



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND
YOUTH AFFAIRS**

(Reference: Educational achievement gap)

Members:

**MS A BRESNAN (The Chair)
MS J BURCH (The Deputy Chair)
MR J HANSON**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2009

**Secretary to the committee:
Dr S Lilburn (Ph: 6205 0199)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Committee Office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

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Amended 21 January 2009

The committee met at 1.32 pm.

CULLEN, MR GLENN CAMBELL, Chief Executive Officer, Menslink

THE CHAIR: Thank you for coming today to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs inquiry into the educational achievement gap in the ACT. There are just some housekeeping matters I will run through for you. There is the privilege statement, which should be on the desk. I just make sure that your attention has been drawn to that and you understand that. The transcript of the hearing will be sent to you to check for accuracy. Would you like to make an opening statement before we go to questions?

Mr Cullen: Yes. First of all, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to represent Menslink in the inquiry into the educational achievement gap. I would like to just outline a bit about Menslink. We are a not-for-profit community organisation that has been in existence for seven years in the ACT and that supports young men and boys. We run a range of mentoring programs and life coaching services—essentially a counselling service.

We have had a particular interest in boys' education for some time and ran significant programs not only in ACT schools but in New South Wales schools through our POSM program, which is project oriented school mentoring. That was funded under the federal government Attorney-General's community crime prevention program, seen as an early intervention targeting boys at risk of disconnecting from school at those early years in grades 3 and 4. That program has run over three years in the ACT and some south coast schools. So we are familiar with boys in education and what some of the challenges are for them in achieving their potential.

We have also got a number of other programs which we have implemented in schools and are working with the ACT education department on delivering next year. We are currently working with Belconnen high school on a program there engaging boys in year 10 who are clearly disengaged and others who are at risk of disengaging. So we are familiar with secondary and primary school and some of the challenges that are there for boys to achieve their potential.

I would also just like to make a comment on the broader context of outcomes for young men and boys, and men more broadly, and how important we see education that really is a launching pad for good outcomes in their lives and the risks that do escalate if that transition from education to employment does not happen. The POSM program was insightful in that way because it was trying to target young men who were not making that transition—and their risk of becoming juvenile offenders escalates significantly.

We really see it as a forum where we can make some impact and, hopefully, get in early and prevent some of those issues which can occur later on and that become much more visible in the community later on in their lives, whether that be through crime or violence—a whole range of negative outcomes for the community.

THE CHAIR: With the programs which you run, do you see any particular trends in terms of particular socioeconomic groups or even different backgrounds or is it

something which is generally across the board, across all different sorts of backgrounds and incomes in terms of the young men who you see coming through your programs?

Mr Cullen: More broadly, in terms of the school-based programs we run, I think it does not discriminate, particularly for our counselling service. We see young men and boys from every aspect of the spectrum. It does not prevent someone from having difficulties as to whether they are from a private school and a more affluent background or someone who is attending public schools and is of lower socioeconomic status. However, Menslink has been—we are clearly positioned in the community sector, which is there also to service families that are accessing other community services and agencies, and we get a lot of referrals from other community agencies that might be working with disadvantaged families. That would take up more of a proportion of the young men that we do see in our programs.

Within the school context, and looking at the POSM program, it has been run quite widely. Again I think it would be represented that there are more boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and also from single-parent families, as a high proportion. Part of what the program is about is providing positive male influences in schools. That flows from the *Boys: getting it right* report, a federal report on boys' education. Some of the recommendations there were for more positive male role models in school and more experiential learning opportunities. The POSM program was about setting up school veggie gardens, hen houses et cetera, which gave really practical ways for boys to experience success at school and get a sense of contributing to the school and also having that positive mentoring component to it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS BURCH: I have found the POSM program on your website and it looks like a wonderful program. You made mention of doing some work in Belconnen high school. Is that a similar type of program? Can you tell us a bit about that?

Mr Cullen: The program we have been running in Belconnen high school is exactly the POSM concept but it has been expanded slightly to cater for the secondary school context. We were running it there for two terms. It is the same concept. We had a project that the boys were working on in their school. We have got a difference in that we also brought in the parents, in particular the fathers, right at the beginning of the project to see what was going to happen and get some engagement from them. And later on in the project we also had the young men or the boys who were participating go on a camp for a weekend with the schoolteachers that we involved. The pastoral care coordinator and the fathers went away on a camp for a weekend, which was really successful in getting buy-in from the parents into the boys' education.

That concept relates back to some of the things that Ian Lillico, who is one of the best regarded people around boys' education, says. He says that boys need a space in the school which they can identify with as their own and projects like that where they are actually building—for example, seating which they are going to utilise themselves. It really gives them a sense of having some space in the school which they have some connection to and also seeing it from that point of view of leaving a legacy in the school. Often the legacy that they are leaving is not a positive one, so when they can

have an opportunity to engage in a project which is going to be ongoing as well in terms of the sustainability of those things that they construct, that really has an impact with them.

MS BURCH: You made mention around your programs being able to identify—you have seen the challenges for boys to achieve. Can you talk to us a bit about what you see as the top-end challenges for boys to achieve?

Mr Cullen: The thing that we see and have seen, particularly again referring back to POSM in schools, is that the thing that gets in the road of boys engaging in learning and makes it difficult to engage at school is the concept of themselves that they have. That can then play out in several ways—either withdrawing and being more socially isolated or going the other way and having to present themselves usually with antisocial behaviour even in those early years, which may be bullying or a whole range of other things.

It is very much dependent on how they see themselves, and that, obviously, is dependent on what is happening at home and that broader context about the image they have of themselves. It becomes very clear, when you work in a small group of boys and you have got almost a ratio of two to one there, how this then plays out.

If I can give you an example, one day I was observing a group where there were two boys who were doing well—because we had boys enrolled in the POSM program as well as boys at risk—and a mentor. They were going to cut a piece of timber in half. They were all there standing and looking over it, and as soon as the tape measure came out to do some measurement one of the boys just stepped backwards and sat down on the seat. He was one of the boys who was at risk or was in the program because he had some learning difficulties. It was a very clear example of a situation where, as soon as there was an opportunity for him to fail by getting the maths wrong, he disengaged from that activity. He did not make any fuss about it; he just stepped back and disengaged. People would not usually notice. And the other boy, who is quite confident in class, is still engaged and has a measuring tape in hand.

It is a very subtle thing. That is something that is common with boys. They become risk averse; they avoid any situation where there is the possibility that they will fail. Therefore they do not even put themselves in that situation.

MR HANSON: Anecdotally, girls seem to be doing better academically than boys at the moment. At university level, other than in engineering, girls now exceed boys in every category. For example, medicine has females at 60 per cent compared to 40 per cent for males. Do you have a view on why that is?

Mr Cullen: I do not have any direct research that I could draw on. However, I am aware that, if you look at education over the last 30 years and go back to that stage, boys were achieving higher than girls were. My understanding is that there were some adjustments made to how the curriculum was actually delivered. That is what some people tell me has had an impact. What that means in practical terms is that there are fewer experiential learning opportunities and therefore it may be more suited to how girls learn. I certainly do not claim to be any expert in pedagogy, but in terms of the classroom environment, they are some of the issues that I have come to understand

might be having an impact. That is not taking into consideration the broader social aspect of being in a school. I think that is more our area of interest and expertise.

MR HANSON: Just to follow up on that, have you noticed a difference in the way boys achieve in a single-sex environment, whether it be a single sex in a classroom in a co-ed school and in single schools as well—as opposed to boys who are mixed in with girls? Is there a difference there? Do they react and respond differently?

Mr Cullen: I have read some research that claimed advantages for both situations. Certainly here in the ACT it is limited in terms of how we can compare that, because the single-sex schools are the private schools, essentially, so that brings in a whole new dimension as well in terms of socioeconomic status that would be difficult to compare.

MR HANSON: So you are comparing apples with oranges?

Mr Cullen: What is happening, particularly in some subjects, is that there seems to have been a difference even in co-ed schools when they have delivered some aspects of a curriculum in a single-sex format—there seemed to be an improvement.

MR DOSZPOT: A couple of moments ago, you mentioned the concept of themselves for some of these kids. Do you believe that the ones who are referred to you are getting adequate attention through the education institutions that they go to or could there be more specialised assistance given to them?

Mr Cullen: We receive referrals from schools, often from youth support workers, who are in schools now and sometimes from school counsellors. Some of the reasons why they choose to refer young men or boys to us may be that they see there are some issues there around gender and that the young guy is not responding to a female counsellor. Often that is the case in schools—female counsellors. But also we do some outreach with our life coaching service, which is essentially a counselling service, to one secondary school.

I have surveyed youth support workers in schools and I have got a very positive response from the concept of having an external agency being able to deliver those therapeutic supports in schools and being clearly branded as Menslink—given that there is some stigma around the school counsellor role, there is a perception by the students that confidentiality may not be 100 per cent. That is the perception; I am not saying that confidentiality is an issue with the school counsellor, but that that is a perception of students.

All those things can get in the road of kids accessing those supports. In a school environment, as I said, there is quite a lot of stigma around accessing those therapeutic supports. And there is a huge demand on school counsellors even to the number that do want to access the services. There is a great opportunity for those services to be delivered differently into the education system. That might facilitate better take-up, particularly from boys and young men.

MR DOSZPOT: This is a twofold question. Is there enough resource available to handle the amount of work that some of these counsellors need to handle, and are

there enough people with adequate skills to address some of these issues? That is the first part. And the second part of the question is this: we hear, say, taking bullying as an example, that students get suspended. Is anything done in that suspension period that would assist the instigator in some of these activities to address their actions? Is that something that you would play a part in?

Mr Cullen: Going to the first part of the question, anyone that I speak to, even from schools, acknowledges that having school counsellors in a school for one day a week or two days a week is inadequate. It is a very limited time frame when someone might be in a window for actually accessing a service, and if that time is passed then that person is not there and obviously you cannot step into that room and speak to them. That is my understanding from speaking to people in a range of different secondary schools and primary schools.

Going to the second part of the question, the research that I have read on suspensions from school—and this is coming particularly from a crime prevention perspective—is that people do not believe that it is the most effective way to go. To assume that punitive approach and have them put outside the school actually escalates the chance of them becoming less engaged and of the negative behaviour continuing. That in itself is an approach to dealing with the issue which is not effective.

The other aspect of the question is whether more can be done to work with kids who are bullying, in this case boys. We ourselves as an organisation have the capability to run a program on bullying. It is called the ABC of bullying and it is really working with a whole class and the whole school. We have discussed this program with the minister and we have also discussed it with the education department. They are quite interested in that program and being able to deliver it. However, there are some barriers around being able to deliver it more broadly when it comes to the cost of being able to deliver that. And I guess their interest is around trying to develop the capacity of schools and strengthen the capabilities of teachers in schools to be able to possibly do parts of that themselves.

That is fine in principle if we are trying to build the capacity of our education system, but the other side of it is that there are some real strengths in someone coming in from outside and delivering programs like that. One of the greatest learnings I have had from being in schools is that the load that is already on teachers is enormous. To expect teachers to continually be taking on more is really risky. Just in the schools that we have worked with, we have seen several principals who have had to take terms off because they have basically had breakdowns because of the load of work they have. I think this goes throughout the whole education system.

You only have to spend an hour in a school to see that if you are going to give a message to someone in a school and it is going to take you more than five minutes to deliver it or if you have an email that is more than a paragraph long—you really have to be very concise in your communication with the school if you are going to expect them to be able to have the time to deal with it.

MS BURCH: You made mention earlier around providing services and models. Can you just talk around what sort of service model you see about somebody external coming in and the benefits of that and what that might look like?

Mr Cullen: I was particularly mentioning the life coaching service, which essentially is a counselling service. We call it life coaching because we find that it helps facilitate engagement from young guys—just the language, because of that stigma that is there. Why we see that as being a good model for taking into schools is, as I said before, that there is less stigma around seeing the guy from Menslink, for example, as opposed to seeing a school counsellor. It is really all about that perception from the students' point of view and also, as I mentioned, about the perception of confidentiality, whether that is reality or not. From the students' point of view, that is a huge consideration—seeing someone coming in from outside as being more of a confidential way to go about it.

THE CHAIR: I have a question around engagement. You talked about the type of learning model, the change to the way learning was delivered, which did benefit girls more than it did boys. Do you think it is more a question of the type of engagement you employ in a school? You gave the example of having less stigma attached to going to one particular program than going to another. Do you think that is actually about providing a wider view of what that engagement is in terms of the school environment?

Mr Cullen: Definitely. Looking at some of our initiatives and the COAG arrangements, the education department has four schools which are going to come under that socioeconomic grouping. Then there are those aspects to that initiative. One of those is partnerships with community and families. It has been very evident through our delivery of POSM into those schools, both secondary school and primary school, that it gives the opportunity for families to engage in the school who may not themselves have had a positive experience of being in the education system or in school. It gives them a very practical way to come and engage with the school—through, say, the vegetable garden, which was always the centrepiece of that program. It gives parents something they may already be familiar with in terms of that very practical thing of growing vegetables as a way for them to engage with the school. That helps to facilitate that relationship between the parents and the school, which, as we know, is also very positive for children's educational outcomes.

In looking at secondary schools and those more practical trade skill areas, it seems that in some schools they are non-existent or there is a very limited capacity to be able to run any programs like that which are more tactile and lead to those vocational pathways in the trades. Our programs are always pitched in that context—that they are practical ways to engage.

MR HANSON: I am just trying to get the scale of how much we are doing out there in the ACT in terms of the ACT government and also the non-government school sectors in terms of funding or services that you are providing. How much funding do you get from the ACT government, for example, and what other contracts have you got set up?

Mr Cullen: Currently, for Menslink as an organisation, we are funded by the ACT government to run our mentoring program. I have not mentioned that to this point. It is a one-to-one mentoring program for young men 14 to 21. That has no relationship to schools whatsoever. And our life coaching service—there is a very small part

where we spend about three hours a week in one high school. That is just an arrangement between the school and Menslink which has been pre-existing for several years.

Outside of that, as I mentioned before, we have had some discussions about delivering the Drumbeat program, which is a therapeutic drumming program, into secondary schools next year for the department. They have agreed to part fund that, and schools will have to part fund that.

MS BURCH: As in drumming drumming?

Mr Cullen: Yes. It is a program that has been designed by the Holyoake foundation, initially for working around drug and alcohol issues but it has been delivered into prisons, secondary schools—a lot with Indigenous youth. It is being rolled out nationally. We have been trained in that program. That has a very good evidence base so therefore the department are quite happy to have a good look at that and are quite keen on its—

MR HANSON: Is it like bongo drums or something?

Mr Cullen: Yes, that is right. They are just very simple ways of engaging. That has six structured weeks of themes for relationships and resilience. That has been very effective and, as I say, there is good evaluation for that. It is not speculative; it is quite evidence based in its approach. It provides a way for young people to engage in the group without having to verbalise exactly what is going on. They can engage in other ways.

Outside of that, there is the work we have done with Belconnen high school with some funding they had gained through, I think, a “schools as communities” grant or something like that. So schools are grabbing little bits and pieces here and there. But I think we are in a position to be able to provide a lot more services to a lot more schools given that there are the resources there.

MR HANSON: So you have got the capacity to do it. If the ACT government said, “We like what you are doing in Belconnen; do that elsewhere,” you would be able to step up to the mark and do that.

Mr Cullen: Yes. As I said, the POSM program essentially doubled the size of the organisation. That came to an end 12 months ago officially through the federal government funding. We had some private money through the St George Foundation which kept it going for six months in some west Belconnen schools. We put in a bid to the ACT government in the budget round; unfortunately there was no allocation there for that. That would probably cost about \$300,000 a year to run in 12 schools. We were disappointed that we were not able to make a nice transition into being able to continue to roll it out further in the ACT, but I understand the difficulties and restraints in this economic time.

THE CHAIR: We are almost out of time; we have about two minutes for one very quick question.

MR DOSZPOT: Can you give us an indication of how many students would be referred to you in an average month from various schools?

Mr Cullen: That is difficult because, with the counselling service, the life coaching service, they may come from referral directly from a school but they may come indirectly. The parent might speak to someone in the school and they might say, "Give Menslink a call." I would really be guessing if I was to answer by giving any sort of loose figure on how many. Certainly we get an increasing amount of referrals from government agencies such as the education department, youth justice, restorative justice, which we are working with quite a bit now, and Care and Protection.

MS BURCH: You may not have the evidence, but with the suite of programs that seem to be fantastic, do you see the benefit? Do you see the gap decrease? Do you see kids improving academically?

Mr Cullen: I can certainly forward you an electronic version, but I did bring a copy of the external evaluator's final report for the POSM program, which was done through the University of Canberra. That is what I would call a warts-and-all report. It talks about the perceived deficiencies from a school's perspective. It has got comments from parents, from teachers, from our mentors. And certainly in some schools, in particular Charnwood-Dunlop, they are really increasing the engagement there from boys in grade 3 and 4, which is outstanding. They are great advocates of the program. With other schools I think it fluctuated depending on the environment in the school and the philosophy in the school, from the principal down. And the other thing to keep in mind is that this is very early intervention, literally sowing seeds that hopefully will come to fruition further down the track in a lot of cases.

MS BURCH: A copy of the report would be wonderful, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps we can get a copy. Thank you for taking the time to speak to the committee. As I said earlier, the transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you to check for accuracy.

GILMOUR, MS PENNY, Branch Secretary, Australian Education Union—ACT Branch

RASMUS, MR PHILIP, President, Australian Education Union—ACT Branch

SMITH, MS CATHERINE, Assistant to the Secretary—Professional, Australian Education Union—ACT Branch

THE CHAIR: Thank you for coming to speak to the committee today on our inquiry into the achievement gap. I draw your attention to the privilege statement which will be in front of you. You are aware of that. Ms Gilmour, did you want to make an opening statement before questions?

Ms Gilmour: Thank you, Ms Bresnan, for the opportunity to appear before the committee today. We chose not to make a written submission on this occasion, preferring instead to come along and make some comments. I am going to cover some general issues but Cathy and Phil, in particular, will be dealing with ESL generally and also a subset of ESL students who might be characterised as students on humanitarian refugee visas.

In general terms, I think there is an acknowledgment—“acceptance” is the wrong word—that the ACT public education system is high quality but low equity. It is worth noting, though, that the gap at the lower end is apparent. It is not a long tail—it is actually no bigger and no worse than other jurisdictions at the moment—but that is no cause for resting on your laurels and not attempting to address it.

Our top students remain the same. They are not achieving significantly better results, while their counterparts in other OECD countries are improving. That indicates that we have work to do, both in stretching our top students as well as addressing the needs that cause students to fall away at the bottom end. In that regard, the AEU is a strong advocate for additional targeted resources to ensure equity of outcomes. We do not believe that it is a sensible strategy to just throw money generally at the problem. You need to understand which bits of the problem you are going to target and how you are going to use the funds to target them effectively.

There is an obvious gap in the ACT in Indigenous students’ achievements. That clearly needs to be addressed through the targeting of resources. Obviously the COAG low SES literacy and numeracy national partnership may assist in addressing that issue, but it is a bit too early to say definitively that those measures will make a difference, given that the partnership is only just coming into being at the moment.

Our NAPLAN results have shown some improvement, but there is insufficient longitudinal data at this stage to make long-term conclusive remarks, even taking into account that we have got ACTAP—the transition from ACTAP to NAPLAN—and the extension across more years of schooling. That will provide better data in future years for us to track more effectively exactly what is going on.

Our gifted and talented students’ outcomes are consistently high, but that is not a reason to rest on our laurels. The system needs to ensure that there are challenging programs in all the schools for all levels of achievement and that the programs extend the most capable students. Similarly, there is a need to lift the performance of lower achieving students. The system needs to ensure that there are equally challenging

programs to develop and support those students and that those programs also have expectations for the students to rise to, rather than making assumptions about where their level of achievement might sit. It is always a good thing to aim above where the students think they might be and encourage them to surprise themselves with what they can actually achieve.

In terms of Indigenous students, I think the government's data about the school leaving age indicated that there is more likely to be a significant drop-out rate in later years of high school among Indigenous boys, although of course they are not the only group of Indigenous students who are at risk. A number of schools are implementing excellent Indigenous education programs and integrating Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum. It seems to be pockets of schools, however, rather than across the whole of the system. Most principals, though, have signed up to Dare to Lead, which is a program that promotes Indigenous education and reconciliation in schools. That is a really positive thing. One could conclude from that that they have set their feet upon the path. They now need to give action to the philosophy that they have signed up to around promoting and supporting their Indigenous students.

Currently there are eight Indigenous literacy and numeracy officers working with schools for a period of one to two terms to build teacher capacity to support students. They are permanent officers, but they move around the system, providing that kind of support. They are, if you like, a bit of an exemplar, a shot in the arm, for teachers to keep going with the program after that specific support has moved on. About two-thirds of the new aspirations coordinators have just commenced work with the department. From our perspective, it will be interesting to see how these positions support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve their goals and to ensure a successful pathway, particularly towards tertiary study.

The AEU has called nationally for all pre-service education courses to contain mandatory studies in Indigenous education. The AEU's national new educator surveys have consistently shown that not all pre-service teachers study Indigenous education and they do not feel adequately prepared to teach Indigenous students. That is clearly a gap that will have an influence on what happens in the classroom.

DET provides minimal cross-cultural awareness training. That is not delivered regularly or consistently to the majority of teachers and support staff, acknowledging that the ACT Indigenous community is quite small in number and scattered throughout our schools. I think that is still an issue that needs to be borne in mind—that the needs and aspirations of that community can be quite different and we have to make a special effort to address them. The Dare to Lead coalition, I guess, is one way in which our principals are trying to meet that need.

One of the things that Cathy will take up is budgeting initiatives that the AEU has been pushing for some time, most recently in this year's budget submission, around ESL and other targeted programs. In our view, the key to addressing achievement gaps in our system is through early intervention, at whatever level it is needed, with whatever group of students. The earlier we can identify their problems and deal with them successfully, the better likelihood we have of ensuring that they remain engaged with education and that those who are in danger of slipping through the cracks are identified and supported to prevent that happening.

There are early entry programs and playgroups, including parents as well as Koori preschools, and those are all positive, creating good liaison with families. All of that encourages enrolments and attendance and that is a valuable thing. There are a range of literacy and numeracy officers working with schools to support teachers. These are good initiatives.

In terms of dealing with students who are disengaging or are already disengaged from schooling, we acknowledge that there are a range of programs introduced to support those students—for example, the achievement centres, the connect 10 programs, Access 10 and YARDS. The latter two are run through CIT. The AEU has submitted a proposal to establish an alternative vocational pathways program at the Weston CIT campus when it is vacated. That will be targeted to students at risk of disengaging from school or from whom a traditional school setting is not successful.

One program that I particularly wanted to draw to the committee's attention in respect of assisting students who are at risk of disengaging is the CC Cares program at Weston, which is run by Canberra College, for young parents. Currently it has an enrolment of about 80 students this year and well over 80 kids. Having gone to a ceremony at that facility in the last week of term when they were presented with a cheque that they won through a partnership program, I could certainly attest to the hard work that has gone on there and how successful that program has been.

One of the things that have been highlighted as a result of the success of that program is the need to look at how such an initiative could be translated to provide another option on the north side. Canberra students do not have a good history of travelling from one side of the lake to the other. Certainly the CC Cares program is well embedded in Weston. It brings with it, I guess, not only very positive things in terms of a network for young parents to support each other but also an opportunity for interagency involvement, where child and maternal health nurses attend and provide advice and support to those young people as well.

About 20 students are expected to graduate again this year—there were about 20 last year—and it has been demonstrated that, for such a program to have success, it needs to have the capacity to operate flexibly. For the most part, the young people who engage in that program complete the year 12 credential over three years rather than two, which is in recognition that, apart from adjusting to the demands of being a parent, most of them have other life circumstances that are very challenging to their continuing engagement with education.

Just by way of an example, the young woman who spoke to the gathering recently had left school in year 9 and had had three unsuccessful work placements before deciding that perhaps trying to go back to school was the thing to do, but by that time she was pregnant and going back to school did not really seem like such an option. But CC Cares is well enough regarded and known about across the agencies now that she was actually referred there by Canberra Hospital. She is now three weeks away from delivery date and she is successfully engaging in her studies again. It is interesting that there are a few young dads who engage in the program as well, although it is primarily the mums.

In terms of a gap, it can be as small as a week that the young women take off. They do not like to be away from their network. They find it a very useful source of support for them, not just in terms of their parenting but in encouraging them to pursue their educational goals. That is worth taking on board. It is an example of something our community already does and does well, but we could look to grow that.

In our budget submissions for the last several years we have suggested that the ACT government look to establish residential or day mental healthcare facilities with access to education and/or training for secondary or primary students. The reason for that is that there is still a great need in the territory for some kind of provision for primary aged students. There are some limited programs for secondary students, but there is still nothing for the primary aged kids who have explicit and difficult healthcare needs.

In our view, models for the kind of facility that we think would be useful to look at can be found at Rivendell, which is part of Westmead Hospital in Sydney, and also at the Austin Hospital in Melbourne. In our view, whatever we do here, it must be a site that is capable of supporting students with a range of mental health issues, including those who exhibit violent behaviours as a result of whatever is going on with them.

Students with a disability, we think, are a bit of an unknown quantity to some extent because they may be underachieving, but since many of them—in fact, probably most of them—are exempt from NAPLAN, or their parents exempt them, there is little data on exactly how well they perform across the whole range of measures. I for the first time this year discovered that if you do not sit the NAPLAN test, you are automatically put in as not achieving at the required standard, so you are below average.

Some students who have disabilities may be achieving very well for their capacity but, measured against a normal spectrum, they would have little chance of success if that is the only measure that is used. Some of those students would be in mainstream as well. Our teacher members tell us that they may not necessarily have the training or experience to support those students as effectively as they like. That is something that we have been pushing for in terms of resources and PD, consultancy support and a review of the SCAN process to establish a more sophisticated way of funding provision that supports the curriculum needs of students. We are certainly aware that the special ed review should have some opportunity to make comments on SCAN.

I have just a couple more things to say. There are two things that we think are key in considering how to address the achievement gap. One is the quality teaching model. If the capacity of teachers is acknowledged as making a difference then clearly measures that will support development and increase teacher quality should be supported. Again, in our budget submission we have proposed an urgent decision around the continuation of support for 10 quality teaching coordinators across the system. There are three in central office, but until the end of this year there are 10 scattered across the system in various clusters or schools of interest. For example, the special education schools have one between them and so on.

Quality teaching is a new framework within which teachers can look at their practice. It needs to be supported. As with all new programs, I think there are transition issues. The things that we think would assist in developing and supporting it—and ultimately

supporting students because they should deliver better teaching pedagogy—include the provision of PD for schools and the provision of support to release teachers to conduct the kinds of professional conversations that need to be had as part of a quality teaching framework within the cross-schools and clusters. It does not have to be a huge resource intensive issue, but there needs to be some formal recognition that, if you are going to undertake this kind of model, you need to build into it the expectation that teachers will work in that way.

Similarly, the continuation of resources to support teachers to undertake the graduate certificate that is currently being completed by a number of teachers in the system is key because it will continue to grow the mass of teachers who have an understanding of the principles and the application of quality teaching across our system. That, of course, will be important in maintaining the capacity of our teachers.

We have made comment in previous inquiries about the shortage of casual relief teachers. That is a problem that works to make the subject of this inquiry more difficult, in our view, because schools are under a lot of pressure when they cannot find appropriately qualified relief staff to take up positions for people who may be ill or on leave.

Finally, the capacity to free teachers and principals from administrative burdens to concentrate on teaching and related tasks we think is also an important measure in dealing with addressing the achievement gap. Principals and teachers have repeatedly expressed concern in recent times about the ever increasing range of administrative and compliance tasks that they are required to address and they feel that there is a sense of being bogged down in administration. In our view, this needs examination and the provision of appropriate resources, not necessarily teachers, to allow teachers to concentrate on teaching and principals to concentrate on their role as educational leaders. We believe that this kind of strategy will have a positive impact on the capacity of teachers to further develop their skills and make a real difference to outcomes for students.

That is what I wanted to cover. I know Cathy has some particular comments about ESL and Phil about international students.

THE CHAIR: Did you want to make those comments?

Ms Smith: Sure, unless you wanted to ask questions.

THE CHAIR: Given that Ms Gilmour has talked about ESL and refugees as being a particular group identified, I would be interested in hearing about that.

Ms Smith: There are two ESL executive officers that work with the central office in the department of education. They are highly valued and they provide excellent expert support to teachers around how to support ESL students in mainstream schools. It has been noted in the ACT government submission that ESL students are overrepresented in the NAPLAN results as being in the lower 20 per cent. PISA, the international testing regime that happens about every three years, shows that students from language backgrounds other than English—so that is 15-year-old students—do well and suggest that culture, attitude to education and parental expectations assist in

students achieving positive results.

However, students that do NAPLAN are not disaggregated to the level of ESL students. Language background other than English is not necessarily the same as an ESL student, whereas a student who might be speaking English as their main language and having a very good grasp of English—and they probably use it mostly at home—is not the same as a student who is learning English as a second language. NAPLAN is not refined enough to be able to disaggregate students to that level.

In the ACT, in the department of education schools, 52 per cent of ESL students are performing below average in English proficiency. That is an average English-speaking competence. They are missing out on targeted support. The majority of ESL students who are not achieving to that level are not getting targeted funding through ESL programs et cetera.

There is a complicated range of funding methods for supporting ESL programs. We expand on that in our latest journal. I would like to refer you to that article which starts on page 8. I will not go into great detail because it is a very complicated set of funding methods that enable funding for ESL staff, ESL programs and the intensive English centres that operate across the system, both primary and secondary. I would encourage you to get more information through that article that we have provided.

Basically, students who are considered as ESL students only generate funding if they have a language proficiency rating of 1.75 or below, remembering that LPR4—language proficiency rating 4—is the average English-speaking level. There are a great many students who are not gaining targeted support.

The other issue is around ESL teachers. The majority of them have not had specific ESL training. We would certainly advocate for the department and the government to support training for those teachers and to upgrade their training to be able to specifically teach students who are from an ESL background.

As Penny has said, early intervention is absolutely vital. Several years ago the department had five schools office positions allocated to supporting mainstream teachers in being able to teach all students, but particularly students who are ESL. That resource is no longer available to teachers. As I said, there are two schools office staff who provide that from kindergarten to year 12 level. There are two ESL support teachers for the whole of the preschool sector. The teachers support teachers as well as students. Anecdotally, each teacher has talked about supporting 250 students and their teachers each over a year. That is two ESL support teachers, remembering that they have to travel to dozens of sites to support those people. Early intervention is absolutely key in supporting both students and their families who may be very new to Australia as well. I will hand over to Phil.

MS BURCH: If I can just ask: are they across the age range, ESL students, or are they skewed to primary school or secondary school? Are they across the school community?

Ms Smith: They are. From kindergarten to year 12 there has been an increase in ESL students in about the last 10 years, a 35 per cent increase in the number of ESL

students in public schools, and they represent about 11 per cent of the public school population now—so a growing cohort of students in public schools.

THE CHAIR: That 35 per cent increase has happened?

Ms Smith: Over about the last 10 years.

MS BURCH: You have spoken about ESL teachers and the capacity within that workforce. Is that need equal against that community or is there a more pointy investment perhaps in the more senior years of ESL?

Ms Smith: I think it is across the board that there is a need to support teachers in training, professional development and, as I said, upgrading those ESL teachers who are not actually trained in ESL. Phil might like to expand on the issue around humanitarian visa holders at some point.

Mr Rasmus: To amplify what Cathy said, a very large number of kids arrive in years 11 and 12, particularly from the Asian countries, as a preparation for getting into Australian universities; that is mainly the point of it. So, even though there are ESL kids coming through the whole system, there is another big lump that arrives at years 11 and 12 that we have not dealt with before and that have particular issues. The secondary introductory English centres partially can deal with those kids, but the number of kids we are talking about cannot be catered for in the facilities that we have got.

MS BURCH: And that is increasing?

Mr Rasmus: It is, and interestingly enough the profile of those kids has changed over the years too. It used to be that they were very high-flying academic kids with a reasonable grasp of English. These days they are not so much; they tend to be the people who can afford to pay that come out here, who are not necessarily competent in English at all. But that is a problem seen in universities as well.

MR HANSON: They are coming out here and using the public education system?

Mr Rasmus: I do not know that “using” is the word I would use. They are—

MR HANSON: When I say “using”, I do not mean it in a negative sense. Are they coming out here with their parents?

Mr Rasmus: Some of them do, but most of them are international full fee-paying students who would spend years 11 and 12 here in Australia.

Ms Smith: Over the last few years we have seen an influx of Sudanese refugees, and the most recent influx are students from Burma, the Karen cohort of students who have come in the last few years. As I guess humanitarian situations are happening throughout the world, we are seeing the influx of different groups of students arriving, and that creates unique needs that the public education system needs to meet, particularly around the issues of trauma. A lot of these students have not been to formal schooling ever. They have very complex needs that need a multidisciplinary

approach really. It is not just a school issue. These students need support from the whole community and all of the services need to work together effectively to be able to support them and their families.

Ms Gilmour: Noting, of course, that they may not be literate in their first language and then they come here and are faced with the double whammy, I suppose, of trying to deal with English on top of that.

MR HANSON: The three categories of ESL students that I can see here are the people who are migrants or whatever it might be, the refugees and diplomatic corps people, and then people who are coming here as fee-paying students. Do we get a funding line for any of these? Are we hosts for the diplomatic corps? Does the ACT government get recompense from the federal government because of that additional burden?

Ms Smith: I am not able to comment specifically on the direct funding particularly for that group. They would be considered as ESL students and—

MR HANSON: I was just wondering, because we host them. It might not be a question for you but it is just that it has come up. It might be more a question for the government because it would seem that if we have a disproportionate amount perhaps we could ask the federal government for money.

Mr Rasmus: Not many of the diplomatic kids are actually of non-English-speaking background. The majority of them speak English, because of the nature of the families that they come from. They are not a real problem. The kids that we do get funding for, because they pay out of their own pockets, are the international full fee-paying students. They pay an awful lot of money.

MR HANSON: Do they pay the ACT government? Where are they going to—CIT or to other schools—

Ms Smith: And to colleges.

Mr Rasmus: At the school level we certainly get a lot of that money. I do not know what the actual conduit for the money is.

MR HANSON: I will have to follow it up with the government, maybe. And the refugees: if the ACT takes a proportion of Sudanese refugees, is there a support mechanism there?

Mr Rasmus: Not that I am aware of specifically.

Ms Smith: A portion of commonwealth funding goes towards humanitarian visa holders. Our understanding is that that money has been rolled into a specific purpose base now; it used to be a separate fund that the commonwealth provided but now it has been rolled into a specific purpose base so that the ACT government has that band of money and makes decisions about how it is spent. We would like to know that that money is being targeted specifically for those students.

MR HANSON: Indeed. What I am thinking is that there might be funding streams and it just sounds as though there is not a lot coming out to provide the support for ESL students.

Ms Gilmour: In relation to the international students, I do not know whether the money goes elsewhere but certainly money appears to go directly to the schools where those students are enrolled. Whether it is all of the cost or only a portion of it, I am not sure. As Cathy indicates, we are not sure what the disposition for the diplomatic community is, and federal government funding takes care of the students on refugee visas.

One of the issues, of course, is that in the diplomatic corps there are certainly many students for whom English is not their first language, but their level of proficiency is such that they are at least level 4, and probably better. The concern that we have is really with the people who fall through the gap. The funding cuts out at proficiency level 1.75 and there is a big gap between 1.75 and 4. To be able to succeed and achieve well in the normal public school environment is a big ask if you are coming off a base like that and there is no funding to provide you with additional support. That puts a lot of pressure on not just those students but their teachers and the system.

THE CHAIR: We heard this morning from Glenn Cullen of Menslink and we are also aware of other programs that Gugan Gulwan runs. Eleven per cent is a fairly large percentage of the school population and it does seem that perhaps there needs to be more of those targeted programs that deal with not just the learning difficulties but the other circumstances that are affecting the learning experiences of students. Do you think that is needed?

Ms Smith: Absolutely. We need reassurance that the funding from both the commonwealth and ACT governments, and from international fee-paying students, is going towards supporting programs for them. I guess the issue with school-based management is the level of discretion for principals in schools to manage the funds as they see fit. We support that model. However, we do need to have reassurance that the commonwealth government's, the ACT government's and other funds are going towards supporting the range of students and the intent of that funding. We would certainly advocate additional funding in particular for those students who are not being provided with specific ESL programs, who are missing out at the moment.

MR DOSZPOT: You mentioned that there are two ESL officers at central office. How many ESL teachers are there? We are talking about funding and it comes through loud and clear that you do need more funding. Currently, funding does come in. Are there resources to spend that money on?

Ms Smith: Certainly there is a need for more staffing and there is a cap on the number of ESL staff that can be provided. Again, schools have the prerogative to choose to spend additional school-based funds on more ESL teachers. It is generally based on the proportion of students per school, so you might have half an ESL teacher, working half the week on ESL programs, in a small primary school. It might increase to more than one teacher per school. They are there, obviously, to support programs for ESL students in particular but also to administer the census that happens each year, to assess the needs of those students and provide programs for them.

MR DOSZPOT: What I am getting at is that I think we understand that there is an issue in getting the resources to deliver the services, like ESL teachers. Are we paying enough attention to actually training these ESL teachers at the moment? Is there funding to bring more ESL teachers into the system?

Ms Gilmour: One way that that matter could be addressed is through the teachers professional learning fund. Under the teachers enterprise agreement—and this has been the case for the last three agreements—there is a sum of money set aside for teacher professional learning, and some of that is earmarked for scholarships to targeted areas. We have not been successful in having the amount of base funding increased in that and I think that one thing that would be worthy of consideration would be not necessarily to increase the pool of money available in the teacher professional learning fund but to allocate a sum of money particularly for scholarships for existing teachers to upgrade their qualifications, so that it is not just in consolidated revenue for scholarships generally; there is a committee structure that targets the scholarships.

For example, this year there were 22 funding allocations made available for preschool teachers to upgrade qualifications. Sixteen of those were taken up. I do not think there is enough money in that pot to simply say that that pot alone can fill this need. But, going back to my original comment that the AEU believes very strongly that resources should be carefully targeted, I think it would repay examination to see whether targeting specific government money on that kind of model to that specific need through a process that already exists might give you some value for your investment in ESL support.

MS BURCH: We heard earlier from Menslink around gender gaps. Do you have a view on that? Do you see a gender gap?

Ms Smith: The NAPLAN results do disaggregate by boys and girls. In the past we looked at the needs of girls, then there was the pattern of looking at the needs of boys. I think the latest research is really looking at which boys need support and which girls need support, so really refining that rather than having the boys versus girls debate. There are disadvantages perhaps for both boys and girls but we need to find out which students need that support.

MS BURCH: You talked about targeting programs and individual need. Is our system sophisticated enough that we can go into schools and have targetable programs, whether they be Indigenous programs, ESL, gender? Is our system sophisticated enough to identify those little niche areas of need?

Ms Gilmour: I think there is some capacity there. The difficulties that confront people are the resources and the time to do it. Particularly with the primary curriculum, there are so many things in it. If you subscribe, as we do, to the view that the earlier you can intervene the more likely you are to make a long-term difference, the downside of that in one sense is that you may be putting even more pressure on the part of the curriculum that is already crowded. I think there is some capacity there to do it, but managing how you do it is the challenge.

Ms Smith: The quality teaching model is a very successful model that has been implemented both in New South Wales over the last five years or so and also, I believe, in the Catholic education system here. It has taken that long to try to embed it into the schools there. That is around high quality teaching practices—a range of practices that support each student. It is probably the highest priority that the system could have around further developing the quality of the teachers that we have—and they are very good because we know that the results overall are very good. This is an excellent model that deserves being supported for a long period of time in order to embed those practices and strategies into every school.

MR HANSON: Has that model been adopted by the ACT government or is it just under-resourced?

Ms Smith: The department would call it “adapted”.

Mr Rasmus: It is adapted from New South Wales via Queensland.

Ms Smith: Yes. The department of education in New South Wales developed a quality teaching framework and it has been adapted, and the ACT department has been given the rights to use that as an adaptation for the ACT system.

MR HANSON: What you are saying at the moment is that you probably need more resources to roll that out with additional coordinators and so on?

Ms Gilmour: This is the first year that there have been specific positions established to support the implementation of it. Our worry is that the bulk of those resources, the 10 quality teaching co-ordinators across school groupings that I referred to earlier, disappear at the end of this year when the funding to support them dries up. We are very concerned that the implementation is only five years old in New South Wales, and in the non-government sector but it is still being supported to some level. We are concerned that the ACT will have three people to support quality teaching across the whole of the system next year. It is too soon to withdraw that level of resource.

MR HANSON: I am trying to get my head around what makes a quality teacher; perhaps it is unfortunate language. Do you do a certificate or a diploma; is it on-the-job type stuff as well as academic papers? How do you do that?

Ms Smith: A number of the people who are the quality teaching model coordinators, or the cluster coordinators, have done a graduate certificate through the University of Newcastle. Some of the lecturers have been providing some significant support to assist with the implementation.

MR HANSON: Let us say you are Cathy Smith, a primary school teacher in wherever; will one of these coordinators visit you and give you a program to do or train you?

Ms Smith: It is really about having a professional conversation about what high quality practice is. It is not a course as such. As I said, the coordinators have done a graduate certificate and they understand the model very well, but it is really around having regular professional conversations around excellent teaching practices, a range

of strategies to support the needs of the diverse group of students that you might be working with. So it is a long-term program that would be successfully implemented over five or six years. But it is also about the commitment of principals and school leaders in each school.

MR HANSON: Are these quality teaching principles now being taught in the university system so that people graduate with this? Are you playing catch-up with people who have not had this sort of program at university?

Ms Smith: I believe some universities are implementing the same sorts of models into the courses that they have. I understand Queensland certainly has been doing it for quite a while.

MR DOSZPOT: I have a question to perhaps both of you, Ms Gilmour and Ms Smith. How many of our teachers have got this graduate certificate in quality teaching over, say, the last 12 months?

Ms Smith: A rough estimate: I understand about 20 did it last year and I believe about a similar number this year as well.

MR HANSON: So it is 20 across 80-something schools?

Ms Smith: Primary and secondary.

Ms Gilmour: Again, the pool of resource that supports that is the teacher scholarships part of the professional learning fund—

MR HANSON: So that is limited by the scholarship available?

Ms Gilmour: Yes. Every year—we are about to sit down shortly—as part of the committee—we look at the allocation of those resources. Every year there are more priorities than you can poke a stick at, but clearly from our perspective quality teaching and the preschool qualifications upgrade are two key things. There is nothing that is not important that comes before that committee for consideration; it is just a matter of how far you can make the funds stretch.

MR HANSON: Indeed. The question is this: how many priorities can we address? Even in this discussion that we have had here today, we have not even looked at the Indigenous issues that you spoke at length about, which were of a lot of interest as well.

THE CHAIR: We are actually out of time. Thank you very much for all coming here today to speak to the committee. A transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you for you to check for accuracy.

Meeting adjourned from 2.46 to 3.16 pm.

DAVISON, MS KIM, Executive Director, Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

WASS, MS ALI, Teacher, Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

THE CHAIR: I welcome Ms Wass and Ms Davison here today to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs inquiry into the education achievement gap.

I draw your attention to the privilege statement on the table in front of you. Before we go to questions, I invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Davison: I would like to explain that we do have an education support program component to our program at Gugan Gulwan which is funded by DHCS. Under that education support program falls our numeracy and literacy class. We have a teacher, Ali, who teaches a class of up to 10 students on Wednesdays and Thursdays of each week in the school term.

We have a variety of issues that come within that class with regard to transitioning the young people who come back into mainstream schooling; or some of them do not attend school at all, so it is about trying to at least give them some kind of base for an education.

We also have a partnership with CIT so that the young people can complete their Access 10. This has been a very good relationship and partnership so far and it is also great for the kids because they can actually obtain their year 10 certificate at the end of it. Some of them might start in year 9 with the Access 10 and keep going through and work with them over the two-year period.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I noted that the Youth Coalition highlighted your program in their submission as a best practice program in terms of providing targeted teaching. Can you talk a bit about the success of the program and how it has gone over the years?

Ms Wass: What I find a success is to see kids who have perhaps been labelled in mainstream school as “won’t achieve” or “won’t finish year 10” able to come and have two days away from that mainstream school, to be supported and to work through the mainstream school curriculum and get that done and complete a year 10 certificate.

One of my students from last year has gone on to CIT, done a cert III in business and is achieving great stuff. I guess those are what I see as the successes: a young person who has been maybe labelled by the system as not succeeding walking away from a two-day program at Gugan, succeeding and going further.

THE CHAIR: Do you think that having the specialised teaching program helps with general engagement in school altogether?

Ms Wass: Yes, for sure. Because it is a smaller class, you are able to have more of that one-on-one time. It is evident that that is what is lacking in the mainstream school because you have so many students that need your attention. Every student deserves

individual attention, and if they can get that in a smaller setting they do succeed and you are able to then say, “Where is this student coming from? What does this student particularly need on a daily basis?” Those needs change all the time and a huge mainstream school cannot do that.

MS BURCH: You say that they come to you for two days out of the five. What are the linkages back to the school from which they came and the other Indigenous support programs that are in the mainstream schools? Can you outline the linkages across the two?

Ms Davison: What happens is that we have an education support worker attached to us, so he goes back into the mainstream school and will liaise with the school and the support staff there. With the Indigenous education services unit, we have Indigenous education workers across the board. They are responsible for some 20 schools and where linkages can be made they will be made, so we have a close relationship with that service. We are finding that some of the schools are not working as much as we are with that young person, so we are going to be going into a memorandum of understanding type of contract when we take the kids on, to say, “This needs to be upheld by the school and this is what we can provide.” A difficulty we are finding is that when they go back into the mainstream system their attendance drops again.

MS BURCH: Are the linkages to other programs through Gugan or through the mainstream school?

Ms Davison: We have an individual education plan for each of the students that come through, so we address a whole heap of issues. They might be sent to us with educational issues and then they become homeless. There might be family dysfunction or family breakdown, drug and alcohol issues—myriad things that could be happening in that young person’s life, or any young person’s life; they are not restricted to Indigenous young people. We find with the case management style that we are able to bring in a lot of other services to assist that young person.

MS BURCH: And then that would also be informed back to the mainstream school as well, so both planks are working together?

Ms Davison: Ideally, that is how we would like to see it, but it is not actually happening. They get back into mainstream and there are 40 other students in their class. They have youth workers in the schools now, but that connection is really hard to make and to uphold that individual plan for that young person.

MR HANSON: Firstly, I would like to say what a great job you guys are doing out there. We had a visit, but unfortunately I missed you that day, Kim. It is really good stuff that you guys are doing. I remember one of the conversations we had that day was around the nature of the funding that you receive and how it is done year by year, which makes it quite difficult for you then to do any long-term planning or to coordinate some of your activities. It seems that you have a whole myriad of different funding streams that come into your organisation. In terms of the year-by-year approach, have you had any glimmers of hope in that area?

Ms Davison: We have had a verbal come from Indigenous education services to say

that our funding for Ali's position will be continued after December 2009. We have not heard anything else from that. That was supposed to be coming from the Department of Education and Training. It is very difficult to plan. We are now in the middle, in fourth term, and if funding does not come through that will be it at the end of this year.

MR HANSON: And if it comes through at the last minute you have not really had the time to prepare or—

Ms Davison: No. It is ridiculous.

MR HANSON: The other thing that struck me was that all of these different programs that are run by different bodies, both state and federal, provide you lines of funding and it is very difficult to coordinate all that into a central aim as well. There are two problems there.

Ms Davison: It is very difficult. You will have different funding; some funding rounds might be triennial; others might be on a yearly basis, and we have pilot programs operating. You just cannot operate under those terms. I think we have done a fabulous job, and I thank you for commenting on that. Under the circumstances we are doing very well. That needs to be looked at, and it is being looked at as we draw up our new strategic plan.

MR HANSON: This is a little bit separate from the inquiry in a way but it links in because it is very difficult then to provide the services that are needed if you do not have the full capacity to do a strategic plan. So are you going to do a strategic plan to address what the needs are and then seek the funding for that on an ongoing basis?

Ms Davison: Where Gugan Gulwan as a whole hopes to be within the next three years. We have to stop taking on these pilot projects and have some commitment, I suppose, to some of these programs that we have been highlighted as being best practice in but we are not getting recognition for in funding terms.

MR HANSON: In terms of those programs, closing the gaps and extending them in terms of the number of students or the number of teachers or whatever: is that going to be incorporated into your strategic plan? Is it to try and increase the capacity of Gugan?

Ms Davison: Yes. That is all being looked at at the moment.

MR HANSON: So your view would be that there is extra demand out there that you are not meeting at the moment?

Ms Davison: Yes, there is. There is a lot of extra demand that we just cannot meet and this program is one of them. I think there are 10 on the waiting list at the moment. So we do not know when we are going to be able to get to see these kids; we can only do the best that we can. Ali's position is \$35,000 per annum. That is what we are working off, that whole program.

MR HANSON: That will be interesting. Maybe for the committee you could provide

some evidence or some sort of detail on that in terms of the numbers that you have got that you are not servicing because you do not have the support from wherever it is, federal or ACT, to do that.

Ms Davison: We only have one teacher so that is about all we can take on at the moment.

MR DOSZPOT: Ms Davison, does the program provide support across both the government and the non-government sector?

Ms Davison: Yes, it does.

MR DOSZPOT: And do you have any idea as to how many in each category you would be providing a service to over, say, a particular year?

Ms Davison: For the young people coming through the program?

MR DOSZPOT: Yes.

Ms Davison: There can be up to 30 that go through the program in a year. We only have 10 at a time. We are dropping that figure down to six and we are hoping that we will be able to do more work with those six young people and then move it through quicker. But, yes, that is how it stands at the moment.

MR DOSZPOT: You are obviously dealing with the students. Do you provide some feedback to the teachers, to the schools themselves, as to how to cope with particular situations?

Ms Davison: We try and give feedback as much as we can. It is one of the downfalls that a lot of the schools in the ACT have: they will not listen. We are giving advice, but it is not being taken on. How we change that, I do not know. I have been in this position for 15 years so I have seen a lot happen over those years and I think what needs to happen is for the principals and all of their support and teaching staff to go through cross-cultural training, not only for Indigenous kids but also for non-English-speaking background children, so that they have a better understanding of where it is coming from and it can filter through the school. We are finding that where the principals are really interested and take on our advice it flows down throughout the school.

THE CHAIR: As a follow-up to that, you mentioned previously the finding that once students had been through your program they might go back into the general school population; that the dropout figure goes back to what it was before. It must be very difficult when you have put all the work in with a student and then they go back, when you feel they are coming to a point where they might be able to engage with the school population. What do you do in those circumstances? Do students ever come back to the program once they have been through? I am wondering how you deal with that situation.

Ms Davison: The education support worker will take on that role to help them through that transition period back into school. We find that one of the fundamental

things with a young person is that if they feel comfortable in any situation they will excel—and that is not happening there. Whether there is bullying in the school or the parents are not being involved in the process, more needs to happen, because a lot of our parents have had negative experiences in the school system themselves. We are also finding that, if there is a large family where a sibling that has gone before them has had incidents or issues at the school, it is taken out on the younger ones coming through. So there is that mindset about a certain family. That makes it very difficult for them to achieve in that environment.

We have had instances where teachers have told them, “You’d be better off going and playing on the road, mate,” or little comments like that that are huge in a young person’s life. Their sporting achievements are highlighted, we have found, but their actual ability to succeed in the school setting academically probably is not brought home to them enough. Their self-esteem is very low when they come to us. We get a lot of comments like, “We’re told we’re dumb. We don’t know how to do this.” And they can achieve. So that is a big issue.

THE CHAIR: So you do not always find that if they are particularly good at sport that keeps them engaged with the school process?

Ms Wass: Not always, no. There might only be one sport that they excel at. If it is rugby league, you do not play rugby league all year, so for a lot of that time they will not go to PE or wherever, so you still have to find some sort of way to engage that student.

MS BURCH: I would like to discuss a couple of things. One is around Access 10 and the links. You take them not just in years 9 and 10; you can have children come through your program earlier?

Ms Wass: Year 7.

MS BURCH: So the theme from year 7: is the goal back to mainstream school or is it to Access 10? Where is your goal?

Ms Wass: My goal as a classroom teacher is to see them stay in mainstream school. If they come to me in year 7, I liaise closely with their year coordinator and get the curriculum that is being undertaken in that school. We do that school work with them on those two days a week. The students that I have currently doing Access 10 have been students who have dropped out of mainstream and have turned up saying, “I want to get my year 10 certificate.” So we have enrolled them into CIT, because they do not want to go back to mainstream school, and they will complete year 10 that way. Because of the flexible nature of it, they can finish that in 10 months, 14 months—whatever their self-drive is. It is not necessarily to say, “I am going to pull you out of mainstream school in year 7 and we will just do Access 10 until you’ve got that.” It is “I want you back in mainstream school because you have got to engage with society.”

MS BURCH: What numbers go back into mainstream and then finish, wherever they finish—whether it is year 10 or they go on? Are the bulk of them staying through your program as well?

Ms Wass: Of the students that I have currently, several of them have rolled over from last year so they were in year 7 and are still coming on the program, but a lot of them are new starters for this year and I have five doing Access 10 who were not school attendees. Some of them are out of state at the moment but they are still enrolled in that program, so half of my class are Access 10 students who are disengaged from mainstream school for whatever reason.

MS BURCH: And the bulk of them would get their year 10?

Ms Wass: Yes.

Ms Davison: That is our aim.

Ms Wass: And it does come down to your self-drive as to how you want—

MS BURCH: Their—the children's?

Ms Wass: Yes, for sure.

MS BURCH: Are they boys or girls?

Ms Wass: Predominantly girls doing Access 10, and boys. I have a younger set of boys.

THE CHAIR: You said it was the younger age group that is mostly boys.

Ms Wass: They are at the moment, yes.

THE CHAIR: That is just how—

Ms Wass: That is how it is, yes.

MR HANSON: As to the physical locality of your kids, because of the proximity—you are southside—is there a gap up north?

Ms Wass: Yes, there is.

MR HANSON: I imagine—and we have talked about this—that it is difficult to get them to come to you because they do not have transport or there are motivational issues or whatever.

Ms Wass: Transport is the big issue. We used to go around and do home visits but we found we were spending half the morning picking students up and then it would be like, “Okay, we’ll get you back in the bus as we have to drop you home.” We have said, “We’ll do one central pick-up, which is Woden, but if you’re living in Gungahlin that’s a long way to get to Woden for a 9.30 or 9 o’clock pick-up.”

MR HANSON: Is there any service doing something similar to what you are doing in the north at all?

Ms Wass: No.

MR HANSON: So it would need either a transport facility of some sort to pick up those kids from the Belconnen bus interchange or something like that or the establishment of something similar in the north. Billabong is not doing anything similar to what you are doing?

Ms Wass: No. Currently, the students who live in the north are strong, regular attenders. It is amazing that you live in Gungahlin and you make it to school, whether by 10 or 10.30. One boy catches the bus and he is there regularly at 9.30 at the interchange to be picked up. There is the will of those young people.

MR HANSON: Yes, they have got the will, but it makes it difficult—

Ms Wass: There would be a lot of young people who do not have that will who would—

MR HANSON: They might if it was closer type of thing.

Ms Wass: Yes.

MR HANSON: We were talking before in a committee meeting about there being some schools that are set up—for example, one is a sports school, one does arts, and so on. Are there any schools that you have noticed that do Indigenous well? For instance, they have a bunch of kids there, they have got a real focus and they have programs. You can steer kids towards those schools because you know they will be fostered.

Ms Davison: Yes, it is pretty difficult. Wanniasa high has got a program going where they bring Indigenous elders into the school. That is working quite well. We are having more of a role in that school. When you have to put the kids all in one school it is difficult because you have the out-of-area issues and stuff like that.

MR HANSON: One of the problems we have heard from other people giving evidence is that you have got one or two everywhere and then it makes it very difficult for the principal and the teachers. If they want to run a whole Indigenous cultural awareness package for one student, that is going to be difficult. Do you think there is any scope for schools putting up their hand and saying, “We want to run that as a particular steam,” and then you have two or three on the south side and two or three on the north to foster that and put a greater emphasis on it? It is difficult when you have 80 schools for each school to run at that level.

Ms Davison: It would be great.

MR HANSON: You do it for sport or you do it for other things. You could do the same for ESL. Instead of just looking at the good stuff, let us look at the things where you can actually help people up at the bottom as well.

THE CHAIR: I guess, as you said, having that cultural awareness training across every school should be something which is done anyway.

Ms Davison: Compulsory, I think. At the moment it is not compulsory. Only a few of the principals—

MR HANSON: I am just thinking about the peer aspects of it. The thing I notice with a lot of Indigenous kids—any kid—is that if you have got your mates there that understand who you are it is a lot easier. If you are on your own you feel isolated. So if you had two or three Indigenous kids in a class—it is the same with ESL—I guess you help each other.

Ms Davison: I was talking to Ali about this earlier. I think sometimes the schools, rather than just looking at the child as a person instead of what race they are and saying they have learning needs, freak out when it is an Indigenous student. Because there is so much emphasis on closing the gap and Indigenous issues overall I think sometimes they overdo it by thinking too much instead of just taking a step back and saying, “This young person needs help and support in this area and this is how we’ll do it.” I think sometimes they freak out.

MR DOSZPOT: A number of topics have been covered. It appears that role models, whether they are elders or sporting people, would seem to be a fairly good way of doing things. There are a number of sporting people, in particular Harry Williams in soccer and Kenny Nagas in league. Is there more scope for utilising people like that with the kids so that the cross-cultural issues can come across and positive self-perception be given to not only the kids themselves but also their colleagues? Is that something you are able to do?

Ms Davison: Kenny just works across the road from us so it is great. He pops in every now and again.

MR DOSZPOT: Yes, I have heard good things about him.

Ms Davison: Yes. I have known Harry for a number of years as well. It is a great concept and we would love to do more of it. We presently have two mentoring programs at the centre. We have a young men’s mentoring program for eight to 12-year-old young boys and a young women’s mentoring program for high school student aged young girls. A lot of the time they are looking for payment as well, so we have to look around that too. Something like that would be very positive for them. They need to have the role models there to go, “This is what I did when I grew up and this is how I have come out of it. You can achieve.” We need to raise their self-esteem. I think that is the first and foremost thing that we need to do.

MR DOSZPOT: Do you have a demographic expectation as to how many kids you are expecting and the particular age groups? Is there data like that available to you?

Ms Davison: We cater for all of the ACT.

MR DOSZPOT: Yes, I know, but as to the number of students in particular age groups, do you get an indication of how many are coming through?

Ms Davison: In our program?

MR DOSZPOT: Yes, to your program.

Ms Davison: The age range is year 7—so 13 till 16. We find it is very important, especially with our young boys, that we have programs for them at eight years of age. A lot of them come from single-parent families. Their vision in life is that they are the protector at such a young age. There is no father figure or there is no mother figure in the family. That is a lot to take on. We have some kids that are carers of their parents as well because of their health. It is a big thing that is happening out there for a lot of the kids.

MS BURCH: You cover the whole of the ACT. What is the referral and assessment process? You have mentioned that you have some in the wings that you would like to accommodate. How do you assess?

Ms Wass: Students will be referred either from schools or DoCS or other government agencies, if an agency recognises that a student needs education support. We have a referral form process that gets filled out. That goes to the education support worker who reviews that referral. He and I then meet with that young person and the referring agency, whether it is the school or the support worker. We then talk with that young person. Hopefully a parent or guardian can come to that.

From that referral process we work out whether or not that student should go into the numeracy and literacy program with me or whether or not we can offer other education support for that young person, whether that is an in-school support network or something like that. If it is deemed that numeracy and literacy is the way for that student to go and to go to Gugan, then a whole education plan is done for that young person, again—if they are in mainstream school—with school in mind. Is that what you are after? It is quite a lengthy process that we go through in saying, “What does this young person need if they are going to come to me to be educated?”

MS BURCH: As to that decision making, they could either go to Gugan or be supported in mainstream as well, and then other services—

Ms Wass: Correct, and if there is an alternative program in the ACT that might suit that person we will say, “Let’s utilise that program. Let’s keep that person on our education support program and liaise with that person while they are on that other program.”

MS BURCH: If they then enter into Gugan, you have got other youth services and home support services around them as well?

Ms Wass: Yes.

MS BURCH: Do you get a sense of being able to separate an education program to a youth support program to the family? Is it the package that is working?

Ms Davison: I think it is, because we have got it all under the one roof. If they are homeless, we can get the reconnect section involved. The drug and alcohol section will deal with the drug and alcohol issues. So it is not such a burden on one person

trying to case manage this young person with myriad issues.

MS BURCH: It is not just looking after their reading and writing; it is that whole life package around it.

Ms Davison: We are doing a lot of work at the moment because we want to produce competent adults in a competent adult world. As a staffing team we have come together and said, “Okay, what is that and how do we achieve that?” There is some paperwork I will leave with you. You can read, if you like, where we are up to and our model of service for that.

MR HANSON: Do you think that your services are well understood out there in the schools? You might have some schools that understand what you can do and so they refer kids to you and so on. I imagine there are a number of schools out there that would not have a clue; is that right?

Ms Wass: That is correct. I would say that some schools look at it and go, “Gugan has got numeracy and literacy; we’ll just put them there,” and that is kind of solved in a way. I think it also comes down to the relationship that I might have with the youth worker in the school or the welfare worker or the new coordinator.

MR HANSON: It is a little ad hoc then, depending on—

Ms Wass: It can be, yes. It is hard then to also deal with the Indigenous ed worker because they are spread across maybe two or three high schools. You may not get a good relationship if they are not always in that school, that you need to see them on a particular day. It can be ad hoc. I find I probably have a better relationship with southside schools due to the location of where we are at.

MR HANSON: What is the solution to that? Is there one?

Ms Wass: Another one of me! I do not know.

MR HANSON: So just extra capacity so that one of you, one of your clones, could spend more time out and about.

Ms Wass: Yes, more time, for sure.

MS BURCH: Just on that, do you link into the cluster? Your schools are around clusters and they have an executive framework—

Ms Davison: We raise that with the Indigenous education services—

MS BURCH: You work through that.

Ms Wass: Because you would be forever attending that. I guess I see my role as going, “Here is a young person who is in need.” If I can help them for a particular length of time then I will do that.

MR DOSZPOT: My question is related to that again in the sense that children are

referred to you, you take them for a certain period or you guide them and then you put them back into the mainstream schools, as you said. Do you find that you keep coming back to the same children all the time or, once you have mentored some of these children, do you then take up other cases? Do you get repeat children coming back to you? That is what I am trying to get at.

Ms Wass: Yes, we do. I have been at Gugan for 2½years. The students that I had last year—some of them finished year 10 and some of them went back to mainstream for this year, so they have not come back to Gugan. It is both. As I said earlier, one boy started in year 7 and he is back with me in year 8. I had a boy who started at the end of the last year who has rolled through again. It is both, yes.

MR DOSZPOT: I think Ms Davison mentioned before that you do not seem to be getting engagement at the school level and you are telling them how to cope with some of the issues. Is that repeated when the kids go from one year to the next? Then you have a whole new group of teachers and principals—the principal may be the same—who need to understand—

Ms Davison: Most of the teachers and principals out there are just fantastic, but that is one of the flaws that I have seen. They say, “I have taught Aboriginal kids up in Queensland.” That is fine and good and well, but we are talking about the ACT here and a population here. It is more us trying to teach them a lot of our ways as well and to be educating as well—to say, “There is not only one clan of Aboriginal people within Australia. There are hundreds of them and each young person will come from a different clan.” That is proven to be a problem.

But with a lot of our kids, too, they have identity problems. They are saying that they are Aboriginal, and they are Aboriginal, but what that means to them is totally different from what—I suppose we see ourselves as Aboriginal people. We find that, because of the decrease in the extended family, they are not getting the culture passed down to them as well. When they are asked questions by teachers as well in relation to Indigenous issues, some of them have not got the answers. That makes them feel more isolated.

MR DOSZPOT: So in a way we should be looking at educating the educators themselves to be more aware of what issues the kids are facing? Is that what you are saying?

Ms Davison: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I want to ask about the new FAs. Ms Burch said the FAs wrap around those other services which you are providing which are keeping kids within the programs. How do you decide? Is it based on numeracy and literacy if that is a specific need they have there—that they would be referred to that program rather than be in the mainstream school population but have other services that support them along the way? How do you make that decision? Is it based purely on whether or not they do actually need assistance with reading and mathematics?

Ms Wass: If they are approved for the program, we have an intake form. They have to be a certain age; they have to have a myriad of educational issues that we would be

able to help them with. Eight times out of 10 probably the student would go into a numeracy and literacy program. I do more than just look at their numeracy and literacy, especially if they are attending—my approach is that a student needs a basic year 10 certificate. A lot of them come and say, “That is what I want. I want my year 10.” My approach to the teaching at Gugan has been, “I’m going to take you, or you’re going to take yourself with my help, to a year 10 certificate.” In that intake process, and with the referral, if it is with the school, a lot of it would be sitting with the year coordinator and going, “Where is this student’s downfall? If it is in numeracy, let us work on their maths—and so on. If it is just getting work done and completed, here is an opportunity to do that.”

But for the majority of the time I have found that the students come to the numeracy and literacy program. It would be those who are doing really well and go, “I just need something else.” It might be cultural support; it might be “I want to do some mechanical stuff as well.” We go, “Okay. Here’s a program that we can put you in.” Or they might just need a day out of the system to go, “I’m not coping because of other stuff that is happening at home.” But for the majority of the time they would come into numeracy and literacy.

MS BURCH: You made mention around the culture within the school—being understanding and aware of the needs of Indigenous students. Earlier today we had the teachers union. They left us one of their newsletter-type things. They were talking around the dare to lead program. Are you aware of that?

Ms Davison: Yes.

MS BURCH: Just from reading this, this is around teaching the teachers and getting that cultural head of school and changing their thinking so that the ripple effect moves down.

Ms Davison: That is something that Chris Sarra has been working on for a number of years with the program that is initiated in Wanniasa high school.

MS BURCH: And you see it work? You see where that is working well—a shift happening through the school?

Ms Davison: In some instances it is. I think we have a long way to go, but there has been improvement over the last 10 years or so, which is what we need to see.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: I am all out of questions.

MR DOSZPOT: You mentioned at the outset of our discussions that you are concerned about the funding situation. You work on a three-year funding cycle?

Ms Davison: One year for this program.

MR DOSZPOT: And we are nearly at the end; we have a term to go.

Ms Davison: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: Have you been asked to put a submission in for next year?

Ms Davison: No. We have only had a verbal to say that DET will be funding it.

MR DOSZPOT: So the federal—

Ms Davison: The department of education, yes.

MR DOSZPOT: But you got no ACT government funding for this?

Ms Davison: We have got ACT government funding for the education support program where we can hire an education support worker. What we are after is the funding so that we can employ the teacher, because without the teacher we have not got the skilled education support worker to go into that role.

MR DOSZPOT: Are you confident that the program is going to continue?

Ms Davison: Yes and no. I do not know. I really cannot answer that. I have been told it will but whether that happens or not—and we are used to operating like that.

MS BURCH: I have that faith, Mr Dozspot.

MR DOSZPOT: I think that with our systems it takes a bit more than faith; we need to have budgeting periods that governments are very much bound to. My question is this. If the budget cycle has not been entered into—

MR HANSON: This is the problem we were talking about earlier. When you are doing it on a drip-feed basis, the ability to do any strategic planning and say to kids, “Yes, you’re going to be here next term”—you simply do not know. That is the problem. There needs to be an ongoing funding commitment or not so that at least Gugan can strategically plan what services they are providing.

MS BURCH: Again I am going back to the teachers union magazine. There is a program called the student aspirations program. Are you aware of that?

Ms Davison: No.

MS BURCH: This talks around creating an Indigenous education system and an Indigenous student aspirations program to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have the potential to succeed. There is a southern area position and a north area position. You are not aware of that program?

Ms Davison: No.

MR HANSON: I will give you a copy of it.

MS BURCH: I was attracted to this because there was some talk around Caroline Chisholm high, my local high school. This reads as though it is a good program. It

seems to me that there may be programs out there. Again it is about linkages and awareness and having the two halves better meet.

Ms Wass: I was going to comment. Kim highlighted Wanniasa. Chisholm high have a good youth support worker, I guess—I am not sure what his role is—within the school. He does a lot of fantastic stuff with the Indigenous kids at Caroline Chisholm. And we had a fantastic transition lunch for those kids in year 10 who will be rolling on to Erindale college, to keep that support and to go, “We have an education support program at Gugan. It involves you guys into college as well.” I see year 11 college students if they need assistance as well.

MS BURCH: You made mention of Caroline Chisholm and Wanniasa where these students are coming out of year 10 from a supportive school. Their success rates at year 11 and 12? Do you see that as—

Ms Wass: This is a problem as well. They come out of year 10 succeeding in a supported environment. College, obviously, as we know, is totally different. If you are motivated and organised, you do okay in year 11, but I have noticed, with some of the students that I see, that they struggle towards the end of the year getting things in on time, because it is left up to—you are a year 11 student.

MS BURCH: It is that flexible arrangement of year 11.

Ms Wass: For sure. A lot of them get behind and then they go, “Oh, you know what? Year 12 is too hard.” And they drop it. We have got to maintain that support through year 11 as well, with some sort of safety net for them: “You’ve got to do it, but there are programs that will help you through.” Whether that is in-college tutoring, smaller class sizes for them within college—

MS BURCH: Or it could be something again—they mentioned tertiary.

Ms Wass: I think Erindale college have got the highest intake of Indigenous kids—the highest year 11 Indigenous student intake this year for a long time. So something right has happened.

THE CHAIR: We are out of time. Thank you very much for coming to see us today and speaking to us. A transcript of today’s hearing will be sent to you to check for accuracy.

HARWOOD, MS LYNNE, Chief Executive Officer, Galilee

THE CHAIR: I welcome Ms Harwood from Galilee to speak to this committee's inquiry into the educational achievement gap in the ACT. I draw your attention to the privilege statement on the card in front of you, which you have probably seen before. Would you like to make an opening statement before we go to questions?

Ms Harwood: Thank you for having me here today. Galilee is a not-for-profit organisation that provides five different programs supporting babies, children and youth in the ACT. The Galilee school is one of our five programs. Obviously that is the focus today, but our other programs are very complementary and supplementary to the school and the ongoing mentoring, support and coordination that often the children and youth need to enable them to continue to engage with both education and further ongoing training.

I am new in this role; I have only been in this role for just over two months, so in a sense I feel quite privileged that I am looking at this from the perspective of a fresh pair of eyes. I have been employed at Galilee to try and make it more efficient and effective but also at the same time to be very clear about what our goals, our vision and our mission are, which are very much to try and support the disadvantaged children and youth of Canberra to reach their full potential. That is something that we are very mindful of in regard to juggling.

The words "efficient and effective" come up often in the community sector because, on the one hand, if we are not efficient and effective there is no way we can achieve what we need to achieve. We literally do function on the smell of an oily rag and so being efficient and effective is essential. But that does not take away from our goal, which is to provide the support that is necessary for the children.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned the disadvantage in the type of students that you see, and that, I guess, is in the school program and your other programs, as they probably affect each other. Do you find that you have students across the board in terms of community representation? Are low socioeconomic groups particularly affected or even those from particular cultural backgrounds, or do you have a wide variety of students coming through?

Ms Harwood: No. There definitely is a leaning towards the demographic of low socioeconomic background, Indigenous background, and we are just beginning to see the starts of CALD influence as well.

THE CHAIR: When you mention CALD, is that in terms of migrant refugees?

Ms Harwood: Migrant refugees. It is really the beginning of their assimilation into our society. That is where they need support often.

THE CHAIR: The education union gave evidence earlier and they said that they have obviously seen the Sudanese refugees and are now seeing the Burmese refugees coming through. Are they two of the groups that you have found—

Ms Harwood: Yes, and from our perspective it really is quite new for us. Until this

point, it had always been the socioeconomic disadvantage and the Indigenous disadvantage. I heard you speaking earlier about training the trainer or making sure that the people who are teaching are being taught themselves, and that is certainly what we are needing to consider as an organisation—making sure that we are across the issues and then equipped to support the CALD people, whose issues are certainly different from those we have been considering before.

MS BURCH: What sort of numbers are we talking about at Galilee school?

Ms Harwood: We are talking quite small numbers at Galilee. In an ideal world we try to keep it at two students to one teacher because of the sheer need and the intensity of the contact that is required. The numbers fluctuate but at any given time we have approximately 12 students enrolled.

MS BURCH: What is the referral mechanism to you, and how do you do that assessment? Whom do you take in and what is the demand?

Ms Harwood: The referrals come from three major sources. One is the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support, another mechanism is the education department and another is care and protection. There is a committee called the CYIN committee and we take all our referrals through that, which is overseen by the state education department. Basically, all the pros and cons are debated at that meeting and a decision is made as to whether we take on a referral or not.

It is very understood that Galilee is a last-resort school and it is very understood by all parties that Galilee is an alternative form of education when all other forms of education have not been satisfactory for one reason or another.

MS BURCH: We heard from Gugan Gulwan just before you and they have an alternative program with an aim of having the young folk go back to mainstream school where they can. Is that your aim, or once they come into Galilee do they get to year 10 through Galilee?

Ms Harwood: As I have just mentioned, normally all of the options have been used up by the time they come to Galilee, so our main aim is to get them a year 10 education. It is obviously proven on many levels, and certainly statistically, that if youths can achieve a year 10 certificate they have much more chance of assimilating into an adult life. We have had the rare occasion when, speaking about the demographic again, there has been much more of a middle-class demographic, when for other related issues a child has ended up at Galilee school. If we are able to help them resolve those other issues outside of that, often we have been able to assimilate them back into normal school. The aim is to get them a year 10 certificate and then get them continued support around either further training or the earn and learn theory.

MR HANSON: Most of the students you have got are because of behaviour and disadvantage rather than any disability; is that correct? I am just trying to clarify—

Ms Harwood: They certainly do not have a physical or mental disability but they certainly have behavioural—

MR HANSON: Okay.

Ms Harwood: It is definitely behaviour related but then also we do have and have had children from the autism spectrum et cetera. Once again, I suppose it is a fine line as to whether you define that as a disability or not, but I think we would be safer to put them in the category of behavioural—

MR HANSON: Behavioural issues rather than disability, yes. Where are you physically located?

Ms Harwood: The school itself is located on Kambah Pool Road, on Lions Youth Haven land, so it is basically down by the Murrumbidgee golf course. We rent Lions Youth Haven land and we have built on there. We are in the process at the moment of negotiating to build so that all our programs can be out there, because the school is quite isolated from—

MR HANSON: Who funds that building?

Ms Harwood: Donations, in-kind support, lots of tin-rattling and bleeding-heart stuff.

MR HANSON: Is it? So your funding stream then is through tin rattling, generous donations from various people, I guess—

Ms Harwood: Yes.

MR HANSON: And government?

Ms Harwood: Yes. Also the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support have brought to my attention that they are in negotiation with the ACT education department, trying to decide who should take responsibility for us. At the moment we get some quarterly funding from the office, we get some quarterly funding from ACT education and we get some quarterly funding from federal education for the school. But the office have clearly said that it is on their agenda to try and put that responsibility holus-bolus with the education department and that they want to be honest, open and transparent with us. Some of our other programs are also funded by the office or different parts of DHCS and we also get a little bit of federal money.

MR HANSON: You were here and heard the conversation with Gugan, I guess, who have the same sorts of problems with a lot of funding streams, which make it difficult to plan and coordinate, and your time is spent on a lot of administration. Do you also have the same problem where you are funded on a short-term basis so that you never quite know what is around the corner, or are you getting more ongoing—

Ms Harwood: In some ways it is better to get multifunding streams because then in a risk management sense you are not relying on the one hand to feed you. In some ways that is a good thing. Certainly having a concurrent or a recurrent funding stream is essential for any level of planning or any level of sustainability. Normally that has been the case, but I believe the office are going through a bit of a restructure and a bit of strategic planning as to how they are going to continue from hereon in. That is having an impact at a few levels because we now have rolled three-monthly contracts;

the contracts officially ran out on 30 June this year and theoretically we would normally get rolled for three years. But, because they are restructuring, it is just rolling on a quarterly basis at the moment, so technically that is very unsettling on every level, but also, although they have been very honest and transparent about it, we know that they are in total negotiation with the education department at the moment to pass the responsibility. Certainly that does not make us feel very confident.

We are busy strategically planning. We are busy looking for other funding sources and wanting to spread the risk. But at the moment it seems very tenuous.

THE CHAIR: So it is the ACT education department that is looking like it will take sole responsibility, or the federal education department?

Ms Harwood: At the moment the office are explaining why they should take responsibility and the education department are listening to them but have given us no sense of promise or way forward; they have just said that they are having preliminary discussions. Also our foster care program, for instance, is being rolled on a three-monthly basis at the moment because they are restructuring the way they do all aspects of their services, I suppose.

MR HANSON: You talked about the expanded services that you want to provide. Will that increase the capacity for the number of students that you can look after and, if so, to how many?

Ms Harwood: It will increase, but not necessarily full-time students. It will supplement some of the other programs we already do. Probably from a numbers point of view we would only ever be able to deal with that probably 12 to 15 number in the school. The school's intention is in regard to that. It is not a quantity driven school; it is very much about when there are no other options, as a last resort, and then it is very intense numeracy, literacy, health and wellbeing from thereon in. So the focus of our growth is not about growing numbers substantially at the school. The focus is very much about using old programs and getting the synergies from old programs so that we can get a better cross-service to the clients. Often the school is one major aspect; they also need the mentoring, the support and the more coordinated approach to what they do.

MR HANSON: Do you do that mentoring internally or do you subcontract?

Ms Harwood: Predominantly internally, but we do use subcontractors when we need to. For instance, at the moment we are working on a fitness in schools program, sports based, so we have much of that internally but we are also tapping into Gulan in regard to some of their Aboriginal, Indigenous, expertise to bring that in et cetera. Predominantly we are self-sufficient in most things we do, but whenever we need expertise of whatever description we do seek it and we do seek certainly cooperative relationships with all other community organisations.

MR DOSZPOT: You mentioned at the outset that Galilee is a school of last resort and the fact that you have two students per one teacher. How many teachers do you have?

Ms Harwood: I said that was in an ideal world. We have five full-time, fully qualified teachers at the school. As I said, the numbers fluctuate and also the attendance fluctuates. That is something to know; often, if there is some crisis going on in the youth's or the child's life, attendance fluctuates quite a lot. We have five full-time teachers and at the moment we have about 12 enrolled. When I say about 12, there is another one day a week program that works from the school as well that does cross-support some of the school programs.

MR DOSZPOT: When you say you have fully qualified teachers from an educational perspective, are they trained in counselling and some of those areas?

Ms Harwood: Yes. When I say fully qualified, they are a mix of teachers, youth workers, social workers et cetera. So there is a cross-mix of skills and certainly mentoring, support and counselling are major roles that they have. At the end of the day we recognise that the six hours that the kids spend at the school is often the most stable time that they have in their lives. We also recognise that things totally outside the control of the school throw variables into the mix that can affect everything that we do. So the counselling and support are as essential as the numeracy and literacy and everything else.

MR DOSZPOT: By the way, I have heard some very good reports about Galilee. I have not visited the school yet but I would love to. On to matters of importance to you: you have mentioned interaction with ACT education, or perhaps lack of funding from ACT education. How many students are referred to you by ACT education?

Ms Harwood: Probably the majority of referrals come from the office at this point.

MR DOSZPOT: That is the ACT education office?

Ms Harwood: No, I keep saying "the office"; it is the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support. Probably 50 per cent of our referrals come from there and then probably 25 per cent from care and protection and 25 per cent from the education department itself. Those are very rough figures.

MR DOSZPOT: Some of those children would be referred on from ACT education to those other areas, who would then refer them to you, I should imagine, as well.

Ms Harwood: As we said, we work on this committee called the CYIN committee and there are representatives from all those areas. Obviously our school principal is on that committee as well.

MR HANSON: Just to follow up on the referral issue, how many kids are referred to you that you cannot accept? I imagine that you have got a cap and there are children that people want to refer to put in the program. Do you know how many people are queuing up?

Ms Harwood: We have probably got a more technical problem at the moment. With one of other programs, one of our Indigenous programs, we accepted two children for two years from there. They are actually quite a success story at the school, but they live in Queanbeyan. We are having this fight at the moment because the office will

not accept responsibility and the ACT Education will not accept responsibility. We are not getting any response from the New South Wales counterpart.

So we are in a dilemma in that we have got two children who have been assimilated for nearly 18 months now within the school—they are doing exceptionally well considering all the circumstances—and taking up two spots in the school when there are waiting lists to come through. To get assistance or answers or to get a result is proving extremely difficult. One party says, “They’re taking up two spots that ACT children should be taking up.” The other context is that they really fit all the other criteria and the other programs that are being run. They are really proving a success story and is that a reason alone to kick them out of school?

MR HANSON: Beyond that issue, how many do you know or would you think are queued up to be put on that program?

Ms Harwood: It is probably double again. It comes in fits and starts as well. We can go for a month or two without a referral and then we can get an influx of half a dozen referrals. Also, we can go for a period of time when we have got stability with the students at the school and then, for many different reasons, we might lose several of them for all different reasons. Or we might go through a period where we have got good attendance by the students that are enrolled with us and then we might go through a period where just trying to locate them is a difficult phase. I understand that statistics and numbers make the day in regard to what we are trying to achieve, but it is quite different in regard to what we do.

MS BURCH: Just to follow up: on your numbers, the 12—I am just looking at success as in attendance and gaining year 10—if you use that as a success rate, can you tell us about that?

Ms Harwood: Very much so. In the last three years we have had approximately eight or nine children reach that year 10 certificate. We are just going through a phase now where we have got year 8s and 9s. We have a core group of about six at the moment that we are hoping at the end of next year will achieve there. We have got stability with them, we are making progress, we can see the progress happening and we are hoping to get the bulk of them through the year 10 certificate by the end of next year.

THE CHAIR: One of the terms of reference of the inquiry is about looking at educational experiences for students from different backgrounds. I am just wondering whether, as to the students that you have coming through—I guess in terms of their experiences with the education system in general—you find other aspects of their life which are perhaps impacting on how they are interacting with the school system. Or is it because they are just not working with the school system? Is it having more students around them or just not having the personal attention which they might need? Or do you find it is a mixture of both?

Ms Harwood: I think your first comment is probably more relevant with our students—that is, the other aspects of their life. That just creates a lack of stability on many levels. Probably once that occurs then with the standard school system it is difficult for them to achieve, but it is not because of the standard school system that they are having difficulties. It is probably very important to note that. I suppose in

some instances we note that after school holidays or even after weekends it is much harder to get them assimilated. It is much harder on a Monday morning or the week after the school holidays than it is on a Wednesday or a Thursday. It is an ongoing situation too.

THE CHAIR: Are families involved at all in the process?

Ms Harwood: We certainly try to involve them. We try to involve families on many levels. Some families will become a little engaged with us. Some actually see us in the sense of us being another cause of their problem. I suppose we raise or we highlight issues within the child or trigger within the children their own thought processes and that often can add to the chaos. So often the family see us as they do the police or as they do the system and they do not always engage with us. Certainly we are open to engagement; we do try and engage them. We create a couple of functions to involve parents and guardians or kinships. Some other children we have are in kinships with extended families. Some of the kids we have couch surf; they live on couches. They do not have a permanent place of residence. In a sense, that makes Galilee unique.

I have just been speaking with the education department. We are not a special school and we are not a private school, but we are not a state school. We do not fit into those categories. Private schools usually have the support of parents and the greater special schools usually have specific needs that are attempted to be targeted. We do not fit into any of those. We are quite unique, which is often frustrating because we do not quite fit into any of the categories to continue with the support that is needed.

MR HANSON: Can I just follow up on that in terms of the origins of the school? Are you nationally or internationally based, or is this just a purely locally run—

Ms Harwood: It is purely local ACT. It has been running for 23 years now. It was originally based out of a Christian church group, hence the name Galilee, and originally run by volunteers and lots of goodwill et cetera. It has moved on from that a lot, and we certainly see ourselves now as a fully functioning not-for-profit organisation. While some of the vision and values are based along the Christian ethos and moral foundation, we certainly are a fully self-sustaining not-for-profit organisation. We do not get support from the church or anything like that.

MS BURCH: Can I follow on from the involvement from families? You have mentioned that often the other services are as important as the learning, the teaching. Can you just tell us a little bit about that? Following on from some families just do not want to be engaged or some of these youths do not have families, are the services wrapped around the youth and then, as you can, wrapped around the families? Is that how you work?

Ms Harwood: We have a structured program at the school where the first hour of the day is focused on a kids program and then a nutritional breakfast program, because it has been proven—all sorts of work has been done in this regard—that to get that energy out of the kids early in the day then allows them to concentrate on the more mundane numeracy and literacy. Also, the healthy breakfast and the healthy lunch program are the only staple meals that they are likely to get. Those three components are probably more important than anything.

In regard to the other supports, for instance, our teachers, our youth workers, are very much the transport and taxi service for them because if we did not provide that pick-up and drop-off—obviously we are in a slightly isolated or slightly off the beaten track area—the chances of them coming to school would be very minimal. That is also a key factor.

We really try to focus on areas. We always have a drug and alcohol program on the go because that is an area where, if they are not already involved, they very soon can become involved. Sexual health is another area, especially around the prevention side of things and educating them in that way. Also, we have a lot of, I suppose, confidence building. There are several programs based around their own confidence, self-motivation, their own values and visions et cetera, so they are all based on known successes in regard to such alternative education. So their numeracy and literacy fits around that.

With regard to some of our other programs, we have an Aboriginal program that is very much about the support, the mentoring, the coaching. Often it may be a skill or a potential in a child. It might be in sport, art or music, and it is to actually help them work through that system and get them into something different.

We also have a basic life skills program which is about helping them to set up bank accounts and fill in Centrelink forms. It is working with transitional housing—some of the youth hostels et cetera. It is about basic life skills, basic budgeting and things like that. We work with them on those things. Those things are essential. I am currently in discussions. The vision with regard to growth is very much about them providing either SIP or vocational education training after year 10, so there is that next area.

MS BURCH: The relationship with these youths must be quite close. You follow them through.

Ms Harwood: Absolutely, yes.

MS BURCH: What happens after year 10? Do you see them go on to other opportunities?

Ms Harwood: Some we do. The ones that do, the successes are rare. Obviously we try and build on that. We know that getting them to year 10 means, statistically, that they are more likely to achieve. Getting them to the next level of either further learning—so the college level learning or indeed the vocational education training—or some form of pre-trade type training or environment also makes it more successful. We do follow them through and we work closely with Gulwan and many of the others. CIT have some courses too that we try and link them into, but it is still a bit like throwing them to the sharks. That is why, as an organisation, Galilee needs to grow in the direction of the further supports we provide, not the quantity of what we necessarily do.

MR DOSZPOT: Did I hear you correctly to say that you had a waiting list?

Ms Harwood: We technically do not have a waiting list because we do not keep it as a waiting list, but we do have to turn referrals down. We use the CYIN committee with regard to the referrals coming through. Often if it is decided that they will not be suitable at Galilee, they will be looking at whether Gulwan is more relevant or does CIT have a certificate 10 course. There are a few others that do similar courses, so it is looking at all the options but, at the end of the day, we do have to turn some of those down.

MR DOSZPOT: I just come back to your terminology: best school of last resort. I was wondering what happens to the kids who you cannot or will not accept, for whatever reason.

Ms Harwood: I think “cannot” is more the word than “will not”. Depending on their current situation, often we might receive children as they are coming out of Bimberi and so on. Often there is a cycle there. Certainly many of them do end up back there. I suppose the other side of that is that even when they are trying to assimilate them back in a mainstream school it is not always successful. Probably the succinct answer to that is there is still a problem there.

MR HANSON: On the Bimberi experience, say you have got kids that you look after and then they go to Bimberi and come back out, how is that going for young kids? I guess everyone’s experience is different.

Ms Harwood: I hear really good things about Bimberi. I hear really good things about the programs that they have to support the kids once they are in custody. Certainly the level of education and the level of the program and activity they undertake while they are in there, from my understanding, appear to be of a high level and appear to be very engaging. Often when they come back out nothing matches up to that, so often that is the problem. What they have received in there is really good and then everything else is quite disappointing, and also because in a sense they do not really have a choice. They have to be engaged and they have to do what they have to do. It seems to allow them to engage. When they have a choice—shall I engage or not?—that is often when the problems occur. I only hear good things about Bimberi but, unfortunately, the standard that Bimberi sets then makes it quite difficult when they are being assimilated back into everyday society.

MR HANSON: Is it mostly boys or girls, or is there a gender balance?

Ms Harwood: We just happen to have mostly boys at the moment, but we have no differential in regards to boys or girls. It is probably a third to two-thirds at the moment in regard to boys.

THE CHAIR: We have a few minutes left but I think we are out of questions. Thank you, Ms Harwood, for coming to speak to us today. It has been greatly appreciated. A transcript of today’s hearing will be sent to you so you will be able to look at the accuracy of that.

MR HANSON: Good on you for the work you are doing; well done.

The committee adjourned at 4.37 pm.