR—I need to be clear about what that actually means.

Mr Hawkins—So it would be interesting to see if the companies can provide that detail.

CHAIR—You mentioned you need government support. The question is: how, why and in what areas could the government give greater support?

Mr Hawkins—Where the government should support—is that the question?

CHAIR—Yes. It is the how, and the why to support the case.

Mr Hawkins—You have people that maybe have not worked for a long period of time, so being fit and ready for work. I always use the analogy of when I was at university. By the time you had to go back to first semester it was really hard to get out of bed by nine o'clock in the morning because you were used to staying out all night and you did not have to do anything. You were living at home or whatever.

CHAIR—A fairly common experience across Australia.

Mr Hawkins—Yes. Everyone goes through that. Getting fit and ready for work is important. I think having support where people do not feel isolated because, invariably, they will have to move to the place of employment that may be away from their community. Going back to their community, there might be a lot of people around them that are not employed that are perhaps playing cards all night or, obviously, have a different life style compared to someone who has to front up to work each day.

I think one of the interesting issues—and this came up when I was working in local government some time ago—is that companies invariably employ people on contract matters who do not work 12-hour shifts. They might have a half day here or work daylight hours or whatever. The comment that I put in front of the company was: why couldn't they do that with Indigenous people, rather than having a 12-hour shift, two weeks on, one week off. There are lots of jobs in the company where you do not have to do a 12-hour shift. Why can't we get people employed like that to build up their tolerance, I suppose, towards working and working longer.

Mrs VALE—An adjustment process.

Mr Hawkins—Yes, it is an adjustment issue.

Mrs VALE—It is a psychological process.

Dr LAWRENCE—And the mining industry is a pretty tough employer at the best of times—let's not kid ourselves about that. They ride everyone pretty hard.

Mr Hawkins—Yes, and I think the adjustment process is really important. That has to be handled. By the same token, it is a very difficult one to handle, because you obviously do not want employees in the company who stand out unnecessarily, who are treated too differently.

CHAIR—It is a fine line. I was just trying to understand how the government could give more support. I am not sure that I have enough there to make a recommendation with. I understand the separation from family, but I am trying to see what would make a difference in Indigenous issues from a government perspective.

Mr Dann—I think what people have to understand is that it is actually a changing culture. Thirty years ago you could leave school at 14, walk out onto a station or walk to a farm and find yourself a job. You did not need a qualification. The need for an education at that stage was never important. We as Aboriginal people just decided: 'I'll go home to my family. I'll get a job on the station,' 'I'll get a job on the farm,' or 'I'll get a job mustering, fencing, fixing the mill or whatever.' There was never a need for an education to do that. You picked it up. You learned that as you went. Now the emphasis is on completing at least year 10 or year 12. Although Aboriginal culture is changing, it takes time for that to happen. It is like walking into a mining company or going into training: you need to have someone hold your hand for a period until you get used to that culture. There are simple cultural things like getting up in the morning, going to work, coming home at night, not going off with the boys to have a beer or whatever, and having a good night's rest.

CHAIR—Having one beer and not 10.

Mr Dann—Exactly. And with the change in that culture, some people just do not realise that it is huge, because employment was never important. We were happy doing what we wanted to do. But now, to be able to get a job, you have to have a reasonable education or, if you do not have an education, you need to be quite confident in what you do to be able to go out there and do it. That confidence is not there. You can give all the training you want and say: 'You're trained up. You are now a qualified electrician. Go out and do the work.' I believe that the failure rate in that is still quite great because, in all honesty, all you have is a bit of paper which tells you that you are qualified. You do not really have any work experience out there. Therefore, I think after the completion of your qualification you still need to be helped and assisted through that process.

Mrs VALE—You need a mentor.

Mr Dann—A mentor—exactly.

CHAIR—That is an excellent point, because my father went to year 7, I went to year 10 and my kids went to uni. It is a progression. The freedom that I have is totally different.

Mr Dann—Back at home there is a young boy who has recently done his carpentry qualification, and I have been talking to him in the last few days about going into business for himself. He has a younger brother who wants to be an electrician and who has just completed year 12. But the young boy is just not confident about his ability to go into business on his own, and I am trying to convince him.

CHAIR—He is desperately needed.

Mr Dann—That is right. The current environment in Geraldton is that the building and construction industry has taken off and it will continue to go that way. I continue to say: 'Don't go and work for someone else. Build your own work force and go and do it yourself.' But he just

does not have the confidence. That is my point about having that bit of paper saying, 'I'm a qualified carpenter.' He still does not have the confidence to go out and do it.

Mr SLIPPER—That lack of confidence would not be because he is Indigenous. You would find that most people of similar vintage, young people, who had just qualified would not have the confidence to set up a business either. I think something like 80 or 90 per cent of all small businesses collapse in the first five years. That is why we have a lot of programs, like NEIS and other things, to help people go into business. It might be exacerbated because the person is Indigenous. I can understand the reticence of that young man to go into his own business, but I would think that, if you looked at non-Indigenous young people as well, there would be a similar reticence, a similar concern and a similar lack of confidence.

Mr Dann—I think there is a difference, and I will tell you what that difference is.

Mr SLIPPER—Please do.

Mr Dann—A non-Aboriginal apprentice might want to be a mechanic because they know someone who is a mechanic, like their old man. Their old man might be an accountant or their mum might be a lawyer, and they might want to take on a similar profession. They would have that person there with a guiding hand that could assist them. They might go into their family business and they would get the mentorship which they needed. This young Aboriginal person's old man is a police aid, an Aboriginal police assistant. His mum is unemployed. They do not own a family business. Therefore, it is a whole new world out there for him and he has to ask, 'Which step do I take?'

Mr SLIPPER—I agree with you, but I would think that very few non-Indigenous young people would have a family business to go into as well. Sure, there would be some that did—certainly more than Indigenous young people. But I would think that most young people who are going into a field other than a field in which their parents are—and I would say most young people would go into a different field—would experience that same need for mentoring and assistance.

CHAIR—Perhaps it is not so much about young people being non-Indigenous or Indigenous, although I do accept your difference, Mr Dann, but about all of them needing mentoring, support and encouragement. How you do that is a critical issue, and it may be that failure is part of the development of success in terms of the business structure. But you raise a key issue. I do not know what the figures show us, but I would suggest that 20 years ago, maybe even 10 years ago, Indigenous business was at zero per cent and now we are seeing 0.1 per cent or something like that. We need to see that six per cent figure or whatever it might be. We need to see that ratio, and we need to build it. However we get there, we have to get there.

Dr LAWRENCE—I have a few questions surrounding the issue you raised, Mr Hawkins, about monitoring and compliance. I know agreements are hard fought and often quite complex. You are suggesting that you do not have the resources to monitor whether the companies are complying with the agreements that they have entered into. That is a really serious concern. I have to say it is not an uncommon problem; mining companies are notoriously difficult to pin down. Even state governments have found it difficult in the past with state agreement acts.

CHAIR—Are you speaking from experience?

Dr LAWRENCE—Absolutely. I am wondering what recommendations you can make to us about how that should be improved. These are potentially fantastic opportunities for economic development and employment, and if the monitoring and compliance elements are not there then it is not much more than a piece of paper and vague goodwill.

Mr Hawkins—In our situation, we have the staff that have been involved with the TOs in negotiating the agreements, so they understand it pretty thoroughly. Those same staff members could be utilised to monitor several agreements which they understand and which they know how and why they have been created and all those sorts of things and ensure that the companies maintain them. In a lot of cases it is a matter of establishing some sort of committee made up of the TOs and the company to make sure that they do deliver on them. But they need to be resourced. The TOs may not necessarily have the skills to do it. It would be a professional job for someone to do.

Dr LAWRENCE—And it is not easy, because some companies are not very transparent, as you say. You almost need an independent agency, a committee or whatever to have a look at these things, don't you?

Mr Hawkins—I think part of it is human nature as well. Everyone has the euphoria around the agreement—it has been reached, it is fantastic—and then the hard work starts, and it goes wanting.

Dr LAWRENCE—Generally speaking, in the agreements are there any agreed consequences for failure to deliver? If you become aware of the fact that, for instance, Indigenous people are not either being offered employment or being supported in employment and companies are meeting their quotas, if you like, by importing people from elsewhere, are there consequences or penalties built into the agreements? People get penalised on the other side of the ledger.

Mr Hawkins—There are not necessarily penalties. I think the consequences purely come down to the fact that the contract has not been delivered.

Dr LAWRENCE—So you would have to take them through the courts?

Mr Hawkins—Yes. We have had some companies who are extremely difficult to pin down. Their approach is quite clearly—

Dr LAWRENCE—Catch us if you can.

Mr Hawkins—And they have plenty of resources to do that.

Dr LAWRENCE—What characterises those companies that make a better fist of it—the ones which are actually trying to support Indigenous employment—and how successfully do you think they are placing local Indigenous people as per the agreement?

Mr Hawkins—I think there is very low success, quite frankly. When companies promote what they do, from our experience and from what we know of dealings, I think the data is very

questionable and the success rate is very low. It would be an interesting question for you to ask Woodside: how many Aboriginal people do they employ who are local to the area in the Pilbara? I have heard rumours that it is extremely low. I cannot verify that.

CHAIR—They have put some figures on the table. We have had some figures, but I would have to go back and check them in the *Hansard*.

Dr LAWRENCE—I think they are worth questioning. Obviously, in the Pilbara as everywhere else throughout the entire region that you cover, there are Job Network providers. What you are suggesting to me is that they are not working with the Indigenous communities and the companies in any constructive way to provide the backups in training, wage subsidies and that sort of stuff. Are you just not getting much liaison with them?

Mr Dann—Not to my knowledge. I had some involvement with a CDEP program as well. As far as the mining industry side of things goes, there is no training program or support for anyone who wants to go in there. As far as the Job Network agencies in my region go, I see very little evidence of it.

Dr LAWRENCE—That is interesting. I think it is something that would be worth our following up. It seems that they are suggesting, ‘You deal with the companies,’ but there is no way of achieving the outcomes that are agreed, no monitoring and no compliance requirements.

Mr Hawkins—Just on that point: the great opportunity is that, when you are going through a negotiation and there are employment levels being talked about—and the government has talked about things like shared responsibility agreements and what have you—one of the things that we have programmed with the government is that, ‘This is your policy position, so let’s try and work within the framework that you have promoted.’ Why aren’t we having government coming in at the same time, when they know that these employment numbers are being talked about, just to make things happen in a cooperative approach? What happens is that employment numbers are talked about but, unless the company drives it itself internally, they may or may not reach those levels.

CHAIR—We talked earlier about a government mechanism which does sit at the table on this and monitor. I am trying to understand how the government might do that. If you have some ideas, I would love to hear them. In many ways, it is not that much different to the euphoria of these agreements that you talked about. In fact, the government might be more guilty of having more euphoria—and then there is something else to do. It is a real issue for bureaucracies and politicians to monitor, to come to the table and make sure these things happen. I think it is an issue for government, as it is for everybody else.

Mr Hawkins—I think the starting point is with the various working groups that are making these deals. The traditional owners’ leadership is there. They are a part of making sure that there will be accountability. It is all happening at that stage. Why aren’t we having people in with the company and the government being equally represented and working out a plan to deal with it? I am not a—

CHAIR—That is fine. But you can see my difficulty. We are going to have to make some recommendations in a report and dot some i’s and cross some t’s. Anything we can glean from people who are at the coalface is valuable to us.

Dr LAWRENCE—I will put a proposition to you. One of the things that strikes me is that, in the absence of monitoring performance adequately, the Indigenous people cannot be guaranteed that the agreements they have entered into in good faith are actually worth much, and the government cannot be confident either. It is Commonwealth legislation that these agreements are struck under, basically—that is the framework—and there may be subsidiary state legislation, so we cannot be confident that the purposes of the legislation are being enacted. I wonder if it would make sense to have a body like the Auditor-General, for instance, come in and investigate what is actually happening in these cases. Who is being employed? What level of training is being provided? How compliant are the companies with the agreements they have entered into with the representative bodies and, in your case, with the working groups around the place?

CHAIR—I think it is a healthy suggestion, because some kind of independent audit would be useful to front up to issues—and we have heard a bit about independent auditing in the last couple of days, Carmen. That is something that we perhaps should hold up there to say, ‘Let’s make sure these things are fair dinkum,’ to use the Australian vernacular.

Dr LAWRENCE—And you need the mechanism to then make it happen. That is only the smallest part of it, but unless you actually know—although people on the ground could probably tell you in five minutes flat.

CHAIR—At the very least it would achieve two things: it would restrict and bring companies to book in not being too exuberant in claims—and check politicians jumping on the same bandwagon—at the same time as it would give genuine accountability to the interest groups, such as yours. Mrs Vale has some questions.

Mrs VALE—Anthony and Simon, I am having a little difficulty understanding the whole structure of your organisation. How did it form? It incorporates the Yamatji Land and Sea Council and the Pilbara Native Title Service. Do other groups form corporations like yours? How did it come to pass? In the state from which I come, the land councils normally have a direct relationship with either government or companies, but you have formed a corporation to be the spokesperson or the vehicle for these two organisations.

Mr Hawkins—Basically, the Yamatji Land and Sea Council has been in place for about 10 years. There was a re-recognition process in the Pilbara. Originally it was the Pilbara Aboriginal Land Council. They lost their recognition to represent native title in that area. It was about four or five years ago and I was not around, but I think it related to noncompliance in certain areas. The re-recognition process enabled Yamatji to bid to represent native title claims in the Pilbara, and we were successful in that bid. The Commonwealth government awarded that to us. The Pilbara Native Title Service was formed because the Yamatji constitution had been in place for 10 years and there was a need to establish a constitution for the Pilbara Native Title Service to sit under the umbrella of Yamatji until it became equal in status. We received separate funding for Yamatji and for the Pilbara Native Title Service, but then there is a governing committee, which Anthony co-chairs and I report to, that oversees both regions.

Mrs VALE—Is your corporation unique within the Indigenous communities across Australia?

Mr Hawkins—I suppose it is unique in the sense that we manage native title and we could also manage land and sea related issues. For example, in the Yamatji area we successfully secured funding for natural resource management and also economic development offices and things like that through negotiations with companies. So we can take on a broader function than just the native title service per se.

Mrs VALE—It allows you to be the focus, if you like, for the working groups and for government and corporations. You are the contact mechanism.

Mr Hawkins—Yes. A point we make is that, whilst the corporation is focused on native title matters, there is an opportunity for government to use it for gathering data, understanding needs and so on.

Mrs VALE—Absolutely. That is very important. I should imagine it would be a very useful vehicle. The organisation employs 50 per cent Indigenous staff. How many staff do you have all up?

Mr Hawkins—Approximately 70.

Mrs VALE—That is your corporation, and there are two operational divisions. Your submission states:

Both the PNTS and YLSC regional operations have achieved an Indigenous employment rate of around fifty percent of total staff.

That is about 30 people. The submission goes on to state:

Additionally, a number of the senior management positions in the organisation are held by Aboriginal people.

But you also act as an employment conduit to the mine companies. Is that right?

Mr Hawkins—Not necessarily.

Mrs VALE—You are not an employment agency?

Mr Hawkins—No.

Mrs VALE—But you do try and negotiate jobs with companies?

Mr Hawkins—Yes, as part of future act matters—which are basically when there are new mines operating and they have to negotiate with native title owners—employment initiatives are always a key part of those agreements. Agreements vary. It might have a percentage: ‘10 per cent shall be Indigenous people by a certain period of time.’ It might be that 20 positions would be available and they would be supported by training initiatives.

Mrs VALE—In these areas, what is the percentage of Indigenous population?

Mr Hawkins—I am not aware of that statistic, but I think the Yamatji region has about 10,000.

Mr Dann—I think we represent about 20,000 in Pilbara Yamatji.

Mrs VALE—That is quite a lot of people.

Mr Dann—In an area that is about one million square kilometres.

Mr Hawkins—The Indigenous population, particularly in the Pilbara, will soon outstrip the white population, if it has not already done so.

Mrs VALE—It was interesting because a point put to us yesterday was about having the percentage of the Indigenous population in the area reflected in the employment contracts or employment agreements, if that is possible. That was the target that was suggested. So if you have quite a large Indigenous population in one area it would be a big target for an employer to actually employ a vast majority of people within its firm if it did not have the skill base. That brings me to this other question. You say that, despite ongoing attempts by your organisation to increase numbers in the Perth office—you say you have got very low numbers here—the limited Indigenous human resource pool in the urban centre of Perth continues to present recruitment challenges to your organisation. Why would your organisation want to be recruiting people in Perth? Were these country people from your area?

Mr Hawkins—They could be. We basically want to increase the number of Aboriginal people in our Perth office. It is a lot easier in the regions because, predominantly, a lot of people live in the regions.

Mrs VALE—Did you know about the previous witnesses that were here, the people from Manguri Employment Services, which is a specific Aboriginal service?

Mr Hawkins—No.

Mrs VALE—Would you in the future think about contacting that organisation?

Mr Hawkins—Definitely, yes.

Mrs VALE—Perhaps for your Perth office?

Mr Hawkins—Exactly. The committee talked about the idea of actually getting a pool of Indigenous people that have been pulled in at different stages. What we are trying to do is, rather than have recruitment people, create our own pool that would come in and serve us for casual periods of time when we need people for relief work or long-term positions. We do traineeships in the Perth office, and we have had people successfully complete those traineeships and go into some more senior roles in the organisation, but it is a difficult task, even for us as an Aboriginal corporation.

Mrs VALE—You have heard about the difficulty of Manguri Employment Services. I do not know if you heard it all. They said they had about 260 on their books at various stages of work readiness. It was just a thought.

Mr Hawkins—I think it is a good point.

CHAIR—I have just a couple of questions on the way through to Mr Slipper. How are you funded?

Mr Hawkins—Through the Commonwealth. We basically receive funding through the OIPC. We also generate our own income.

CHAIR—What is the approximate budget?

Mr Hawkins—Last financial year the budget was $12 million, but the Commonwealth funding was $5 million.

CHAIR—So you get $7 million self-funded.

Mr Hawkins—Yes, but that was mainly because we received funding from mining companies to negotiate the large agreements. Also, we do heritage work, so we charge consultancy fees to undertake that.

CHAIR—It is a professional business. A structure like that needs a pretty strong management. You have explained to me the future acts, in terms of future mines, and they become almost greenfields negotiations, native title types of cases. You retain those rights, as I understand it.

Mr Hawkins—Yes.

Mr SLIPPER—I have not got a lot of questions. It seems to me that, as a community, what we would like to achieve, ultimately, in the fullness of time, however long it takes us to achieve, is a situation where Indigenous people are treated exactly the same as non-Indigenous people and where we do not need—which we currently need—the extra support networks for Indigenous people. Do you find that the policy of the government—and I suppose our predecessor—is moving Indigenous people adequately quickly along the road of that equal treatment? Or do you see the current subsidised network that has to be out there in a whole range of areas as being something that is going to be there for as long as Australia is Australia?

Mr Hawkins—We talked about the issue of confidence earlier. I had an experience of dealing with a mining company that was keen to employ Aboriginal people. I was not working in native title at this point. Basically they would do 17 traineeships each year. The managing director of the company said to me: ‘We don’t expect anyone to make it past 12 months. We won’t have anyone here after 12 months. This happens every year.’ Invariably they did not have any locals working for the mine. They would fly people in from outside the area. By the end of the 17 traineeships, there would be no-one there. They had guaranteed employment within the company, but after nine or 12 months people would not have completed. I said to him, ‘Maybe we should be doing something different.’ We had a good relationship with the TOs in the area. We came up with the idea that they would actually work as contractors—

CHAIR—The TOs?

Mr Hawkins—The traditional owners. They would work as contactors to the shire, and then the shire would place these people out at the mine. It was a way to break down that barrier. Importantly, one of the key things that came out of it was a confidence issue. With the traineeships, what companies do is isolate people who perhaps have low skills and are low in confidence throughout the company. What we learnt from this experience was that we kept these guys together working collectively and that gave them confidence to deal with the everyday issues of work. I think in Australia, certainly in regional Australia, there is clear separation still between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. There is not the multicultural mix that you perhaps see in city areas with other cultures. I think that what happens is that Aboriginal people know that the white people do notice that, and there is that sort of awkwardness around that. That adds to the lack of confidence in being able to deal with issues. Fortunately enough, the guy who was representing the mine on the day-to-day stuff was about six foot seven and very supportive of Aboriginal people, so, if he ever heard any racist comments, which did occur, he would deal with it personally. It was quite lucky that internally there was that guy to deal with that. It needed that.

CHAIR—Bringing his presence to bear.

Mr Hawkins—I think there is a long way to go.

Mrs VALE—Another thing too is, if you put another person of a different group in anywhere there are huge expectations. It is like being the first woman at a Rotary Club that is traditionally male: to be the first one there is very hard. When we were in Alice Springs, we found that they placed two girls in a shop. They would never just place one; they would try and place the two girls or the two young people together for that reason. There are huge expectations on them. It is not just the confidence from their point of view. It must be very onerous.

Mr Hawkins—We were talking this morning before we came over about the confidence issue. I was thinking about when I graduated from uni and started my first job. The pressure of writing a letter, having to deliver on something, is very difficult.

Mr SLIPPER—Did you succeed?

Mr Hawkins—I am here, I suppose. On Anthony's comments about the support that the non-Indigenous community has compared to the Indigenous community, where perhaps there are not the same networks of people around you that mentor you in all sorts of different ways, that is a real issue that is part of the divide.

Mr SLIPPER—This question is not meant to be provocative, but you talk about Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Most Indigenous communities would intermarry with the non-Indigenous community. Why is it, in your experience, when you have a situation where, for instance, a non-Indigenous man might marry an Indigenous lady or vice versa, that the children seem to emerge with more of the Indigenous culture than the non-Indigenous culture? I do not fully understand this, and it obviously reflects on me. It is not as though we are talking about Indigenous people as they were when Australia was settled. Most Indigenous people would have non-Indigenous

relatives, for instance, I would think. I wonder why it is that the problems that Indigenous people clearly have are still as bad as they were, given that crosspollination, in a manner of speaking.

Mr Dann—I would suggest that is because we appear to have a more relaxed and easygoing lifestyle and culture.

Mr SLIPPER—Not as many heart attacks.

Mr Dann—Yes. I suppose there is less stress. I would suggest it happens because we are happy to be a lot more relaxed and we do not adhere to structures that are imposed on non-Aboriginal families. Believe me, I am not an expert, but I am saying that, although there are requirements, the expectations are far less than they are on the non-Aboriginal side of things.

Mr SLIPPER—Perhaps my next question ought to be directed to Carmen.

Dr LAWRENCE—You are about to provoke me.

Mr SLIPPER—I do not want to be provocative.

Dr LAWRENCE—I think you are about to be.

Mr SLIPPER—Carmen, were you a former minister in this area?

Dr LAWRENCE—Yes, I was—at the state level.

Mr SLIPPER—What proportion of Indigenous people would identify as Indigenous rather than as part of the general community? Would it be 50-50, 80-20?

Dr LAWRENCE—It is an impossible question. Indigenous identity is a very difficult thing, as Anthony was just saying. It is interesting that, over time, as people have been given the opportunity to claim their Indigenous heritage, more people have done it, rather than fewer. As people have become aware of their Indigenous heritage, despite the very bad treatment Indigenous people often get, they have wanted to claim it. It is a very important status to have in Australia. You say that you do not want to see Indigenous people treated any differently from the rest of Australia, but I part company with you there because Indigenous people are the original owners and, in my view, they will in perpetuity be treated as they should be treated—that is, as the original owners. It is something we do not want to talk about.

Mr SLIPPER—I was referring to the need for additional employment support, for instance. I would like to see a situation where that was not necessary.

Dr LAWRENCE—It may well mean that the relationship that Indigenous people have to areas of land and cultural practice will and should remain different—not areas, less so.

CHAIR—I might have to declare the discussion—

Dr LAWRENCE—I think it is important to get this on the table. We are not just talking about another disadvantaged group in the community; we are talking about the original owners of this

country and, in the area of native title, some very clear statements were made by the federal parliament, which, in my view, were watered down to the point of being nearly impossible to administer. What we are hearing today is that even the very limited form of agreement with the original owners is not being delivered on. That bothers me and I certainly mean to pursue that.

CHAIR—That is a very fair point. The only point I was going to make was that we could talk at considerable length on this issue and we may end up where the federal parliament ended up five or six years ago. So I ask that we come to employment and the issues under discussion today. We need to draw the discussion to a close. I have found the discussion valuable. I think it has brought out some things that could become recommendations. I think the idea of audit and accountability in this process is important.

I am going to ask you to sum up and conclude our discussion. What does the native title experience teach us as applied to this? It teaches a lot of things, but something I had not thought that about was the auditing, the ongoing negotiations. We have the other part coming into it now with private ownership—and I have a lot of inalienable freehold title. There is an issue coming into it now about we strike the balance between offering opportunities and separating the economic issues. It is not easy to move from welfare dependency to other issues, which we have highlighted this morning. You are experts in native title—you have been at it for five or 10 years or whatever with your own personal experiences. Is there anything it teaches us? Can you sum up our discussion this morning and tell us a couple of things you might like to see come out of our inquiry?

Mr Hawkins—There are two opportunities. The future act process creates opportunities for employment—

CHAIR—Assuming mandatory quotas.

Mr Hawkins—Yes. The native title process involves people who will invariably be future employees. There is a point of engagement there that provides a real opportunity to create fertile ground to achieve real employment and full employment. My final comment is that, obviously, the monitoring of those agreements needs to occur to ensure that it happens.

CHAIR—It is something that has not been raised and something I had not thought too much about, but it is very valuable.

Mr Hawkins—We have piles of future act agreements. There is not one or two; there are lots. So there are lots of opportunities.

CHAIR—Can you give us a clue? Are there 10 or 20 agreements?

Mr Hawkins—There would be 10 agreements a year.

Mrs VALE—And each one is different with each individual company.

Mr Hawkins—Yes. It is up to the traditional owners and what they value.

CHAIR—And how they feel.

Mr Hawkins—Invariably, it is up to them.

CHAIR—They are practical people. They have a view about what might be reasonable and what the people might think is reasonable. Do you have a final statement, Anthony?

Mr Dann—No, not really. I think Simon said it all in his closing.

CHAIR—I thank you both. It has been a valuable discussion. Barna was particularly significant for me. That is where I come from. I had not found it before.

Mr Dann—I will give you an explanation.

CHAIR—Thank you, I need it.

Mr Dann—Yamatji is the people where I come from. Marlpa is the Pilbara people. Barna is ground. Baba is water. Maaja is boss. Therefore, Yamatji Marlpa Barna Baba Maaja means Yamatji Pilbara land and sea and we are the bosses.

CHAIR—Well, how about that. My ground is Barna.

Mr Dann—Barna is ground, yes.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Dann—Not a problem.

Proceedings suspended from 11.06 am to 11.23 am

KICKETT, Mr Larry Peter, Private capacity

MCGUIRE, Miss Jenny Ruth, Private capacity

CHAIR—Welcome. We appreciate your time today. Would you like to make a short opening statement? Then we will go to a few questions and a general informal discussion. Mr Kickett and Miss McGuire, can we just go to your general views? You probably understand our inquiry is Indigenous employment. We are really interested in the positives. We understand there are negatives as well. We will go to your views.

Mr Kickett—I have been involved in Aboriginal training and employment for seven or eight years. It is sad to see a lot of kids who are not completing years 10, 11 or 12 who are going on to employment. That is something I would like to see addressed. There are lots of programs around and I think we probably need to have a look at working with all the corporations around the place to streamline it a bit better. There is a lot of money going into Aboriginal education and training but I do not think all of it is going in the right direction.

CHAIR—I am sure we will come to that. We would like to hear where and how and why.

Mr Kickett—Are you asking me about the positives in terms of what I have been involved in?

CHAIR—We need to have both sides, but I have always thought—and this is more of a personal crusade—that we have a lot of negatives in Indigenous issues and we get a lot of media about those. I have been surprised by the positives that are out there. I do not say it is perfect; we all know it is not. I am just saying that it is good to understand that there is a very positive side. The most important part to me is that that positive side teaches us it is possible and it gives us an opportunity to understand what we can do about the negatives. It gives us the window of opportunity to take us through to a much broader application for the majority.

Mr Kickett—I have been involved in the Pilbara over the last seven years—

CHAIR—A lively place.

Mr Kickett—Absolutely.

CHAIR—And getting livelier.

Mr Kickett—The hub of Australia. Basically, we have a relationship with the TAFE up there and the government departments, and it is a program that is actually retaining kids at high school. It is called the Gumala Mirnuwarni program. Prior to this program starting there were two Aboriginal kids who finished year 12. Since this program started there have been well in excess of 20 who have gone through to year 12 and seven or eight of those have gone on to university, which is terrific. Basically we sat down and worked out that that is where we have to target—those young kids. The success of that has been that there have been 17 or 18 who have

come through that program because there are apprenticeships or traineeships. So there is a positive there.

CHAIR—I guess it was not too brilliant before and it has gradually built up—is that what you are saying?

Mr Kickett—Yes. The reason for that is that we have had a good project officer coordinating it. It has been supported in the community by parents and has had support both at government and corporate level with the various organisations in Karratha and Roebourne. The other success that has been happening is with a program we have that is called WY for short—the Warrgamugardi Yirdiyabura program. It trains people aged 18 and above who go back to TAFE to get construction skills—obviously construction is an enormous thing up there—and we put them through a program of 16 weeks and then get them employment on construction sites in the Pilbara.

The benefit of that is that it is giving the people a lot of self-esteem. We are giving them construction experience so if, for whatever reason, they want to leave the Pilbara and go and work in Queensland they have got the experience behind them to do that. There are good numbers attending the courses. What also happens is that the success there is fed back through the community because they become role models. I suppose you hear all the time about role models but those people have been good role models for their kids and their rellies.

CHAIR—Maybe in our questions we will draw out the how and what we need to do differently in the future. Total participation in the society is a vital part of seeing a future, for a whole range of very good reasons, and that goes for Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous people—perhaps more so for Indigenous for a range of reasons. Jenny, did you want to say a few words?

Miss McGuire—I think one of the big successes now with Indigenous employment is that everyone is aware of the issue. I am with Woodside and I meet in a forum now with the other oil and gas companies in Perth and we are discussing these issues. Everyone is now becoming aware of it and I think this has been a big success. Now that we know and we are more aware, we are now offering more positions, in Karratha but also in Perth.

During my six months in Indigenous affairs it has been astounding to see the networks out there and awareness now that there are opportunities out there. I wish there were more opportunities. But it is having an impact on kids. They are staying on at school with programs like Follow the Dream and the one that Larry mentioned—the GM program in Karratha. They are now aware of opportunities that are available to them.

CHAIR—Maybe we need to be not excessively coy. You work for a corporation so your daily life is to do with the employment of everybody, basically, not just Indigenous people?

Miss McGuire—Our role is just with Indigenous people.

CHAIR—It is specifically Indigenous?

Miss McGuire—Yes.

CHAIR—Is your background in training or teaching or education? Where are you are coming from?

Mrs VALE—Is it HR?

Miss McGuire—No, I do have not have a background in HR or training. My experience in Indigenous affairs has been through personal experiences and I have been fortunate in getting a position with Woodside in the Indigenous affairs team.

CHAIR—It is none of my business, I suppose, but you know what I mean.

Mr Kickett—Obviously, I am Indigenous and I was fortunate enough to have gone through and finished year 12. I got a very good education at a private school in Perth because of government assistance, actually—a government scholarship. So I can see the benefits of actually keeping young kids at school and then going on to university and also having the skills and ability to go to TAFE to get trained up.

CHAIR—Yes, to be a participant in this Australian life.

Mr Kickett—Absolutely. I see myself—and I am not putting tickets on myself—as a role model for a lot of the people I talk to.

CHAIR—It is important to have that.

Mr Kickett—Yes.

CHAIR—I have questions on about three or four areas. My passion is trying to be positive. I am an ex-farmer so I am not always positive. Have you heard of Hanrahan—'We'll all be rooned,' because it is not going to rain or something like that? That can describe me from time to time. But I think it is so important on this issue to look for the positives, because they are there. We need to remind ourselves of that and remind Indigenous people that they are there. There is an opportunity here given the basics et cetera. But how we get there is the trick. I just want to talk about where the work force is coming from in the future and whether that is driving part of your mission. Is that part of it?

Mr Kickett—I think it is important as far as remote areas are concerned—areas such as your Karrathas, Roebournes and Pilbaras. History has shown us that, if you can train people who have an affiliation to the area, they are not going to move. If we can skill them up to a level that is suitable for the organisations that are in the town, you are going to save a lot of money on fly-in, fly-out and housing. It is better for the community if the local people are involved and employed. That is something that we probably need to push a bit more. But there is a lot of work needed to get a level.

CHAIR—Let me set the scene. I can remember being in Port Hedland about 10 years ago—on this same committee, I suspect. One of the elders said to us: 'How do you expect us to manage our communities and our society if you offer our young people sit-down money or dole money? How do you expect us to manage that when the incentive to go on is not there?' That is as he perceived it. I do not expect you to comment on that. I am just setting the scene. That was

10 years ago at Port Hedland. I remember it clearly to this day—it sent a shiver down my spine to see what we had created collectively. If we go to the next step, how do we get people to be involved in the education system? Can we have a discussion about the education system? How do we see it as an opportunity rather than something to not turn up at? Can we talk a bit about the schooling and the education system?

Mr Kickett—Using Roebourne as an example, I think that as an organisation—and we are talking about education here—obviously it is important and we have to be careful that the teachers who we place into Roebourne have got to be passionate about teaching Aboriginal people because 99 per cent of the kids are Aboriginal. So what I am saying is—and I have not even checked any results or whatever—I am sure that the teachers who get put into Roebourne are freshly out of university and have never spoken to an Aboriginal person in their life. And they are going up to teach a class full of Aboriginal kids who probably, at that point in time, have English as their second language.

CHAIR—And some of them probably do not want to be there. I mean, kids generally do not want to be at school some of the time. But how do you connect with them? And let's not get away from English as a second language—I think it is very important too.

Mr Kickett—I think you have to find people who are passionate. I have a very close friend who teaches in Marble Bar because when was going through university she was passionate about wanting to teach Aboriginal kids. So she made a note marking Marble Bar and Yandeyarra as areas she would like to be posted to. She got Marble Bar and she loves it; she has been there for four years.

CHAIR—There is a real role for the education department, the system, to connect and make sure that there is some accountability that that connecting is actually done.

Mr Kickett—Absolutely.

CHAIR—There is some evidence that that is not occurring.

Mr Kickett—I do not think it is, no. I also see that a lot of teachers, when they go to these remote schools, know that if they stay there for two years or whatever the time frame is, or for 12 months, they get allocated points to make them permanent and after that they go. So the turnover is a problem; there is no stability there.

CHAIR—And the reason for them being there is not necessarily the best reason, in the same way some of the kids may not want to be there. That is not a very good mix.

Mr Kickett—What might be a good idea, in order to get Roebourne to be a school where people may want to go to, is to give the teachers incentives to stay there, or whatever. I do not know.

CHAIR—No, I just wanted to get that on the record.

Miss McGuire—One of the reasons that I think it has been successful in Perth is the Follow the Dream program and the teachers who are involved in that. I have been dealing with them. We

have a schools' information program with the Petroleum Club that goes out to the schools that we are targeting with a high Indigenous population, along with other schools, and the teachers who have been involved with that are fantastic. They are obviously passionate about what they do and it has been very successful. So for the first time we have had Indigenous kids competing along with the other schools. The Follow the Dream program seems to be going well.

CHAIR—How long has that been going?

Mr Kickett—Follow the Dream? Four or five years I think.

Dr LAWRENCE—What is it all about? Is it a state education program?

Miss McGuire—It is run by the Aboriginal directorate from the Department of Education and Training so yes, I think so. I am not sure how the funding works and I do not know if it is just high achievers who are allowed to attend it.

CHAIR—That's fine. Perhaps that is something we should follow up with department.

Mr Kickett—The other one is Clontarf. I think you might have Clontarf coming in so I will not pinch any of their thunder, but that is a good program.

CHAIR—That's vital. Given the here and now, how do you do Job Ready? You talked about some positive numbers coming out and engaging better et cetera. I suppose there are at least two parts to that. There are still a lot of people in the pool who would not be engaged in the process. I suppose you could say it is just more of the same—just keep at it and the passion and all that. But is there something that clearly needs to happen, quite drastically or radically, to engage that next cohort if you like: the disengaged? Any thoughts on that? It is very tough.

Miss McGuire—It is a hard one. There is a list from the Burdekin report, 10 points or so, of the issues that stop the disadvantaged from getting a job. Basically it was pointed out to me that most Indigenous kids have nearly 10 of those issues. I do not know how you deal with it. It came down to just the home life, the house—have they got a stable environment? We found that with some of the people we have been dealing with they do not even have somewhere to live, and we expect them to come into work.

CHAIR—That's fine. I think we understand that. I want to go to the group that are 17 or 18 up to 25 years old or, if you like, 18 to 30 years old. They are there now and they are disengaged. Is Job Network, anyone or yourselves somehow trying to engage them? How do we tap into that resource? What is happening and how long does it take to get them into basic plant operator type positions, or whatever you are looking for? Is it happening?

Mr Kickett—It is probably not happening as quickly as it could, but I think there also seems to be a lack of motivation within the community. They could be the best-trained people in Australia, but they are continually going back to college and there are no employment outcomes because they have not got the experience. It is a catch-22 situation, I suppose. We have got to try and break that cycle and break the mentality. People are unemployed for so long that their self-esteem goes down. It is damned hard to get it back up again. Some say, 'I'm okay sitting on CDEP; I'm happy getting my $200 a week.'

CHAIR—You have probably seen the headlines in the last few days about CDEP and the challenges. We are going to get to a point where, as we are saying now, CDEP is not a destination; it is a place to move on from.

Mr Kickett—That is right.

CHAIR—It has become a destination over a quarter of a century. The government and the parliament are not going to cop that anymore.

Mr Kickett—That is good.

CHAIR—As a community, we cannot afford to cop it anymore. I just make that observation. I appreciate that that is all that is really offering for many people.

Mr Kickett—It is. The other thing, in talking about the Pilbara, is that construction is only going to go on for so long. It is fantastic to have all these people trained up—and they can go and get work interstate—but culturally you are not going to find them leaving—

CHAIR—Let us talk about culture. I find it the most difficult part of this whole task—to understand what it means and how you relate and adapt. I ask Indigenous people this predominantly, because I think it is vital to understand from their perspective. It does mean different things to different people. Can we talk about culture and two or three of the basic things about how we understand it and make it work for us.

Mr Kickett—That is a hard one, isn't it?

CHAIR—It is impossible, but unless we talk it, I do not think we are going to bring it forward.

Miss McGuire—I think companies are having a better understanding of culture in the first place and are employing Indigenous people—cultural awareness programs are a positive that we have now with our company. That has to help. I suppose there have been problems in the past with various cultural things that are going on. I suppose we are learning, as a company, how to better deal with that.

CHAIR—I wonder whether we can develop protocols, because if large corporates are really struggling—I know there are different views about the corporates, but there is also, on the positive side, some intellectual capacity and genuine intelligence which can understand these issues if there is a will and a passion. I accept the point that we need to develop the understanding, but where do we start and how do we start? For some people it is very difficult. There is the language issue.

Mr Kickett—Language is very important. But also, as Jenny said, it is the understanding. It is interesting: the Aboriginal family, the extended family, is very strong. A lot of Aboriginal people are caught between European, Western, English ways of life and trying to deal with their culture in terms of law time and all that sort of stuff. They are stuck in the middle and at times they do not know which way to go. I know, having worked up in Karratha and Roebourne, that it is difficult for me, being a Noongar from down south—

Mrs VALE—Sorry?

Mr Kickett—A Noongar—that is an Aboriginal word for Aboriginal people who live in the south-west of Western Australia.

Mrs VALE—Is it?

Mr Kickett—My apologies.

CHAIR—Forgive these Sydneysiders.

Mrs VALE—It is a learning curve.

Mr Kickett—There are two ways of spelling it—Noongar or Nyungar.

Mr SLIPPER—And the word ‘Murri’ is not used?

Mr Kickett—Murri is a Queensland word.

Dr LAWRENCE—There are several groups here. We were talking to the Yamatji people earlier.

Mr Kickett—That is right. They are up north.

Mr SLIPPER—Koori?

Mr Kickett—Yes, Koori is—

Miss McGuire—New South Wales.

Mr Kickett—New South Wales and Victoria.

Dr LAWRENCE—There are lots of groups in Western Australia. You cannot call all Western Australian Indigenous people Noongar or you get in serious trouble.

Mr Kickett—That is right. Absolutely.

Mrs VALE—I am glad we know that.

Mr SLIPPER—What do you call the people in the north of Western Australia?

Mr Kickett—How far north are we going? Up in the Broome area you are looking at the Bardi group. In Roebourne and Karratha you have Ngaluma Injibandi. It depends. If you go inland you have the Martu and all that sort of stuff.

CHAIR—As a Noongar from the south-west going there is a real challenge for acceptance, as you say.

Mr Kickett—Absolutely. I think it is important, in terms of the cultures, to go and talk to the elders in the community and let them identify what they see as important, because I know there is a group up there that is retaining and recording their language and songs on video and CD. That is fantastic. That is important to them, because obviously, the elders pass on and it is gone. In terms of the culture, it is about understanding of the organisations that are there. It is an understanding from the people who come from outside—they have got to respect the culture. In terms of the Ngaluma Injibandi, in Roebourne, that was the first thing I had to do when I got up there: go and talk to the elders so I knew who I was talking to, what I could do and what I could not do. Whereas, and this is getting back to the teachers, they go into Roebourne, they are there—bang—and they do not know what is going on. Their role between nine and three o'clock is to teach, and then they go home. They do not know what is going on around them.

CHAIR—It is pretty important. I need to wrap up, from my perspective, because we have people keen to ask questions. My final observation, and you may care to comment on it, is that it seems that we have many positives running with us. It does not mean that they are all positives. It is interesting that I use the word 'positive', because I am acutely aware of the negatives. I would like to try to stay with the positives as much as possible in this Indigenous issue: the opportunities in terms of the strength of the economy and strength of the opportunity for employment; a greater awareness across Australia about the impact of welfare and the need to focus in a more positive way; and a determination from, I would say, right across political divides about the need to deal with these Indigenous issues, with employment as a critical part. It seems to me that the tides are running with us a bit. You have seen positives happen. If you had one or two things which were going to make that little bit of difference at this point, to tip it to where I think most would like it to be, what would they be? From a government perspective—and I know you have come from different backgrounds, but we are all part of the government at the end of the day—if you could wave the magic wand for a day and poke this and poke that—

Mr Kickett—I would win lotto on Saturday night!

Miss McGuire—I think education is the biggest issue: keeping kids at school, and getting the parents and families more involved in the whole school process. That has to be the key.

CHAIR—The ability to connect the purpose of education with what it is there to try to do. Is there anything there? You have talked about it anyway, but what do you think of that?

Mr Kickett—I think it is around the notion of education and employment. As I say, for all of us around this table here, our parents are probably our role models. In a lot of places where I have been, the parents have not gone to school. The vibe they are giving their kids is: 'Well, you don't need to go to school.' I think if we can educate the parents—and how we do that, I do not know—to reinforce the importance of school—

CHAIR—Do you think the elders are becoming more aware of the importance?

Mr Kickett—They are now. I think they are.

CHAIR—I think they are. I do not know your area, but I—

Mr Kickett—I think they are, and I think we just need to build a foundation. You build a foundation by getting the parents involved. Like anything, if you want to get something done in an organisation, you talk to the boss and it cascades down. This way, we are going the other way. To me, that is one way of doing it: getting the parents or caregivers or whatever and stressing how important it is. We all know education is important.

Then there is the issue of putting the right people in the schools to teach the kids. The problem we have had in doing the courses that we have done is that people have been unemployed for so long that they have difficulty in getting to work on time. That is an effect that has snowballed because they have not worked for 10 or 15 years. The sad part about it is that, when I went to school, if I did not finish an exam, I did not go to the next level, the next year, but now kids are getting through to year 10 and 11 and they cannot read or write. That is a brick wall straightaway for them.

Mr SLIPPER—It is not just Indigenous children.

Mr Kickett—Exactly. It is not just Indigenous children.

Mr SLIPPER—It is a major worry for the community.

Mr Kickett—Absolutely.

Dr LAWRENCE—I have to dissent from that view, in the sense that more people reach higher standards of education than was the case when I went to school or when you did, when we had this pass/fail mentality. It is what people can do. It is a bit like what we are focusing on here—what can people do; how do we improve that? Can I ask a question about education, because you mentioned having teachers who are committed and really interested in Indigenous education and having parents who understand the importance of education. What about the content of what is taught? Do you think Aboriginal communities like Roebourne might find schooling more interesting if some of what was in the curriculum was about their lives and their experiences—I know it is, to some extent—and the specific and unique circumstances in which Indigenous people find themselves, rather than being an imported curriculum that says, ‘This is the way life is.’ It may be like that for the majority of the community, but it clearly is not for those kids.

Mr Kickett—I agree. If they got taught something that was relevant to them, you would find interest all of a sudden.

Miss McGuire—They love learning.

Mr Kickett—Absolutely. Aboriginal kids are very intelligent. They have just got to be guided correctly. I know when I went to school I got taught about things happening in America and Europe that were not relevant to Australia. If something like that could be done—

Dr LAWRENCE—Excuse this interjection, but I think it is very important that even the training and preparation for work needs to take account of the lived experience of the people you working with. I remember a psychologist I was working with said that she had been testing Aboriginal kids and giving them an IQ test—which is not a very fair thing to do, given that it is a

very European instrument. One of the questions was ‘Who discovered Australia?’ and this kid stood up and said, ‘We did.’ He would have been marked wrong for that. I think that still remains a problem with the curriculum content in a lot of places.

Mr Kickett—Absolutely.

Dr LAWRENCE—Even when schools try very hard it is almost a sort of add-on, instead of having children learning maths in relation to the experiences they have every day and their language reflecting the experiences they have every day. When that works well, kids’ eyes just light up. You have seen it. It is just fantastic. Sorry about that interjection.

Mr Kickett—That is fine.

Dr LAWRENCE—What percentage of local Indigenous people, roughly, are employed in the oil and gas industry at the moment? Do you have a feel for that? I am talking about locally as opposed to overall, but overall as well.

Mr Kickett—Probably less than one per cent.

Dr LAWRENCE—It is pretty small, isn’t it?

Mr Kickett—It is. But we are also targeting the top end of Aboriginal students at universities—engineers, geologists, lawyers, business students and so on. We are working hard in that area. We need the young kids coming through. I noticed that someone made a comment some time ago that there are only 12 Aboriginal kids this year in state schools doing their TE, which is a poor reflection of where we are at in terms of education. I do not know whether that it is correct, but it would not be far off the mark.

Dr LAWRENCE—It is pretty shocking if it is. I would want to check that.

Mr Kickett—It might be worth checking, yes.

Dr LAWRENCE—Obviously we have covered some of this ground, but what do you think are the principal obstacles to employment of these people? We have mentioned education and training and so on. What about on the other side—what are the kinds of corporate obstacles, if you like, or the obstacles that exist within the companies which make it harder for Indigenous kids and young adults to get a foothold? We often tend to locate the problem in the individual. Maybe sometimes it is the system into which we are trying to fit them. Are there any changes that the corporations could make to improve their, if you like, friendliness towards Indigenous people, particularly in the Pilbara region?

Mr Kickett—Companies are now being more proactive in terms of wanting to employ Aboriginal people. With regard to what they are doing in the Pilbara, they are employing Aboriginal people to be mentors within the companies, to provide support to people who come into the organisation. Companies do not want to be seen to be favouring Aboriginal people, because it could cause conflict in the workplace.

Dr LAWRENCE—What about individual workplace agreements? I thought that was what that was all about. Could you not strike agreements that said you had a certain number of cultural days a year? It strikes me that the sort of environment would be the most likely to produce some differences, depending on people's needs and interests. I do not know. I have never heard Aboriginal people talk about a workplace agreement that took account of their culture. It is not impossible.

Mr Kickett—What was your original question?

Dr LAWRENCE—What the companies are doing or not doing that makes it hard for Indigenous employment.

Mr Kickett—I think it is more what the companies are doing. The companies are now being more proactive in wanting to employ Aboriginal people because they can see the benefits and they have experienced it over the years. I think I touched on it earlier. With regard to costs to the company and, ultimately, the shareholders, if they can get local Aboriginal people or local people—Indigenous or non-Indigenous—who are committed to the area, it is going to save the company money. They do not have to go and recruit people from overseas or interstate; they have a captive audience there. They have a captive group, so it means that, maybe, the company is structuring something within the schools to say, 'We want a person coming out of year 12 or TAFE with these skills.'

CHAIR—Someone has done the figures—and your company would have too—to show that turnover and the cost of replacing each employee is huge.

Mr Kickett—Absolutely.

CHAIR—And the stability of the work force is very important.

Mr Kickett—You are spot on. Also, the Aboriginal people themselves can see the benefits of staying at school a bit longer with these programs that are in place now. We will probably not see the benefits of what is happening there for another 10 years.

Miss McGuire—One thing that has been successful is the fact that we have Larry working with Woodside. Larry has a great network now with all our employees. They meet and say, 'How are you going?' They will be sitting in on interviews, so it is not like you are going for a job and there will be five people across from you. We are very aware of that now as well, and that has made a difference.

Mrs VALE—Relationship building.

Miss McGuire—Yes. There is definitely a connection, and it is working well.

Mr Kickett—Prior to an Aboriginal person coming into the company or into a company, we get some psychometric testing done by an Aboriginal psychologist so that, when that person then comes into the company, we know their strengths and weaknesses and we can let the supervisor or whomever know about how they might be a bit sensitive in this or that area. We have a profile of that individual. That is fantastic.

Mrs VALE—I understand that you are here as individuals and not as representatives of Woodside, but how many Indigenous people would the company employ? Is that easy for you to say?

Miss McGuire—Probably about 35 to 40.

Mrs VALE—Has the company undertaken a lot of the training and the skills based knowledge of the employees? Has the company trained these people themselves?

Miss McGuire—It depends. We have some coming in as trainees, some coming in as qualified drilling engineers or whatever so, no, but we have ongoing training in the company.

Mrs VALE—Does the company get taxation breaks for any training that it does for Indigenous people?

Mr Kickett—Not that I am aware of.

Mrs VALE—It does seem that there is a need for a different approach in the education of not only Indigenous children but also children at risk. Yesterday in Kalgoorlie, the committee met a lady who was the spouse of a gentleman appearing as a witness. I found what she was doing particularly interesting. She was involved in a program called ALTA-1. Have you heard of it?

Mr Kickett—No.

Mrs VALE—It started off for Indigenous children—young people between the age of 15 and 19 who could not cope with the lock-step system in normal school education. The program comprised 60 per cent Indigenous and I think about 40 per cent non-Indigenous young people who were at risk and did not attend school. We got some information from her and it seemed that they were having tremendous success with this program. They have benchmarks that they have to meet before they get subsequent funding. Maybe we should be rejigging the content of the education, as you were saying, and looking at what is relevant. But it is not just the content of the education; it is about nurturing the individual student with the lessons. They are not just grouped in together en masse. They are not grouped as a class. Each young person is an individual and each one is monitored. Also, they actually get fed. They get fed breakfast and lunch. They are in a nurturing environment. I thought it had a great deal of value.

I have not had a chance to read a lot more information on it. This particular lady did not give the committee a presentation on it. We got some information from her, which I would like you to have a look at. Please give it back to me because it is the only copy I have. The environment that this particular community created for young people at risk seemed to really fit the needs that we have been identifying. We talk about education as the key to opportunity—the key to life and everything. Let’s face it, it is really the one great equaliser for everyone. My father actually said when I was a little girl, ‘Education is the only salvation for being born a woman.’ The whole point is that it is the only salvation for all of us. No matter who you are, the higher your level of education means you can take your place in any company at any time. You have found that, haven’t you, Larry? You have such an excellent education; it has taken you places.

Mr Kickett—Yes, absolutely.

Mrs VALE—We all understand it is the key. It is the first step on the road to opportunity. But how do we encourage these young people, given those 10 barriers that you said they have to get over. Some of our non-Indigenous young Australians in Western Sydney have exactly the same problems. It is about an alienation from the school system because they do not find any relevance or resonance there.

Mr Kickett—That is right.

Mrs VALE—I think we have to come up with some way, as a government, to try and do this better for these young people. If they have the educational basics, they will make their own opportunities in life. Thank you for your contribution.

Miss McGuire—There are so many other hurdles to overcome, just to even get to school.

Mrs VALE—Absolutely. That is where this nurturing environment is so important. You are right about some people not even having homes. They do not even have food. How can you learn anything if you are hungry? That is what this particular program provides. It has only been running for two years. Before they got subsequent funding, I am not quite sure where it all came from. As I said, I have not read the brochure yet, but it is worth thinking about. We are hearing the call for the same need each time: we have to come up with a better system for children at risk other than the normal lock-step system that is available in our schools.

Mr Kickett—Okay.

CHAIR—This is the place where you are allowed to dream a little and offer us a few dreams about what we might recommend that might persuade the parliamentary executive about influencing the outcomes here. Just think about that. We talked about English as a second language. It is an issue that has interested me for some time. Do you know the book *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die*?

Mr Kickett—No, I do not.

CHAIR—It is phenomenal in how it tries to explain the challenges, and language is a key part of how we bridge the gap—something I had not understood. It still does not allow for walking away from all the other issues around education and into the work force. I am interested in your view about language and what it can mean and what it does not mean. Do you have a definition of language, particularly in terms of your own workplace, your potential employees, the young people, the traditional owners, the elders—everybody? Do you have a view?

Mr Kickett—I suppose it is getting back to one of the things that Dr Carmen Lawrence mentioned about teaching kids what they would like to learn. To retain their culture and their language is very important, but there are situations where, in reality—and I am very strong on retaining Aboriginal culture—we have to move out of the Aboriginal circle and, if we as an Aboriginal organisation and Indigenous group want to progress, we have to learn the English language. Having said that, we still want to hold on to our culture. I suppose that is the difficult part.

Mrs VALE—Is it too late?

Mr Kickett—No, it is not. Hopefully, it is not. As an Indigenous community, for us to move on we basically have to learn the English way of life—I hate to say it.

CHAIR—Is it that, if you are fluent in your first language, you have a better opportunity to be fluent in English? I do not know. Richard Trudgen is the man who wrote *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die*. It is something I am still getting my head around that, if you are fluent in your first language, it does predispose you to be fluent in English. I am still trying to understand that, but I think it is not counterproductive to have fluency in both.

Mrs VALE—They are not mutually exclusive.

CHAIR—It is part of literacy to be fluent. It is something I am still coming to terms with. For example, I tried to learn Pitjantjatjara in a very limited way. My electorate is Pitjantjatjara. I really struggled, but it was still a very valuable experience. I want to raise the issue of language and I want to raise with both of you the issue of the education system. Picking up all those issues without retracing them, it seems that it is a matter of leadership for our education sector to actually bring it together and to have something which engages in way in which we have never really done in that past. It is not blaming anyone. It is not saying that Western Australia is any different to anywhere in the rest of Australia; it is an issue for all of us to see how the hell we actually get a set of factors that bring kids to school. Get a new name for education. Forget the term 'school'. Call it what you want, but can we get to the place where we are able to overcome some of these issues by a different way of doing it? I cannot see any other way through. I do not know the answer. I can see that we all have the bits of the ingredients that can bring it together, but it seems that no-one has really grappled with it enough to finish it off and do it in a way that is effective. I am sure that we are getting bits of it, but we have a way to go. You have touched on some of them today. Do you think we need someone within the education sector to lead with it?

Mr Kickett—Absolutely.

CHAIR—You have talked about someone who will be talking to us today that may offer us a bit on that by the sound of it.

Mr Kickett—Going back to what we touched on earlier about the schooling, if we can get them to stay at school five days a week, that would be good. If you take one day a week that they are not at school and add that up over their life at primary school, they are probably missing two years or something. That is a big gap in their education. If we can develop interesting things to get them to school and keep them there, that would be ideal. Dave Wirrapunda, who is a fantastic young fellow, has probably the highest attendance at Roebourne Primary School ever because he happened to be there. Unfortunately, that was only a one-day thing. What do you do the next day? The kids run and hide and do not come to school. That is the difficulty of trying to structure something to attract them to school and retain them so that they want to come to school.

CHAIR—We are hearing 'no school, no pool'. We are getting a bit of that. There is a lot of that sort of stuff. Anything just to wrap up?

Mr Kickett—I think what you are doing is terrific. If we can, in any way shape or form, we will help Indigenous kids get a better education, and I will take on Carmen's idea that they are

better educated these days. From an Indigenous perspective, we need more of them coming through. We need more employment opportunities to be provided by organisations, and I think that is happening. The difficulty at the moment is that we probably will not see the successes of what we are doing for another 10 years. It is a long haul, and you have to keep chipping away, but 10 years ago we were probably sitting down doing the same thing.

CHAIR—We can measure that a bit. We can have some confidence that we can. There is no reason why we cannot expect to make progress.

Mr SLIPPER—I admire what Woodside is doing. I realise you cannot talk on behalf of Woodside, but is your personal observation that what is occurring is mutually beneficial to the Indigenous community and to the company?

Miss McGuire—I would say without a doubt. People are having relationships with Aboriginal people that they may never have had before. There is better awareness because of our cultural awareness training. I would say it is mutually beneficial. Also, our Indigenous employees have a focus and they have an income that is steady. I would say so. Would you, Larry?

Mr Kickett—Yes, absolutely. I would not disagree with that.

Mr SLIPPER—Is there a problem for your full-time employees, given the cultural concept of sharing within Indigenous communities, who are in receipt of a regular wage sometimes having pressure placed on them by family members to essentially distribute the income more widely than within the nuclear family?

Mr Kickett—I think it is a feature of Aboriginal culture: what's mine is yours. It is a sharing thing.

Mr SLIPPER—It is a plus and a minus, I suppose.

Mr Kickett—Exactly.

CHAIR—Jenny, I did not quite give you an opportunity to wrap up. Did you have anything else?

Miss McGuire—One thing I wanted to quickly say was that we were talking about language and strong culture, which is fine for the North-West, but you also have the group down here—Larry's group, the Noongars—that have lost most of their language. The culture is not as strong as in the north. That is really sad, so there is a different set of issues with the Perth community.

CHAIR—That is a really good point you have reminded us about.

Miss McGuire—They have totally different issues altogether.

CHAIR—In my electorate I have got the urban communities and then I have got the Pitjantjatjara, which is, as we know, probably as close to traditional as there is—apart from the desert people. It is quite interesting and it is a good reminder.

Mr Kickett—In terms of what Jenny was saying, I have just been to an independent Indigenous schools committee meeting this morning. There are 100 kids going to private schools in Perth. Of those 100, there would be 80-plus who are from the Kimberley and the Pilbara. What Jenny is saying is there are no Noongars going to the private schools.

Mrs VALE—How come? Is that scholarship based or a scholarship bias that they take?

Mr Kickett—I think it is support through DEST more than anything else.

Mr SLIPPER—What schools?

Mr Kickett—Guildford Grammar, Hale School—

Miss McGuire—Trinity.

Mr Kickett—Christ Church, Scotch.

Mr SLIPPER—So the best schools.

Mr Kickett—And MLC.

Mrs VALE—Those schools may not appreciate the difference.

Mr SLIPPER—What I am saying is that those are schools which traditionally would considered to be elite independent schools in Perth.

Dr LAWRENCE—You pay a lot of money for an education that may not be superior.

Mrs VALE—Could I just ask, do the schools—

CHAIR—Mrs Vale, you are out of order but you will have to be very quick!

Mrs VALE—Do the schools know the difference, do you think, and know that there are none of your people there?

Mr Kickett—Yes.

Mrs VALE—So the schools would realise they are not just taking an Indigenous child and that there are different nations, if I can use that term.

Mr Kickett—I think what happened is the Noongar group got easier access to the high schools in the government school system. Where these kids are coming from in the Kimberley and the Pilbara, some schools only go to year 10. The level of education is not there for those kids, so they bring them down to Perth.

Mrs VALE—So they are trying to fulfil a need that they identified.

CHAIR—This is a very big state.

Mr Kickett—Absolutely—the biggest and the best.

CHAIR—It is indeed—that is very good.

Mr SLIPPER—The biggest but not necessarily the best.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your time. All the best.

[12:16 pm]

HANSEN, Mr Ray Bassin, Chairperson and Founder, Koorlbardi Aboriginal Corporation

HUMPHRIES, Ms Shirley, Secretary, Koorlbardi Aboriginal Corporation

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you for being with us today. Is there anything you would like to add about the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Hansen—Ms Humphries and I are from the Koorlbardi community external studies program. In fact, we have just completed a pilot program with the outgoing minister, Mr Alan Carpenter. We had been lobbying since we had been incorporated, since the year 2000, to get an education program going in our community.

CHAIR—Thank you. Mr Hansen, would you like to make a short opening statement, which I think you were leading into, and then we will go to questions.

Mr Hansen—Thank you. I am really honoured to be here today. I would like to thank you guys for inviting us. I think it is a stepping stone for a bloke like me. I am from the bush. I left school at the age of 13. I was brought up on the reserve. I never had much education; I am a grassroots man. I have been in Queens Park as part of the Cannington precinct for about 20-odd years now, and I have seen a lot of our problems. They are like the problems we see everywhere, in all communities—a lot of our kids dropping out of school, and all the other social and economic problems that we face.

I have taken up the torch because I have found that a lot of our young people, within our own community in Cannington—and we have got a population of about the same as the south-east metropolitan area; close to about 4,000 people, I believe, which is a huge number of Aboriginal people—do not go to school. A lot of their parents have never had any education either, because of things that happened in the past—you know the extended family stuff that we go through. My program is actually based on grassroots people—me being a grassroots man and remembering how it used to be for me at school when I was a young bloke growing up. They used to call me the ‘walkabout man’ years ago. It was just a cliche they used at that time; actually, I think it is quite funny, really. But I was not being rude to my teachers or anybody like that, or to my fellow students—if I didn’t like a subject, I wouldn’t go. So I never really completed my education. This turned around in the community because there were a lot of Aboriginal people in our own community who were doing an external studies program through the Swan TAFE, called the Certificate of General Adult Education.

We lived in Cannington. By the time we got our kids off to school and that sort of stuff—most of us had young families and we had to do all the necessary family stuff—and by the time we caught a bus and a train to attend Midland campus, we lost two or three hours of our time. I actually turned that around. I found out that there was a huge number of people doing the program. I actually started lobbying the minister for education, Mr Alan Carpenter. I really thank that guy. He did a hell of a job for us. He got us that 12-month pilot. We turned it around and through Mr Carpenter we got some funding. We then lobbied the then minister for housing,

Minister Stephens—he is not the minister for housing anymore—to acquire premises in our community to operate the program. We got some funding for a bus through Lotterywest and some wages for me as a program coordinator. The bus was to do the language and cultural stuff. I thought that doing the numeracy and literacy stuff was great, but the language and cultural stuff is very important too for Indigenous people. We complemented both sides.

We had a 70 per cent success rate with people finishing the course. We had young kids from the trouble spots—for example, Northbridge. We had people coming from as far as Fremantle, Balga and Girrawheen. It was a culturally appropriate thing and it was in a friendly environment. A lot of these people had been failed by the education system over the years because of their circumstances and the way it is sometimes. We more or less founded the program to give them a second chance at learning; to give them their confidence and self-esteem back to attend TAFE and university or whatever they wanted to do. It was a stepping stone for them to go back into the mainstream. We were addressing it at grassroots level. I am really proud of what we did. In the process of all the stuff I did, I actually achieved my year 10 certificate after all those years.

I am sad to say that it has actually failed now. I am a little disappointed because of all the hard work over five years to actually get it up and running. A pilot program is a yes or a no thing, but I am sorry it failed. I am disappointed because it did not get the backing to the extent that it should have been backed. We were very limited with what we got in terms of tools, resources and reading materials. But we still had that 70 per cent success rate. I could not understand why a program that had such a huge impact on our community did not get the backing. We tried to solve some of the issues that we face. I do not know why it failed just like that. I am not an educated man; I left school at the age of 13. I put a lot of hard work and passion and vision into it. We implemented something for the good of our community and for the benefit of our people to get an education to maybe go into business and things like that. It is okay for those who have had some form of education, but the ones we picked in the safety net were the ones who never had any education. We could have had at least 300 or 400 people, easy, but because of the circumstances it failed.

CHAIR—Shirley, would you like to add to Mr Hansen's comments?

Ms Humphries—The building in which we operated would not even be half the size of this room. Twenty people were expected to use one toilet and things like that. It became a safety issue too.

CHAIR—You fulfilled a need, you improved your own education, you got your year 10 certificate and you acknowledge that it satisfied this great need. What was the cost? I saw a budget of $200,000 or is that a strategic plan that was never funded?

Mr Hansen—It was a plan.

CHAIR—What was the cost, roughly, when it was completed?

Mr Hansen—I could not say.

CHAIR—Was it big money?

Mr Hansen—No. What was given to us was just a pebble in the ocean.

Ms Humphries—It was more like leftover moneys from the budget.

CHAIR—Was it $50,000?

Ms Humphries—Yes, $50,000.

CHAIR—A year?

Ms Humphries—For the first 12 months it was, I think, about $100,000.

Dr LAWRENCE—Was that for the pilot?

Ms Humphries—Yes. That was the pilot—everything. The wages that we were getting we were putting back into the school to keep it going with consumables and everything else.

CHAIR—Would it be your hope that something like this could grow again?

Ms Humphries—We hope there is a big institution where the kids can all come to get their education in a culturally friendly environment—not just a TAFE setting.

Dr LAWRENCE—When did you finish the pilot?

Mr Hansen—The pilot was complete at the end of last year. We went back into another contract with Swan TAFE. There was a memorandum of understanding—I have all the documents from the ministers and everybody that was part of the setting up of it. We went into another MOU for this year. But things never really changed much as far as the program went. I set the program up to be culturally friendly. It was having successes and I wanted the program to continue to be run that way. There were changes made to the program. They wanted to implement basic grade 4 and 5 work, which I thought was a bit embarrassing to some of the students that were going from the first year to the second year. They wanted to implement all this stuff, and it took away from the friendliness of the environment of it all. They ended up taking it back to TAFE.

I had a meeting with the directors of TAFE, the strategic managers and people like that. I said: ‘It will not work at TAFE. These people have been failed before; they were coming to us in droves. Why TAFE?’ I did not have much say in it really—it was all cut and dried when I walked into the meeting; straightaway, I felt in my heart that it was gone. And no-one-turned up. We have not heard from Swan TAFE ever since. I am still writing to the minister for Indigenous affairs because our own governing body has gone now. Most importantly, I told him that the education problem, more so than any of the social issues out there, was the main agenda for us. He never answered the way I wanted him to. I do not know whether it was a communication difference between us in our writings or not. With Mr Carpenter I found over the years that he and I had a great language for one another. We would talk and know exactly what we were talking about. We had a good rap between each other. We would share jokes now and again in writing. I never actually met the man; I really would like to shake his hand one day. He has

given an old grassroots man like me an opportunity to fulfil a dream and a great need for our people.

Ms Humphries—Another thing was that Swan TAFE expected Ray to do all the servicing out in our community for no wages at all. The Aboriginal liaison officers were getting paid, yet there were no Aboriginals at the Swan TAFE Midland campus.

Dr LAWRENCE—Were they all in your program?

Ms Humphries—A lot of them were using the—

Dr LAWRENCE—But they were coming through your program?

Ms Humphries—Yes. The only Aboriginal people at the Swan TAFE Midland campus were the mainstream people.

Dr LAWRENCE—Did anyone undertake a formal assessment after the 12 months?

Mr Hansen—Yes, Swan TAFE did. They came up with a 70 per cent success rate. That is what they told us. It was a great program. It was a really worthwhile program for the community the way we did it. I thought that 70 per cent was fantastic in a 12-month pilot.

Mrs VALE—So you were never told why it was not going to be re-funded? A pilot is of course limited.

Mr Hansen—I could not say why, but there were a few little things, as I said earlier. The program was twisted around, and the vision of what it was set up for was being put aside. They were trying to implement different things and different issues came into it. I tried to tell them and make them aware of it and stand my ground on all that sort of stuff, but I was just one man on my own. I never had a chance at all.

CHAIR—Have you had a response from anyone in particular?

Mr Hansen—As Shirley was saying, I never walked away from the program. I walked because I was providing a service for nothing and they were not prepared to pay my wages. I have responsibilities, as we all have. I came here today to talk to you people, and I am honoured to be here to talk to you guys and to have been given the opportunity, but in my heart I think what we were doing is worth while for the community. If we do not catch these grassroots people and give them some of the direction that they talk about as being culturally appropriate to them, getting them into private schools and universities is never going to happen. We are talking about Noongars; we are not talking about Pitjantjatjara, nor'-wester Noongars or you fellas.

Ms Humphries—They have a big support system anyway, with Clontarf and mining companies.

Mr Hansen—They have a big network—mining companies and royalties. They get all this sort of stuff, but Noongars down here—I am a Noongar man—do not get that sort of backing that they get up there. So this program is more appropriate for the Noongar people. It was just

for us. What I also found is that we never had only Noongar people; we started getting Wongai people from Kalgoorlie and nor'-westers from up north. I am finding now that a lot of nor'-west people and a lot of Wongai people are coming to Perth, so we are going to have a major problem here.

CHAIR—But I do not think that would be the increasing trend.

Ms Humphries—Yes, it is.

Mr Hansen—Yes, it is, for sure. Doing what we have done in education, we have started getting these people as well as Noongar people.

CHAIR—Can I just get my timing right here. Just take me back—what year did the pilot begin?

Ms Humphries—2003.

CHAIR—And it went through to?

Ms Humphries—2004.

CHAIR—June?

Ms Humphries—The end of June. Then it was extended up to December to make it up to the school term.

CHAIR—So it concluded at the end of 2004. So we had this very brief period when it was, certainly from your perspective, quite successful and did good work. It was quite a difficult and disappointing time for you.

Mr Hansen—Yes.

CHAIR—The issue of separate Indigenous education units is something that is discussed from time to time. It is really quite a challenging subject. I know high schools in my own state of South Australia have endeavoured to do it, and I think that had some success. Yours is aiming at adults. I do not have the answers, but certainly your endeavour is to be applauded. But that does not mean it fits all those requirements of an educational institution. You obviously have found that and understand that. But you are almost a pioneer of the principle, aren't you? You are a pioneer in terms of satisfying the need, because people were coming to you. I do not have an answer. I look to my colleagues for whether they have any suggestions, but I would like to hear from you. I think you have already said it, but just restate it. What would you like to see happen? You have come through this with a lot of energy and a lot of effort and I can see a sense of satisfaction with what you did achieve but the disappointment of it not going on. What would be the future? I would encourage my colleagues to ask a question to you too, but what would be your hope in the future?

Mr Hansen—I would like to see it resurrected or reborn. But we have learnt a lot, too, about the game over the years. I am not an educated man—I am not saying that—but I am a man of

vision and passion. I feel a change coming around in the way the community and everything is going with regard to the structure in places. I feel that it is a good time for our people. If we do not educate the parents, we all go home to a different way of life everyday in what we do in our lives.

CHAIR—It raises the issue of what is there now, doesn't it? Where do these people go?

Mr Hansen—This is what I am saying—get it resurrected and to bring it back to the community where it is culturally appropriate, such as what we did with it. Give us all the necessary resources and material and what we need. I really believe that what we did became a safety net for a lot of our people from all the communities.

CHAIR—Do you understand that I cannot deliver that—

Mr Hansen—I understand.

CHAIR—and this committee cannot. We can respect your endeavours but we cannot deliver. What I was really interested to know was: where did those people go? Where have they gone?

Mr Hansen—Some of them are back in jail. A lot of them are back on the dole queue and using drugs and alcohol. We became a safety net for these people. We gave them something that no other community—their own community—was doing. We were addressing social issues and family matters. We became a pivotal contact. They were not handballed around. Sometimes you felt like Polly Farmer getting handballed around.

CHAIR—He was a great handballer.

Mr Hansen—He made history by handballing.

CHAIR—He did.

Mr Hansen—At the end of the day, these people were failed. They are still being failed. Like I said, a lot of them have ended up back in jail. A lot of them are back on the streets using drugs and alcohol. So we have really gone nowhere with it.

CHAIR—Let me take another proposition. If it could not be you for whatever reason, is there another way? Is there another group? Is there some other mechanism that you have thought about or have seen others doing? I think it has merit but there is nothing I can do to deliver what you would like. Is there another way or another group within the education system, because you have been there and done it?

Mr Hansen—If we are really going to solve some of these issues out there with education of our Aboriginal people, we have to start with our children at a young age, which is very important. You look at life and throughout people's lives; it is not what you have been taught but how you are taught that you always remember. To me, that is the same thing that is going to apply to our kids. I find there is also a little bit of discrimination about that too. Even in our community we are finding that a lot of the teachers are taking away the responsibilities of the parents. Let us give the responsibility back to the parents. Let us give their respect, confidence

and self-esteem back and say, ‘This is the problem and it has to be adjusted.’ I am finding that, in our own school, we have non-Aboriginal people who are teaching Aboriginal culture. To me, that is okay, but if you are going to implement that sort of thing you are going to have to have it from a man’s point of view.

CHAIR—It is a bit risky, that one.

Mr Hansen—Some of these fellas they are talking about men’s business—the women are talking about men’s business to these young boys.

Mrs VALE—How long did you say the pilot lasted, Ray?

Mr Hansen—Twelve months.

Mrs VALE—You had a 70 per cent success rate. Who did you say were the people who were in jail or on drugs? Were they the 30 per cent who did not—

Mr Hansen—These were some of our students who were attending our classes. When the pilot folded, there was nothing more.

Mrs VALE—And these were not young people; they were mature people?

Mr Hansen—They were parents, and young men and women.

Ms Humphries—And teenagers.

Mr Hansen—We were catching teenagers, as well.

Mrs VALE—I note that you got funding initially from TAFE and the Lotteries Office. Have you tried to secure funding for the program from anyone else? I know you have written to the government, but have you been to any mission groups or church groups that might be interested?

Mr Hansen—Yes. We have been everywhere, including Rio Tinto and Woodside. No-one seems to be interested.

Mrs VALE—Have you written to the federal education minister about your program?

Mr Hansen—No. We are still lobbying the state minister for education, Ljiljanna Ravlich, at the moment.

Mrs VALE—I suggest that you write to the federal minister about your program and set out your business plan, what you are trying to do and also your success rate. Could you do that?

Mr Hansen—Yes, I will do that.

Mr SLIPPER—In your view, why is it that, once the pilot finished, people slid back to where they were? Would that indicate that the pilot—and I am being a little provocative here—may not

have been quite on the mark, insofar as when someone who went through the pilot they slid back? You cannot have people forever on a program, so you have to move people through the program. Presumably, in that 12-month period, even if the pilot had continued, you would expect someone to be through the program in 12 months. If those people slid back after they had done the program, maybe some people made an assessment that the pilot was not the success that you thought it was.

Mr Hansen—These are things that we have looked at. In relation to what you have raised, we knew that we could not keep them here too long. In my negotiations with Swan TAFE, we were trying to set up training. Swan TAFE is an enormous institution. It does about 64 per cent of training in Western Australia, which is a huge amount. Here we were at Koorlbardi, a little group of 30 or so people, whom we were trying to help to get a year 10 certificate. Without a year 10 certificate, you cannot go anywhere really. Those who were getting the year 10 certificate came along in leaps and bounds. Their minds were really opening up, and they started to feel confident. You could see it in their faces that they were finally achieving something in their lives.

Through this we tried to implement the training part of it. If we could have just given it a bit of a trial run, they could have been trained in how to fix up small basic machines like lawnmowers and stuff that most of them use. We could have started off small and seen which way it went, but it never eventuated. It never happened. I left a lot of the onus on the students to let me know what they wanted to do, where they wanted to go and that type of stuff, but things like the training part of it that we tried to implement through the Swan TAFE never happened. Here we were giving people an education, and we were trying to get them training so they could get into the mainstream and either get a job or further their education, but that was not met. I believe all those little things contributed to the failure of it.

Ms Humphries—We were trying to keep the training and the education in the community, in the one place.

Dr LAWRENCE—TAFE does not really do much for those who have not got a year 10 certificate. They really focus on trade vocational preparation.

Mr Hansen—That is what we have found. The guy who was the lecturer for us—his name was Jim Sieler—came out of retirement. He is 65 years old and he came to lecture in our program. He has been teaching for about four or five decades, generation after generation. He is even teaching grandkids. The problem was still going round.

Ms Humphries—And the grandfather is still in the same place.

Mr Hansen—The grandfather is still sitting in the same class.

CHAIR—It is a happy-sad story.

Mr Hansen—Yes.

CHAIR—The endeavour is fantastic. The outcome is not what you would have liked, but it is also making some very good points along the way. I think you are fantastic for what you have

achieved, even if it is not where you wanted to end up. I think Mrs Vale's suggestion is a reasonable one.

Ms Humphries—Yes.

CHAIR—What I have been talking about over the last couple of days is very relevant in the sense that we have to think differently about how we do this.

Ms Humphries—A new way.

CHAIR—Is there anything you want to say about how about how you saw it and how you might like it to go on?

Ms Humphries—We saw the pilot in our community as one that could be put in all the different communities, but they could implement their own cultural things to suit themselves.

CHAIR—As a template for the rest of Western Australia, essentially.

Ms Humphries—Exactly.

CHAIR—Ray, would you like to make a quick final point? Is there anything you can think of? I think it has all pretty well been said.

Mr Hansen—As I and Shirley have said, I had a dream about this—it came to me in a dream. I thought about how I was taught and what I wanted to do in school and all that sort of stuff in my life. Family became an issue. I had a great football career. I could have pursued that, but my mother died at an early age. I never had time; I just helped dad with the kids and that sort of thing. But, looking back over the years, I have been around Australia, I have lived life on the streets and have done all the hard stuff. I am just a knockabout bloke. I wanted to see change. I did not want to see my kids miss out on an education. I wanted them to get jobs and to go out and become hairdressers and butchers or whatever it may be, so they could see that they were part of the Australian way of life and that they were no different to anything—that we are all the same. I brought this program around to try to let people know and understand that the opportunities are out there if they are given to them. I gave the program all the energy and effort that I had, to turn it around for people and to give them the confidence and self-esteem to see that there were opportunities for them.

CHAIR—That is a great story that finishes with, shall we say, not a happy ending but an unhappy interval. It is a wonderful comment; you are fantastic people. Thank you very much; we wish you well.

[12.50 pm]

ROGERS, Mrs Sandra, Private capacity

CHAIR—Welcome. Would you like to make a short opening statement? We are putting you under pressure, aren't we? In your own time, you can make a brief, relaxed opening statement and then we will ask a few questions and draw out a few of the issues.

Mrs Rogers—Yes. I want to present my views here today from my own background touching on education and employment. Initially, I was an Indigenous community member from north-west Queensland. Although I was born in Mount Isa, my community is around the Dajarra region. I was there until I was about nine years old, and then we moved to Mount Isa and that was a big culture shock. I had gone to a school that was mainly Indigenous—probably 90 per cent of the students were Indigenous—and when I went to Mount Isa there was some difficulty in trying to adapt to that different environment. I want to touch on that.

My grandmother never learnt to read and write and my mother had two years of education, so I know that where I am today is because I had a better education than they had. I want to touch on my employment and my first job and how that helped me as well. Also, I will give my perspective as a mother of four children and where my kids are at today through my belief in education and employment.

Like I said, I was born in Mount Isa and I lived in Dajarra in north-west Queensland until I was nine and we moved to Mount Isa. What I recollect about living in Dajarra in those years is that it was predominantly an Aboriginal community and the Aboriginal men had employment. They worked for the stations or they worked driving heavy machinery for the main roads department. I think: where have we gone wrong? We had employment 30 or 40 years ago. It seems to be different now.

CHAIR—It is not progress, is it?

Mrs Rogers—No, it is going backwards. We moved to Mount Isa and I went to a high school. I was the eldest daughter in the family. I cannot remember how many brothers and sisters attended school with me at that time, but we found it very difficult to adapt. We started wagging school, which is something we had never done in our own community. Things were hard for us for the first two years until we went to the Catholic school. We became part of that Catholic community and we were able to adopt a more European lifestyle through it. I went to high school. It was not because my mother or my grandmother had an education; it was because I had a good Aboriginal friend whose mum was sending her to the high school. She actually lent me a uniform at the last moment and said, 'Why don't you go to high school with Beverley?'

My mum had a child at 16, so she did not want any of her kids to do the same—to become a mother at that age. She always drummed it into our heads. When the offer came for us to go to school, she jumped at it as a way to keep us occupied and doing something constructive. I went to San Jose Secondary School and I graduated from year 10. I did not find employment. Everyone wanted to work for Mount Isa Mines as a typist in the typing pool. I did not get into

the mines that year. The nuns were offering a business course, a post year 10 course, and it was the first time it was ever offered, so I went back and did that until August. I did that for eight months in the following year. Then one of the bank managers contacted the school and asked if they had any students who were interested in working as a trainee. No-one else put their hand up. We only had a very small group that year and no-one else put their hand up. I said, 'I'd be interested in that.' I finished school on the Friday and went and worked there on the following Monday.

CHAIR—What we might do is condense this part and then allow a conversation between all of us to come to the issues which are of particular concern to our inquiry. You mentioned your four children. You have obviously come to this part of the world. Our inquiry is about positive outcomes. Your life is a very positive outcome.

Mrs Rogers—I think the positive outcome of me working in the banking industry was that I was valued as an employee. That set me up for life in other areas. Aboriginal people need to feel valued, and I do not think that that is the case.

CHAIR—Can we talk about your children? Tell us how they are going and what some of the outcomes are. Do you want to go there?

Mrs Rogers—Yes. I have four children. The youngest is 17 and the eldest is 25. My eldest daughter graduated from the ECU with a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Japanese studies, and a minor in tourism management. She is employed now. She lives in Cairns. My two middle children have both done traineeships. My eldest son is working for CALM—Conservation and Land Management. That is the type of work he absolutely loves. My youngest daughter did a traineeship at ECU, at Joondalup campus, and she is now working for an insurance company.

CHAIR—It is a wonderful story.

Mrs Rogers—Today is my youngest son's last day at school. He is completing year 12 and he is going to university next year.

CHAIR—It is a big day. From your wonderful story the reality is that the system has worked well in many ways. I guess you are my generation, although my children are just a little older. We have four children. Drawing from that, we think that there are some really positive outcomes, as you have described, but we are also looking at examples. You were valued as an employee. We are looking for what might make a difference for those who are not fortunate, those who are not engaged with our system.

Mrs Rogers—I think that people need to be valued. I do not think that Aboriginal people feel valued. I work at a university and I just saw an example there. An Indigenous woman came in. She became a mum at 16, so she went and got an education later in life, in her adult years. She has a master's in business. She came on board as a senior admin officer and she did not stick around long. I think it was because her confidence was undermined. I do not have a degree and I am still in the system. It is because I went into the work force at 16, I stayed in the work force doing all sorts of jobs and I have that confidence.

CHAIR—You need to be valued.

Mrs Rogers—I think Aboriginal people need to be valued.

Mr SLIPPER—But if this lady got a master's degree, which is a pretty impressive qualification—and overwhelmingly people in the non-Indigenous community do not have master's degrees—why do you think she did not acquire the necessary confidence, as she obviously was very successful in her studies?

Mrs Rogers—I think it was because she went and worked for ATSIC, which is an Indigenous organisation, so she was in that environment, whereas I started out in the mainstream, in the private sector, and I had to perform.

Mr SLIPPER—Which bank?

Mrs Rogers—I had to go up against non-Indigenous people and I did perform better and that was recognised and valued. I think I got that confidence from there, whereas she did not. I think there is something wrong if you do a master's and you do not have that confidence. I see it all the time.

Mr SLIPPER—How can we convey value? In other words, how can we show people they are valued, as a general community?

Mrs Rogers—Everyone is going on about how the Prime Minister should not say sorry. I probably agree: maybe he should not say sorry, but I think he should acknowledge that Aboriginal people have made a valuable contribution to building this country. They worked as pastoralists in the pastoral industry. They worked building roads. They worked in the mining industry. Where is that acknowledgment?

Mr SLIPPER—Hasn't he done that?

Mrs Rogers—I have never heard him.

Mrs VALE—We can get you a copy from *Hansard*, I think.

Mrs Rogers—I have never heard it acknowledged.

CHAIR—That is a wonderful comment.

Dr LAWRENCE—If it is not a repeated story—if you have not heard it—it is as if it had not been said.

Mrs Rogers—It is not going through the Aboriginal community—put it that way.

CHAIR—It is a wonderful comment about a positive contribution and the value of it.

Mrs Rogers—And that is what I think. I am studying at university now and you read writings from other Aboriginal authors. They sort of say the same thing, you know: the Aboriginal people have been downtrodden for so long that it is going to take another 200 years to pull them up out of the shit. I think that is right. That may be the case, but if the government—

CHAIR—But it is not right in every case—your case for one.

Mrs Rogers—I think that is because of the type of person I am and I think that comes back to my grandmother and mother. Although they did not read and write, they were strong women. They survived in the bush and their kids were not taken. A lot of it goes back to them and their work ethic. They may not have had an education, but they had a strong work ethic.

CHAIR—Wonderful.

Mrs Rogers—All the Aboriginal people at our community of Dajarra had a strong work ethic. When the pastoralists threw them all off the stations, they went to Mount Isa and they worked for the council as truck drivers. There are a lot of positive stories out there, but we do not ever hear them.

CHAIR—That is exactly what we are finding.

Dr LAWRENCE—Reflecting on your own education, you would have seen some of the kids you went to school with probably not succeed as you have done, but also, through your children, and now through working there, you have seen a university where there are Aboriginal students and staff—not many probably, but some. Can you give us a little bit of a feel from your point of view of what the improvements have been over that time and what the obstacles are for more Aboriginal people—particularly in the urban areas where you have been living most recently—to better achievement?

Mrs Rogers—I think I mentioned the positive achievements in the little submission which I rather impulsively did one day and then regretted it and thought: why did I do it?

CHAIR—We are glad you did.

Mrs Rogers—I worked at the AMA for three years, and they had the AMA Indigenous initiatives, an employment program. I could see them placing people into mainstream employment and I thought that it was a good thing because of the positive experience that I had in the banking industry. Also, at the Mount Lawley campus of ECU, where I work, there is an Indigenous school—the School of Indigenous Australian Studies—and I see that as a good thing. That was not around when I was growing up. I can see Aboriginal kids that do not have the capability or opportunity maybe to do the TE to gain entry into university studies. Personally I think it has to work in conjunction with employment. When I put my daughter through uni she worked part time the whole way through. I do not think you can expect to have confidence at the end of your studies. I think you need that work experience as well.

CHAIR—I agree.

Dr LAWRENCE—Is the unit at ECU—I know the one at Curtin rather better—one where the students are undertaking other programs as well as being connected with Indigenous studies?

Mrs Rogers—At the School of Indigenous Australian Studies we have our own degree courses and they run courses in partnership with other schools.

Dr LAWRENCE—That is what I meant. At Curtin they operate both as a centre for study of Indigenous culture and community management and that sort of stuff but they also provide a bit of a home base for students who are doing other courses on the campus, whether they are science or engineering or whatever. Is it the same at ECU?

Mrs Rogers—Yes. I see those as positive things that were not around when I was growing up. I see that as a good thing.

Mrs VALE—Sandra, congratulations on what you have done and congratulations on your children, too. I think it is every mother's dream to have the same educational level for the children as what they had themself. You said you began life in Queensland, in the Mount Isa region.

Mrs Rogers—It was in what I would now call an Aboriginal community, because it was predominantly Aboriginal people.

Mrs VALE—But you are based in Western Australia now?

Mrs Rogers—Yes. I came across about 25 years ago. But that is still my home country.

Mrs VALE—That seems to be unusual. We have heard evidence about people not wanting to move from their home country, yet you have done that. Was it because of a job?

Mrs Rogers—Initially my ex-husband and I were travelling around. I come from a mining town and he worked in the mining industry. I had my children over here, and where you have your children and they go to school you get involved there.

Mrs VALE—So you have followed opportunities. Is your husband Indigenous too?

Mrs Rogers—Yes.

Mrs VALE—He was prepared to follow the opportunity to come here?

Mrs Rogers—Yes. He had a trade—he was a boilermaker.

Mrs VALE—You do understand that leaving home country is very intimidating for the vast majority, from what I can see.

Mrs Rogers—Yes. We did not plan to—we were just going on a holiday.

Mrs VALE—It is just unusual. We all have to follow opportunity, but you have overcome a big obstacle.

Mrs Rogers—It was just the way it was. It was not as though we were looking for work. We could have stayed in Mount Isa—I worked in the banking industry and he worked as a boilermaker, so we could have stayed there. It was just that we felt we should see more of the country and travel, so he bought a caravan and we travelled. Around Kalgoorlie we ran out of the money that we wanted to spend, so we got a job.

Mrs VALE—But it is great that you have had the enthusiasm and also a sense of adventure to try that. Is there any message that you could give other Indigenous communities where people do not want to leave when there are opportunities to leave? You still have that very strong emotional and psychological connection with your homeland. It is not as if you are actually leaving it; you carry it always in your heart and your mind. It is just that sometimes I think if that could be understood by other Indigenous people they might feel that they could pursue an opportunity but still have that connection.

Mrs Rogers—I came over here in 1980. There is a lot of politics that have gone on since that time around Aboriginal issues, so I think it would be very hard. My daughter has gone back to Queensland and I understand that. People say. 'How can you come to terms with your daughter living over there and you living here?' And I say, 'Well, I did that at her age.' We are only a phone call away.

Mrs VALE—And she is pursuing opportunity too, isn't she, just like you pursued opportunity to get here?

Mrs Rogers—Yes, she is.

Mrs VALE—That was a really big quantum leap in your personal confidence in being able to do that, and for your husband too.

Mrs Rogers—Yes. The opportunities are here. Being here, I can see the opportunities. Coming here was no different than moving from Dajarra to Mount Isa. That was the big move. I remember as a small child that that was really difficult to come to terms with. I always wanted to go back but, over time, I realised the opportunities were in Mount Isa. It is the same thing here.

Mrs VALE—I think we have a challenge trying to convince people in remote communities that there are opportunities for them not just in their own homeland—they can actually access them and go back.

Mrs Rogers—That is right.

Mrs VALE—From what I can see from your story, it is a matter of confidence, though, isn't it?

Mrs Rogers—Yes. I know the government and everyone is saying that the government is putting all these millions of dollars into improving conditions for Aboriginal people but I think everyone is working in isolation. There are these little departments all working in isolation.

Mrs VALE—Stovepipe, they call it, or a silo.

Mrs Rogers—If they worked more collaboratively, maybe—

CHAIR—We are trying. We have what most would regard as a new experiment called Indigenous coordination centres. So we have a new system, which has replaced ATSIC. The jury is out a little bit at the moment.

Mrs VALE—It is a bit too early.

CHAIR—It is a bit early. They have to get their act together there a bit. You were with the AMA. Do you remember a lady by the name of Dr Ngaire Brown? She was a wonderful Indigenous doctor. You mentioned here about how they offered opportunities. I remember her working in Canberra. I think she has probably gone to the mainstream now. I note that as part of your life as well. I do not really have any other questions. You might like to bring to conclusion your presence here today. I apologise for any confusion about the timing.

Mrs Rogers—That is fine.

CHAIR—We are very grateful for you being with us, however spontaneous your email was. Would you like to spend a minute or two wrapping up?

Mrs Rogers—Based on my own experience, I think that my own education and employment played a significant role in making me what I am today. I feel strongly that the Australian government needs to stand up and acknowledge that Aboriginal people have made a significant contribution to this country. That is what I think.

CHAIR—Would you know of a man by the name of David Unaipon? I am biased—he was from South Australia. He was a great inventor 100 years ago—an incredible man. So I agree with what you are saying. Can we have that as an exhibit?

Mrs Rogers—Yes. I have not read it!

CHAIR—Just send it to us in your own time.

Mrs Rogers—Okay. I will read it over. I hope I do not have too many mistakes!

CHAIR—Just present it to us in your own time. Your contribution—your submission—becomes an exhibit. Thank you. I apologise for any pressure we put on you.

Proceedings suspended from 1.13 pm to 2.41 pm

BRIERTY, Mr Craig, Project Manager, Clontarf Foundation

CHAIR—Welcome. Would you care to make a brief statement about who you are, what the Clontarf Foundation is and its purpose and connection to our inquiry?

Mr Brierty—Kate said to me that the inquiry is looking into Indigenous employment.

CHAIR—That is right. Positive outcomes, basically; impediments; and templates which would allow others in.

Mr Brierty—The Clontarf Foundation runs football academies for young Indigenous men. We have four academies in WA and we are expanding to six next year, with the opening of academies in Albany and Broome. Basically, we use football because football is the vehicle that young Indigenous men really relate to. We use it as the vehicle to encourage young Indigenous men to come into education. Our aim is to ensure that we get retention of them through to year 12. By doing that, we can then work with those young men to get them into employment. Our foundation believe that, unless these guys get education outcomes and are attached to a program through to 18 or 19 years of age, they are likely to leave school at the age of 13, 14 or 15, when their chances of getting employment outcomes are greatly reduced and almost nonexistent. Historically, we know that this group are the most disadvantaged group in our society and that their employment rates, in many cases, are very poor. I suppose I am speaking to the converted here.

While running the program, we have found that there is a perception that Indigenous young men do not want to attend school. We believe that is not the case. We believe that these young men, if you can create an environment where they feel comfortable and supported, will come. Certainly, that is our experience. What we have done in Geraldton is a pretty good example. We went to Geraldton two years ago, where, on average, five Indigenous young men would get to year 12. This year there are 27 Indigenous young men in year 12. The reason that situation has been created is that we can create an environment that they can go into where they feel supported and comfortable and where the educational program, rather than being frightening, is something that motivates them. By doing that, we can retain them through to year 12. If we can retain them until 17 or 18 years of age, these guys mature enormously. In many ways, it is the lack of maturity that, we believe, is a key reason why these young guys are unable to get into employment and be maintained in employment.

While we are working with them the building of relationships is absolutely vital. We build very strong relationships with these young guys, allowing them to develop the normal skills of punctuality, attendance and, obviously, retention at school. They experience and develop those skills, which are really important for employment. Through our work with them, we give them the confidence to be able to communicate effectively in a whole range of settings so that when they do go into the workplace it is not such a frightening place. We work with our sponsors to ensure that our students have a pathway into employment where there is an environment of understanding for the specific needs of those kids. That is really important.

Through building those relationships with our sponsors, we are now able to place our young blokes into some really excellent employment postings. One example is a young guy in our program who has gone into Wesfarmers. We went and met with Wesfarmers and identified a position, an area within their business that would accommodate him and where there were people who were keen to work with young Indigenous men. We placed this young bloke in there and he has been an absolutely outstanding success. He has been there a year and a half. I was talking to him the other day and he told me that at the end of this year he gets his first bonus—$1,200 and a share allocation from Wesfarmers because he has been there for more than 12 months. He is absolutely wrapped. You would have seen Placer Dome. We are setting up placements at Placer Dome for trainees in traineeships. The students can go there and there is a whole range of ways we can manage it. One of the things we are looking at is that the students can still be in the footy academy, part time in TAFE and part time working for Placer Dome in a traineeship.

We will still have very close contact with them. They will be eased into the workplace and, if there are any issues, we will work with the companies and provide support. We do not just work with the students from 12 to 17; we start working with them in primary school. We actually use our young blokes as the vehicle to go out and run coaching clinics and that sort of stuff. We attach these young Indigenous kids to our program when they are still in primary school. That gives them the opportunity for retention from year 7 to year 8, which is so vital. We lose a lot of kids in that time. Once they leave us at the end of year 12, we still maintain very close contact with them. We have an alumnus that we have set up, and those kids come back. We ran an employment forum recently where we had our young blokes come back into our program. We had sponsors there and our current students there. They talked about their experiences in employment. We really pushed the issue of employment because, for a lot of our young guys, they have not necessarily got a vision whereby you go and get a job and this is your normal pathway. We try to instil in them an understanding of the normal pathway that people would go down, through education into employment and then whatever other areas.

CHAIR—Do they want to attend school to play football or to go to school?

Mr Brierty—It is interesting. I went to a meeting with DEST the other day. They are a fairly major sponsor. We took an Indigenous guy called Eddie Brown. He is a parent of one of our young blokes. His young son was an outstanding junior footballer and, at 15 years of age, played state schoolboys footy. His dad was set on him becoming an AFL player. We had had a couple of young blokes drafted, so Eddie saw his son coming into his program as a pathway into AFL footy. As it has turned out, his young son has not been drafted and probably will never be drafted. He is now 20 years of age and has a job with the WA Football Commission. But what the dad said was, by coming into our program, he gained the understanding that football could be used to attach these young blokes to education. Once they are in the education, there is a whole range of opportunities.

CHAIR—Just as importantly, did it engage the parent to support the child coming to the school? How important was that?

Mr Brierty—In this specific case his father was really keen.

CHAIR—I mean generally.

Mr Brierty—More generally it is not always the case. Lots of kids who come to our program are not supported. I will give you another quick case study if that is all right. A young guy from a community out at Fitzroy Crossing had a particularly harsh life—his dad he had not seen for a long time; his mum is around the place but does not have a lot of parenting skills. His auntie actually sent him to one of the CAPS schools down in Esperance.

Mrs VALE—What is a CAPS school?

CHAIR—Is that the parent program?

Mr Brierty—Yes, it was set up by Indigenous parents for their kids to go into. He went down there. The CAPS school knew about our program and got him to come up to our program. John has no support from family or very limited support. He went through our program. He is now in his third year of an apprenticeship with a company called JLV, which is another sponsor of ours. He has done it really tough. We think he should be Australian of the year because this young bloke actually stays attached to the school. He lives on his own in Perth and has no support or very limited support outside of that.

Mrs VALE—How old is he?

Mr Brierty—He is 20 now, but he has been living on his own for the last three years. He lives in a unit over at Ascot—do you know those big units on the way out to the airport on the left-hand side?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Brierty—They are pretty dingy. He lives out there in a unit on his own. I suppose the contact or support that he has is through us. He is very close with us. When there are any issues we go and work with his employer to sort out the issues. There have been times when it has been a bit rocky, but we have managed to keep it going. A lot of our kids do not have that level of support, but I think they need someone in their lives who can intervene.

CHAIR—So it is about the support and mentoring around him and not necessarily the parental support? I just wondered whether it might have drawn parents in—that may have seen a greater value in the school.

Mr Brierty—In some cases it certainly does that.

CHAIR—How is the program funded?

Mr Brierty—The program is funded basically through three sources. State government funding goes into it, federal government funding goes into it—that is, from DEST—and then there is private sponsorship.

CHAIR—What sort of annual budget are you working on?

Mr Brierty—The annual budget at this stage is about $3 million a year.

CHAIR—What does Clontarf stand for?

Mr Brierty—It is not an acronym. Clontarf is—

CHAIR—Or what does it represent, I should say.

Mr Brierty—Clontarf was a school that was set up in WA. It was basically an orphanage when it first started off. Dr Lawrence might know of it.

Dr LAWRENCE—Yes, it was a pretty awful place!

Mr Brierty—It was an Edmund Rice school—

CHAIR—So there was a benefactor?

Mr Brierty—Yes. It was an Edmund Rice school and it was run by the Christian Brothers. Can I just go back. Our budget is not $3 million a year at the moment. Our budget at the moment is about $1.3 million a year.

CHAIR—Anyway, if there is anything different from that, just let the secretariat know and we will tidy that up. Football is not for everybody. It is an important part of national life and I might happen to love it, but certainly not everybody does. I just wonder whether this is the best culture. It is one way through for some people. It occurs to me that, in an elitist competition like AFL or WAFL or SAFL, for every person who gets through I think there are a lot of people who fall by the wayside. It seems to be a fairly competitive process. I understand why young men would want to be part of it, but I am just a little concerned that the football culture is not necessarily always the best culture for young men.

Mr SLIPPER—Maybe rugby would be a better option!

CHAIR—Queenslanders have just seceded from the Commonwealth.!

Mr Brierty—We understand that footy is not for everyone. We are very clear about the fact that we work with the most at-risk group in Australia—Indigenous young men. In Western Australia, for Indigenous young men, there is no vehicle better than football to attach them to anything. The footy attaches them. Once we have them, it is not about footy; it is about a life outcome. The footy is really minimal. When they come to us they all think they are going to be AFL players. But if we get one kid a year drafted, that is outstanding. They understand that.

CHAIR—Do they have that understanding when they come there?

Mr Brierty—I think they all have a dream and a glint in their eye that they are going to be AFL players, but didn’t we all when we were 15 years of age! But by the time they leave they understand that this is about a life outcome and getting a job. They are very clear. As another quick aside: we have kids that leave us, we lose them for a year or a year and a half and all of a sudden they wander back in. We had a young bloke whose grandma, who lived in Meekatharra, won $15 million in lotto a little while ago. Do you remember that one?

Dr LAWRENCE—Yes.

Mr Brierty—We lost him for about 12 months. His grandma bought him a $60,000 Holden V8 ute and off he went to Darwin and played some footy—and the other day he wandered back in. I think the great thing about our program is that he wandered back and said: ‘Look, I’m ready to get a job now. Can you help me get a job?’ We are working with him, and he wants to be an apprentice electrician. He has come back. There are lots of examples of kids who go off the rails a bit, as all kids do, but they trust us and they will come back to us. The difference between our program and other programs like ours is that we are there every day of the week, forty weeks of the year, for three or four years—

CHAIR—How would you describe your structures: your staffing, your program, your headquarters? Just describe your mentoring program.

Mr Brierty—An academy usually looks like this: it runs for five years across a high school, so kids from year 8 to year 12. We have an academy director and two footy operations guys. Normally we would have a very high profile person in it, like Craig Turley or Dale Kickett, which really attracts the kids. If you are not familiar with AFL, those names might not mean too much, but in AFL circles they are very high profile. They are like Mal Meninga and that type of person.

To be involved in the academy, you have to enrol in the school. The academy runs parallel to the school. We are part of the school, I suppose, but we are a separate entity. We are private from that. So the kids go to school and they are involved in the full program. Our guys provide all the support that would normally be provided by other people. They do footy coaching with them. We have a common room, and they come there at morning tea and lunchtime and talk to our blokes. If you have an issue in a classroom or something like that, our guys will go and talk to the teacher and intervene in those sorts of ways.

Mrs VALE—Do you provide accommodation for them too?

Mr Brierty—We do.

CHAIR—How many are there in the total academy?

Mr Brierty—Across all of our sites, we have about 250 young boys at the moment. That will go to about 350 next year, perhaps even 400. Broome is going to be huge. We will probably have about 100 kids at Broome. Broome is an interesting one, because we are working across two schools: both a government school and a non-government school. It is fairly competitive for kids in these regions. We went to Kalgoorlie: one school is easy. When you go somewhere there are two or three schools, it is different. Albany has been interesting because North Albany and Albany Senior High School have a bit of a competitive—

CHAIR—I guess it has an impact on who has the better footy team at the time—the school team, particularly. I am trying to look at your outcomes. How many people do you ask to leave, for example? Five per cent, 10 per cent?

Mr Brierty—I beg your pardon?

CHAIR—How many of your intake would you ask to leave your academy? How many would you need to ask to leave who would not meet the contract—

Mrs VALE—You mean ‘expel’.

CHAIR—Expel.

Mr Brierty—Not many.

CHAIR—You would have a contract with each individual—

Mr Brierty—We do. The expectation is that you attend school, that you abide by the school rules and that you participate in all the activities. That is the expectation. It is very rare that we would ask anyone to leave. Generally we can get most of the kids onside. It is quite rare that we—

CHAIR—And preparation to build the expectation. You probably have people lining up to come in, I would think.

Mr Brierty—Not quite.

CHAIR—Are you recruiting?

Mr Brierty—Yes, we recruit. We have a full range of kids. Some of the kids are really good at footy; some are terrible. We have the duds as well, so we take all comers. We do not find that we need to ask many kids to leave, but it does happen from time to time. If you are enrolled in the school, you are welcome in the program. So, unless the school says you cannot come, we take the student.

CHAIR—Isn’t this a bit sexist? This is exclusively boys.

Mr Brierty—Yes.

CHAIR—What happens with the girls? What is there for them?

Mr Brierty—The mandate of our board is that we work with Indigenous young men. They are the most-at-risk group. About 40 per cent of our board are Indigenous people. The board believe that if we can deal with the issues of the young men it will go a long way to dealing with the issues of the women.

CHAIR—I understand the background of the issues of men and Indigenous women, so I hesitate. I think there are some huge issues for women. My last question is on AFL. What is your connection to the AFL in terms of support? There is an AFL program you should be aware of.

Mr Brierty—We get very limited support from the AFL. The AFL tips in a few dollars every now and then for us to take a camp to Melbourne or something like that, but we do not have any formal, strong relationship with the AFL.

Dr LAWRENCE—You mentioned the big increases in the number completing year 12 in Geraldton, which has been a long-standing problem area for kids in employment and education. Across the board, do you have any feeling for the rates of improvement generally in getting into employment, apprenticeships, traineeships and so on?

Mr Brierty—The statistics that we collect are more about retention rates at school. In Western Australia there are 255 Indigenous young men in year 12. Of those we have about 60 in the two schools where we have up to year 12. We have seen an enormous increase. When we first went to Clontarf there were about six boys in year 12; today there are 34. When we first went to Geraldton there were five; now there are 27. In Kalgoorlie traditionally they would have one boy getting to year 12 each year. This year we have 10 boys in year 11 and we are working hard to hold them, so a 1,000 per cent increase is potentially possible. We aim to get about an 80 per cent employment rate from students who complete our program. Obviously they do not all complete, and I do not have the actual retention rate, but certainly we try to ensure that, of the students who do get to the end of year 12, we get about 80 per cent into employment.

Dr LAWRENCE—There is a bit of a tendency amongst people developing policy in a whole range of areas now to talk about mainstreaming—the service is delivered as it is for everyone else and make sure that Aboriginal people get their share of it. What you are saying is quite the opposite: you have got to be in the mainstream school but we recognise that additional supports, encouragement, motivation and mentoring are required for a lot of these Aboriginal people. Is that core to your philosophy?

Mr Brierty—We believe that you need to provide a range of opportunities for the kids. There are certainly young Indigenous men out there who have highly functional families and they go into mainstream. We are not about going and pinching kids out of good programs.

Dr LAWRENCE—Who are already functioning well.

Mr Brierty—They are already functioning well. In Geraldton, for example, there are students who are doing TE and there are students who are doing vocational courses within the school. All of those kids are in the program, but there are some students who are in discrete classes that have very few choices—the students are in lock-step and they move along together. We believe that it is about creating the right environment for these young blokes. Fewer staff is better, with people who actually have an empathy and an understanding of the kids, and a program that is highly structured and keeps them together and working together—with few opportunities to escape, I suppose.

Dr LAWRENCE—To get lost?

Mr Brierty—I am at Goldfields Senior High School and the school is very close to the town. If I am a young Indigenous bloke and I walk out of science and I am going to maths and I know there is a teacher in maths that I—

Dr LAWRENCE—Do not like very much.

Mr Brierty—Yes, and left is maths and right is town—I am going right. Whereas with us, all of these young blokes are in the same program together.

Dr LAWRENCE—Someone is watching them.

Mr Brierty—Our staff are around them supporting them, saying, ‘You need to be there,’ and if they are not there, why aren’t they there and someone is following it up. It is what schools do as well, but I suppose we have the luxury of having those extra resources that schools do not have to help to monitor these kids.

CHAIR—It might be useful to provide us with the ratio and the 24/7 support?

Mr Brierty—We try to maintain a ratio of better than 25 to 1 students to adults. By 24/7 do you mean—

CHAIR—24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Mr Brierty—Yes, in some cases it is—for students who are in hostel accommodation. For a lot of our kids our guys are around them on the weekends, they go and watch them play footy. The kids who come here to Clontarf in Perth are at the hostel and didn’t have much to do on the weekends, so our staff actually run a footy team.

Mr SLIPPER—Apart from being AFL instead of rugby, I think it is an excellent program.

Mrs VALE—We have a lot of kids at risk in Western Sydney, who for several reasons feel very disenchanted with school and quite alienated there.

Mr Brierty—Our young blokes miss so much of their education. When we were first starting we were bringing the kids back into school and then they would put in the same program that drove them away. That is how I got all these kids. They were saying, ‘We have got to do this and we have got to do that,’ and it was all the same stuff. I said, ‘Don’t do the same; do something different.’ The hands-on activities of TAFE—

Mrs VALE—To get a handle on where you are coming from, the people that work for your organisation, the foundation, how many employees do you have? How many people are involved in mentoring?

Mr Brierty—We normally have three people per academy and sometimes we have four.

Mrs VALE—Are you an educator yourself?

Mr Brierty—I am a school principal. That is my background.

Mrs VALE—I thought you might have been. Are the other people in the program teachers too or trained educators?

Mr Brierty—When we set up a program we try to have someone who has got a strong handle on education to be the director of the program, because you are liaising—

Mrs VALE—And you have this in each of the different organisations?

Mr Brierty—Yes. You are liaising with a school and with TAFE and with business. There is a whole—

Mrs VALE—So you need to make a network.

Mr Brierty—We have a whole range of partners in the program and you need to be able to work across a whole range of sectors.

Mrs VALE—Are you Indigenous yourself, Craig?

Mr Brierty—No.

Mrs VALE—Excuse me for asking but I cannot tell these days.

Mr Brierty—It is not an offensive question. The philosophy of our program is that while we have about 30 or 40 per cent Indigenous staffing it is about having the best person we can find to do the job—

Mrs VALE—Absolutely. I agree with that.

Mr Brierty—at the location. We are driven by employing the best people.

Mrs VALE—How long have you been going as a foundation?

Mr Brierty—Six years.

Mrs VALE—I understand about the funding. I would like to understand how you slot into schools. They go to school and you have them before school?

Mr Brierty—Yes.

Mrs VALE—At lunchtime perhaps? They can call in and they can come off the campus? That is okay?

Mr Brierty—Yes.

Mrs VALE—You have got them there afterwards while they do their homework perhaps?

Mr Brierty—Yes.

Mrs VALE—How has the school changed the content of the lessons to have more relevance or resonance with the students?

Mr Brierty—Where it has been most effective is where we have been able to set up partnerships with TAFE and with the school. We have been able to encourage the school and TAFE to come up with programs that link into the footy. They will do TAFE units in sports and

recreation and that will involve coaching clinics and doing coaching accreditation and umpiring accreditation so there is that link into footy. That is a really strong one.

Mrs VALE—So they train to be an umpire?

Mr Brierty—All of our kids who leave year 12 will leave with graduation from high school, HSC, but not the TE which is their tertiary examination. They will leave with some sort of certificated course that takes them into TAFE. Some kids might not achieve any of that but they will be attached to the program. We work with the school and say, 'How can you blend in and work into the sorts of things that are available?' For example, they build pergolas and they have a big vegie patch and they are doing those sorts of hands-on activities. In the classroom where they are doing maths and English and that sort of thing, they are linking into those activities that the boys are doing outside. Our teachers need to work together, and we encourage that. So the kids are doing hands-on activities and they are covering that in their English and maths and then they are getting an outcome for TAFE as well as an outcome for high school. We are blending school and TAFE. That is a more complex thing to explain but that is what—

Mrs VALE—But you are thinking a little bit outside the square: you are doing something different from, as you said, the normal lock-step.

Mr Brierty—Yes. While the program is hands on, is of interest and uses the area around us, we still do not provide a lot of options for the kids. We say, 'We're all doing these things,' so they all do sport and rec. and they all do horticulture and they all do automotive—

Mrs VALE—But that is not the point. The point is you are giving them the basic education—reading, writing and arithmetic—and they are understanding numeracy and literacy.

CHAIR—Which is probably a fair point to ask about: where are they at with literacy and numeracy when you receive them?

Mr Brierty—There is a whole range—

Mrs VALE—So you do coaching?

Mr Brierty—Yes.

CHAIR—If I can deal with the first one first, what are the literacy and numerous ranges? Are they pretty average in places?

Mr Brierty—They have reading ages of six, seven or eight years. We have kids that come into Clontarf with a reading age of six, seven or eight.

CHAIR—The majority?

Mr Brierty—Depending on where you are, but lots of kids, because we are dealing—

CHAIR—The question then becomes of course: what is the outcome like in that particular area?

Mr Brierty—In the area of literacy?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Brierty—I do not have the statistics because the school is responsible—

CHAIR—But you would have an anecdotal picture. But that begs another question: do you have records? I cannot imagine DEST—the federal government—parting with a million dollars or so without climbing all over you looking for statistics.

Mr Brierty—They do. We report on the number of students who graduate—

CHAIR—But, to cut it short and to let Danna get back into the ring, that is available and we can get it from you?

Mr Brierty—That is what we put in to DEST, so yes.

CHAIR—So we can get that?

Mr Brierty—Yes.

CHAIR—We will get that. So you can have a look at what you have just said in terms of a very average beginning and then you end up with some sensible or reasonable outcomes in that literacy and numeracy area.

Mrs VALE—Because you coach then in it? Do you actually coach them in literacy and numeracy?

Mr Brierty—In literacy and numeracy?

Mrs VALE—Yes, yourself.

Mr Brierty—No. We do not present the educational program, but what we do is this. For example, towards the end of the year kids fall a bit behind. Our guys will set up homework classes and have them in after school.

Mrs VALE—That is what I mean—coaching and that kind of thing.

Mr Brierty—Yes, we do that sort of thing.

Mrs VALE—That is support; that is psychological support and emotional support too. Who started this? Is this your brainchild?

Mr Brierty—This is Gerard Neesham's. Gerard was an AFL footballer. In fact, I wish I had not forgotten because he should be the bloke who is sitting here. He would be able to give you more information than I would.

CHAIR—Where is Gerard based now?

Mr Brierty—Gerard is at Clontarf in Perth.

CHAIR—And he is still very much hands on?

Mr Brierty—Absolutely; it is his program.

Mrs VALE—He is a teacher by training too?

Mr Brierty—He was a teacher. He was an AFL coach. He has coached AFL. He has a long history of working with Indigenous footballers.

Mrs VALE—Is Gerard Indigenous?

Mr Brierty—No.

Mrs VALE—Excuse my ignorance.

Mr Brierty—No, that is fine. What happened was that Gerard was invited to go and do some teaching out at Clontarf after he finished in the AFL. While he was there he was coaching the school footy team and he saw that engaging kids in football had a big impact on their behaviour and conduct during the day and how they felt about themselves.

Mrs VALE—It is about self-esteem.

Mr Brierty—So he then went out and recruited some more kids and got a decent footy team together and, as luck would have it, three of our kids got drafted out of that first team, so all of a sudden the profile of the program went through the roof. Then a lot of interest was generated and, as a result of that, the program has grown from there.

Mrs VALE—You say this Clontarf place was the old Edmund Rice school. Was that the one that was actually built by the boys after the Second World War or around that time?

Mr Brierty—No, I do not think it was built by the boys after the Second World War. I think it was earlier than that.

Mrs VALE—Mr Brierty, is there anything else that you want to tell us? This program sounds absolutely phenomenal given what you are doing.

Mr Brierty—What I would like to say to you is that if you are going to be around next week I should get Gerard to come to speak to you because he can fill in any gaps. What happened was that I got a call from Kate and said, ‘Yes, I will come along,’ but I did not quite understand it, not because of Kate’s fault. Kate did a lovely job and followed me up beautifully—so I apologise, Kate. She gave me the web site and said to go and have a look at it. She said to bring other people and told me all of those things that were supposed to be done, so Kate has done a fantastic job. Sorry, Kate, I hope I did not sound as if I was dropping you in it.

Mrs VALE—I wish we could have come out to see what you were doing at Kalgoorlie while we were there.

CHAIR—Yes, and stayed for another week.

Mr Brierty—Gerard is really the person who should have been here. He is probably the best person for you to speak to. So if you are here next week—

Mrs VALE—No, we will not be. We are heading out today.

CHAIR—When does he get to Melbourne? That would be the interesting point, because I think we would like to follow this up with him if possible.

Mr Brierty—He will be in Melbourne in a couple of weeks.

CHAIR—We will not be there until early next year. I think we should tick-tack. I am going to give you my card and you might pass it on to him.

Mr Brierty—Yes, certainly.

CHAIR—I will talk to him on the phone anyway, and other members are welcome to do that as well.

Mrs VALE—Can all these young lads read and write by the time they graduate?

Mr Brierty—Yes, most of them can. From our position, if they get an educational outcome, that is fabulous. We work with them to get educational outcomes and we see that as being very important. But what we see as more important is that we develop these young guys into good young men that are confident, comfortable and happy—

Mrs VALE—Good young Aussies.

Mr Brierty—and that can participate fully in society. When I was in Kalgoorlie the other day I sat in a coffee shop for what would have been over an hour talking to David Tucker. In the hour that we were there a lot of people came through the shop, but not one Indigenous person.

Mrs VALE—Daniel Tucker?

Mr Brierty—No. David Tucker from Barrick Gold.

CHAIR—No. He is from Carey Mining.

Mr Brierty—Oh, yes.

CHAIR—Our paths have crossed a bit the last few days. I can remember when funding was being discussed, I think, in the party room. We will have a look at the stats. I will undertake to

talk to Gerard as well, but I also would not mind if he was in Melbourne in March for us to get an extra take on it.

Mr Brierty—My apologies for being so tardy with this.

CHAIR—That is all right. We are grateful that you could come in.

Mrs VALE—Craig, you were telling us about a conversation you had with David Tucker from Carey Mining in the coffee shop.

Mr Brierty—I was just saying that during the time we were there, although there are a lot of Indigenous people that live in Kalgoorlie, not one of them came into the coffee shop. We have a bloke who works for us called Kevin Mitchell. We asked him, 'What would show you that this program had been a really successful program?' He said, 'I would like it if when I go to Bunnings on a Saturday afternoon another Aboriginal person would walk in.' As we see it, while there are lots of Indigenous people who live in our communities, to many of us they are invisible. We do not see them at all.

Mrs VALE—Maybe you need a couple of Aboriginal faces in Bunnings serving behind the counter.

Mr Brierty—Yes. Wouldn't that help? Absolutely.

Mrs VALE—And you would need more than one. We were only just talking about this with another witness. It is a huge responsibility on anybody new coming into a different culture, even if it is a woman going into Rotary for the first time, which can be just as bad. When there is only one person it is a loneliness thing for them, and there are huge expectations placed upon them from the other side. So, if ever you get Bunnings to employ Indigenous people, make sure they employ at least two people at the one time.

Mr Brierty—We have a good link with Bunnings. In fact, one of our board members works for Bunnings.

CHAIR—I would also recommend that Gerard talk to Dick Estens, who got some good football stories out of Moree. It is a different code, but there are some pretty serious racial issues. I think it offers a whole lot of opportunities. Did you meet Dick the other day at the Aboriginal employment strategy—

Mr Brierty—No. I did hear Dick's presentation with Cathy Duncan, though. I thought the Aboriginal Employment Service scheme was a fabulous one. The employment issue is obviously something that we deal closely with. Our aim is to work more broadly with kids in education and then into employment. We have a different take on it but, certainly, assisting Aboriginal people get into employment is really important. If you go into any of our towns, such as Kalgoorlie, and walk down the street, you do not see any Indigenous kids working in the shops. If you go into Geraldton you do not see any of the Indigenous kids working in the shops. In Perth you do not see that. My daughter works at McDonalds part time. When was the last time you saw an Aboriginal kid working at McDonalds? It just does not happen.

For the development of a normal young person, you have home and school and then there is a third area that you come into contact with, which is the non-judgmental, non-authoritative group that you mix with. That could be in part-time employment. My daughter works at McDonald's. They tell her to go and clean and wash dishes and she just does it. Whatever they say, she does it, because they are the employer. If I ask her to do the dishes at home it is a different story. You might get it through sport. Your footy coach or your netball coach might be very instrumental in your life. So you have school, you have home and you have that. That is the triangle that forms the basis of how we develop as people. For many young Indigenous people home is not necessarily a really positive thing. School certainly is not a positive experience and they do not engage in sport. People say that all Aboriginal boys play sport. It is just not the case.

CHAIR—Now that we have another minute, let me take you to another area. The whole issue with Indigenous sexual violence is a serious matter. The Gordon report which came out of Western Australia highlighted some of these issues. Do you believe that we are seeing any improved behaviour or improved attitudes as outcomes? It is very hard to measure, I accept, but this is serious stuff in this country.

Mr Brierty—We would like to think that we are impacting broadly on the kids. Certainly, we are modelling the sorts of behaviours that we would like the kids to see. From time to time the wives and girlfriends of our staff will come in and the boys see how we interact with and show respect for those people. There are women around and the boys see us interact with women and how we show respect in interacting with those people. I think that by doing that you are modelling the sorts of things that you are talking about.

CHAIR—It occurs to me that that is a useful option.

Mrs VALE—Craig, do you detect any particular attitude from the boys towards Indigenous women? Do you detect anything either positive or negative or do you think that they are just like a sponge and are absorbing what role models you are giving them?

Mr Brierty—I work in the foundation, so I do not work as closely with the boys as some of the other people do. There are probably people better equipped than me to answer that. My gut feeling is that if you see people interacting in a certain way and that is what you grow up with then that is the model that you see and that is how you start to behave. We want to demonstrate different models or appropriate models or positive models for the way that adults interact—men and women together, men with men and women with women. That is what we attempt to do. Gerard has always pushed this message: 'Boys, you've come along a road and you came to a fork in the road when you joined Clontarf. You've got a choice. Down this track you can get a job, maybe get a girlfriend, maybe buy a house and then maybe have a family. That is a normal route that people might take. Down this other track you can have a baby, never get a job, live on welfare, not own your car and go to jail.' We are really pushing the idea that there is a normal pathway. We are encouraging the kids to be careful and not to end up having children at 16 or 17 years of age. I think we are having a fairly strong impact in that area.

CHAIR—It occurs to me that, for people like you and Gerard Neesham, within the football culture, there is an ability to talk directly. The football coach does have a direct way of saying something on a Saturday. There is a directness about the way you can have a conversation.

Mr Brierty—I think it comes back to what I was saying before about the three-tier approach, where you have home, school and a non-authoritative, non-judgmental place. We can talk to the kids about a whole range of things in a way that teachers would not be able to do. That is because we have this very special role. But it takes skilled, good people to do that. We get phone calls every day from people who say, 'I want to set up a footy academy. I want to coach footy. How do I get the money?' But the emphasis is wrong. The emphasis has to be on how we develop good young people, how we attach them to education, how we create environments and how we build relationships. We have a full program that looks at all of those things, not just at making a buck running a footy program.

Mrs VALE—I think you would agree that once a young man starts to feel good about himself and has self-esteem that sort of self-respect goes to respect for others. You cannot have respect for institutions or for others unless you have self-respect first.

Mr Brierty—Absolutely.

Mrs VALE—It comes from there first, doesn't it? Do the young people within your programs still have to undertake the traditional rituals within their communities or are their communities too fractured for that? You know how in some Aboriginal remote communities the boys still have to go through ritual. Does that happen here?

Mr Brierty—We have boys that go back into their communities and go through what they call law. We have some that do that.

Mrs VALE—Is that lore or law?

Mr Brierty—Law.

CHAIR—Traditional law.

Mr Brierty—If they are a Noongar person living in Perth, they are not involved in going through law. The reason is that—I think the reason is—

Mrs VALE—We had some Noongar people in today from the south-west.

CHAIR—From the south-west; more urbanised.

Mr Brierty—It does not appear that those people would have law, and law is not a part of what they do.

Mrs VALE—Because it is all lost to them.

Mr Brierty—I think it has been lost to them. If you live in the Kimberley in the more traditional communities, they still have law. Out in what we call the lands, which is way out past Kalgoorlie, Coonana and those places—

CHAIR—My country; Pitjantjatjara and Nyangatjatjara—that is where I come from.

Mr Brierty—Is that were you are from?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Brierty—Are you an Indigenous person?

CHAIR—No, but that is my country; that is my electorate.

Mr Brierty—If you lived out there, then there is still law going on in Coonana and those sorts of places. There are elements of it there.

Mrs VALE—Is there law in Kalgoorlie?

Mr Brierty—Not so much in Kalgoorlie, as far as I am aware.

Mrs VALE—In the Pilbara?

Mr Brierty—In the Pilbara, yes. If you lived out from Roebourne, probably the people around there and further out in the communities out of there, they would have law. We have a young bloke who went back home last year and went through law as a 17- 18-year-old. We still have young blokes who go back and go through law.

CHAIR—You do not have any Pitjantjatjara people—probably not.

Mr Brierty—No, not really.

CHAIR—You may have the odd Nyangatjatjara.

Mr Brierty—We have Yamatji kids, which is more in the Kalgoorlie area, but not out in that part.

Mrs VALE—Somebody the other day was talking about the Spinifex people—what people are they?

CHAIR—That is out a bit further. That is more towards, as I understand it, the West Australian border.

Mr Brierty—Yes.

CHAIR—It is more desert people, I would think, but I am not exactly clear. We could go on at great length but we need to draw it to a close.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Mrs VALE—Thank you for coming

Mr Brierty—I enjoyed it.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs Vale**):

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

Committee adjourned at 3.27 pm