



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2011-2012

(Reference: [Appropriation Bill 2011-2012](#))

Members:

MR B SMYTH (The Chair)
MS M HUNTER (The Deputy Chair)
MR J HARGREAVES
MR J HANSON
MS C LE COUTEUR

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 13 MAY 2011

Secretary to the committee:
Ms G Concannon (Ph 620 50129)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 21 January 2009

The committee met at 9 am.

DUNDAS, MS ROSLYN, Director, ACT Council of Social Service

THE CHAIR (Mr Smyth): Thank you all for attending the opening of 2011-12 estimates hearings. As chair, I have a statement to make. I would like to welcome you all to this public hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates and in this case thank you, Roslyn Dundas, CEO of ACTCOSS, for agreeing to meet with us today.

We have approximately 30 minutes for our discussion but before we begin I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the yellow coloured privileges statement before you on the table. I just have two questions. One, have you read the privilege card lying on the table before you and do you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Dundas: Yes and yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I also remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are also being webstreamed and broadcast live. The Assembly is also trialling Committees on Demand, which will allow the audio-visual record of proceedings to be publicly accessed on the website following the public hearings. As this is a trial, all audio-visual evidence will be removed from the website by 30 June 2011. Are you happy to proceed?

Ms Dundas: I am, Mr Smyth.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Dundas. Now, a few housekeeping matters. Please, all mobile phones are to be switched off or put into silent mode. Witnesses need to speak directly into the microphone for Hansard to be able to hear and transcribe them accurately. Only one person at a time is to speak and when witnesses come to the table they usually state their name and capacity in which they appear as they first speak. Before we proceed to questions from the committee, would you like to make a short opening statement?

Ms Dundas: I would, thank you very much, Mr Smyth. My name is Roslyn Dundas. I am the Director of the ACT Council of Social Service. ACTCOSS is the peak body for the community sector and for those living with and experiencing disadvantage here in the ACT. We review the budget every year with an eye on the impact it has on those organisations that support the most vulnerable in our community but also the flow-on effects it has for those who are living in disadvantage.

What we want to explore further in the 2011-2012 budget are issues around community sector viability generally, the support that is being offered to low income and disadvantaged families and how the broader framework of human rights is being progressed here in the territory.

There are a few overview things that I would just like to start off with. We prepared a submission as part of the ACT government budget consultation process which was provided to all members of the Assembly but I do have copies here that I am happy to

table for you all and a copy for the Secretariat. I also have copies of the snapshot that ACTCOSS prepares immediately following the budget, which you might not have seen yet, that outlines what we see as some key initiatives in a range of policy areas and raises some questions and concerns about some other issues.

What you will see from these documents is that certainly in our budget submission in December 2010 we made a number of recommendations—63 in total—across a range of topics. We believe that probably 38 of those have not been progressed and 25 have been considered in some way in terms of the budget for 2011-12.

The other key point that I wanted to highlight from our budget submission in December 2010 was that we raised concerns that since the budget submission process for the 2010-11 budget, which took place in September 2009, the community sector and the non-government sector more broadly had been asked to provide substantial input into a range of ACT government policy proposals and reviews and that we are working in a time of significant change of how we deliver our services through both federal and local reform.

We put together a list of 28 reviews, discussions and consultations of a substantive nature that the council had participated in in the 12 months between budget consultation processes. It is disappointing to say that not many of those review processes have been reflected in the budget for 2011-12. While there has been some response to some of the plans around taxi services, the whole-of-government family violence statement, the future of service delivery at Calvary hospital, transition for young people in care, issues around the women's health plan, the feed-in tariff, housing and homelessness, community facilities, the social plan and, to a certain extent, the reviews of the Alexander Maconochie Centre have not been truly picked up in the budget for 2011-12.

We had hoped that one of the last acts Jon Stanhope would undertake as Chief Minister would be to announce the new social plan. The last social plan has been in a review process since 2009. When I checked last night it had still not been updated; so it is disappointing that we do have a commitment to a clear strategic framework for the ACT through the Canberra plan and the plans that sit underneath that but we are then not seeing that reflected in how expenditure is prioritised through the budget process.

Moving on to topics, in terms of community sector viability we are interested in the government putting formally on the record through the estimates process their commitment to supporting the community sector through the pay equity case. We have had that commitment verbally in a number of different forums but whilst we are expecting the outcome of the pay equity case in the 2011-12 financial year, we do not know what the number will be yet. Fair Work Australia is still in consideration on just how much the base wages for those workers should be increased. So there is no talk of a pay equity case in this budget. As I said, the government has been supportive to date but we would like that backed up by some support formally on the record.

We are also concerned that the funding that has gone through in areas such as the increase in funding to disability services and the increase in funding to out-of-home care services is funding that is there to meet current demand. It is not there for future

growth. It is not there to actually expand services as they are needed or required and it is really only targeted at those two areas—disability and out-of-home care. Across the community sector we are experiencing significant demand.

I actually went back and read the transcript of evidence I provided this committee 12 months ago and very little has changed in terms of demand for the sector and the issues that the sector broadly is facing. It was disappointing to see that support for the not-for-profit sector in terms of capacity and demand was not addressed in this budget.

In terms of support for low income families, we were very relieved and pleased to see an increase in the utility concession by approximately \$131 per customer or household per year. This again is a significant catch up as the utility concession had been dropping behind the increases that were flown on to households for the costs of electricity and water. So it is pleasing that the government has taken a significant step.

What we would like to get more detail on, and perhaps the committee might like to take it up in the estimates process, is how the concession scheme will be placed to meet the impact of rising costs in the future, both of water and electricity, and how it will keep pace with those increasing costs. We have this discussion every year. Sometimes the concession goes up; sometimes it does not, but every year the cost goes up. So how can we develop the scheme to be robust in terms of those continual movements in prices for water and electricity—those main utilities?

The last point I would like to make, Mr Smyth, relates to the human rights framework that we have in the ACT. Budget paper 4 actually indicates that there is a reduction in funding going to the provision of the protection of rights framework in the ACT. It is not a significant drop but it is significant in terms of the work that we need to be doing to develop a human rights culture in the ACT.

The accountability indicators in the Justice and Community Safety directorate in relation to the protection of rights show that there has been a significant increase in the participants and community education and engagement around human rights—that people are interested in engaging on issues in relation to human rights. But there is not the increased funding that the commission needs to meet this demand and to support the community and to actually fulfil, I believe, the requirements of the Human Rights Commission Act. There is actually, I think, a constraint in activities indicated through the accountability indicators as the commission tries to deal with that lack of resources.

At a time when we are reviewing our correctional services, both in the juvenile justice area and through the adult system—these are meant to be processes that really, truly reflect and give life to the Human Rights Act—it is disappointing to see this constraint in funding for the Human Rights Commission and how we actually do our human rights work here in the territory.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Given that time is going to be tight today, we will just get straight to the nub of it, I suspect. On page 76 of budget paper 3, members, is the community sector funding rate. What is ACTCOSS's assessment of how effective the application of the rate is?

Ms Dundas: Certainly. The formula that recognises the combination of the wage price index and the consumer price index is better than a straight CPI increase. That reflects the fact that the bulk, somewhere between 70 and 80 per cent, of the cost of services in the community sector is our staff. Our key asset is our people and this formula recognises that. The concern that we have is that in this year's budget, last year's budget and the budget before that, there was an estimation that the community sector indexation would be 3.7 per cent, projected upon standard projections of what CPI and the wage price index would be in the outyears.

We have not had 3.7 per cent over the last three years and that has made it difficult for the sector to truly plan in terms of the future about what that indexation rate might be. It is also showing in Housing ACT, the Community Services directorate and the Health directorate as a cost saving to the government—so as part of the efficiencies. It is not money that we had in the bank, but it is money that we are not getting in terms of the calculations that are shown. For the 2011-12 year, we estimate that is around \$820,000 that could have come to the community sector, based on those projections, that is not, and there is a lot that we can do with \$820,000.

THE CHAIR: All right. Given that the \$820,000 is missing or has not been received as would have been expected, with the pay equity case rapidly approaching, what does one per cent in the pay equity rate do to the sector or what call will there be on government in the longer term?

Ms Dundas: I understand the ACT government has been working on some calculations to fully ascertain what the impact might be. The pay equity case put forward was to increase the base wages for the community sector in the award by anywhere between 17 to 30 per cent; so it is significant, would be the summary.

THE CHAIR: Supplementaries on those two issues?

MS HUNTER: Yes. I know that ACTCOSS—and I did go to the forum the day after the budget and there was a lot of concern around the fact that there was not money being put aside for expected pay increases that would come through the wage case. Do you see this as a problem for planning for services? Have you had any response from government as to why it has not been put into the forward estimates and have you had any commitment from them to fully fund those wage increases?

Ms Dundas: I will see whether I can get through those questions in reverse order, Ms Hunter. The commitment the government has made is to support the sector. The concept of fully funding is a difficult one to address, because I think the government is working on its obligations in relation to the service funding agreements it currently has. We need to recognise that a number of the services the community sector provides are not funded by government. In the ACT I think it is around a 60-40 split, that 60 per cent of the work that the community sector does is funded by the ACT government and 40 per cent is funded through donations, own-source income and other means.

So the pay equity case—the outcome of the award does not depend on where the funding comes from. It depends on the number of staff that we have. So whilst we have been quite heartened by the government's response to truly investigate this issue

and ensure that, as the federal government is responding to this issue as well—they are doing it not just from the industrial relations approach but a recognition of how services actually operate—we are nervous about the impact fully across the sector and how we might be able to respond to that. I would suggest that you speak to Minister Burch in relation to the work that the government has been doing and where they are up to in terms of their calculations.

MRS DUNNE: Could I follow up on the community sector indexation issue that you raised in your snapshot, Ms Dundas? Your concern, as I understand it, is that, if you look back at the previous set of outyears, the government always predicts that the indexation is at roughly 3.7, but it has never actually achieved that figure. You are concerned about the government's estimate of the rate of indexation. Have you had discussions with the government about refining their estimates? It seems that what it does, as it runs at the moment, is that they always overestimate, which allows them to have a notional saving the next year. That is not satisfactory for anybody.

Ms Dundas: No, it is not satisfactory, and I do not think it is satisfactory for government either in terms of how they are planning. It is based on a CPI indexation rate and wage price indexation rate, which I would expect the government is playing across all of their programs. So I expect it would have impacts everywhere; it is just that we feel it particularly in the community sector. We did raise this issue last year in estimates but have not fully explored it with government.

I think partly the response from government will be—and you will have to ask them—around the continual flow-on effects of the global financial crisis, which are impacting on wage price index and CPI. But in that regard, I would be very surprised if in the 2012-13 budget we are actually seeing a rate of community sector indexation of 3.7 per cent. We can make that assumption right now based on the information available to us through all the economic indicators, so it does impact on our capacity to plan for the future.

MRS DUNNE: But, also, if you backcast that indexation, they got it wrong before the GFC as well; is that the case?

Ms Dundas: Certainly over the last three years it has been. The community sector indexation rate has been lower than predicted the year before.

MRS DUNNE: Could I just clarify—the \$820,000, is that what you estimate that you will not get in this coming financial year?

Ms Dundas: In the 2011-12 financial year, based on the savings that have compounded over the last three years.

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, can you just expand on that? It is not a one-off saving this year? This is a cumulative saving?

Ms Dundas: Cumulative, yes. So the budget estimates include forecasts for the future four years, and this is a saving that had been found for the outyears in the last three budgets. So by the time we get to 2011-12, the compounding saving that has been found in the 2011-12 budget, the 2010-11 budget and the 2009-10 budget, for the

2011-12 year, it adds up to \$820,000 across the health, community services and housing areas.

MRS DUNNE: Okay, thank you.

MR HANSON: In the budget submission, you mentioned 38 recommendations which were not progressed. I am just wondering if you can tell me if you have had a response from the government about why that was and if there is any intention of progression at a later stage. Of those recommendations that you put forward that have not been progressed, what are the ones that really are key to progressing the agenda that you are trying to get through?

Ms Dundas: Certainly some of the recommendations relate to the pay equity case and community sector funding, which we have discussed. We also made some recommendations around human rights, education and advocacy that were not progressed. A range of recommendations in relation to alcohol and drug services and how those organisations engage with the AMC have not been progressed but may be progressed under the Burnett and Hamburger reports, but that is still unclear.

MR HANSON: Have you seen Burnett?

Ms Dundas: It is a lengthy document; I have not read it all the way through, but I certainly am very much aware of where it is heading. Then we made some recommendations in relation to the housing affordability issue here in the ACT and also a range of recommendations—

MR HANSON: And do you feel you have received a satisfactory response from the government? Did they just say no, or have they given you a detailed response in regard to those matters you raised?

Ms Dundas: Certainly in my time I have not seen any government provide a detailed response to all of the submissions that they get through the ACT budget consultation process. We have not sat down with government yet and worked through all 63 recommendations in total. Some of our recommendations are actually linked to the point that I raised earlier around the number of reviews and policy refocuses that the government is going through and how we actually implement them.

We would hope that the government would be able to respond to those policy changes by supporting funding through the budget in those key priority areas, and it is disappointing that that has not happened.

MR HANSON: So your participation in these reviews is not resulting in an outcome. You feel like you are spinning a few wheels that are more about the process rather than the outcome?

Ms Dundas: There is a significant number of documents that the ACT government currently has providing strategic direction for the delivery of any range of programs and services, and we are continually frustrated by the lack of resources to make those plans anything but documents that sit on the shelf.

MS LE COUTEUR: In your budget submission you make reference to the need for government to ensure that the community sector funding contracts include enough resources for staff training and development evaluation, admin support, supervision et cetera. What are the impacts of these resources not being included in the standard contracts, and what choices are you looking into groups having to make in terms of your funding because they are not in the contracts?

Ms Dundas: Thank you for the question. What the sector is looking for is the recognition that, as I said, staff are our biggest asset. If we are to do our job well, if we are to do our job so it best meets the needs of those that are disadvantaged, we need to support, develop and grow our staff.

The turnover rate for staff in the community sector is significantly higher than it is on average for other employment sectors, and that means we are continually having to redevelop knowledge, train staff and keep them moving forward. The impact this has on our service delivery is significant, but it also means that organisations are continually having to do a prioritisation between when they are going to get staff trained versus the impact of closing doors to do that.

Just to change the topic, this budget included funding for children's services community organisations to undertake the vocational training requirements that have been brought in in this part of federal reforms. We would like to see that expanded across the sector so that staff can ensure that their qualifications are up to date and continue to meet best practice so they are able to deliver the best for the community.

MRS DUNNE: So you are suggesting a sort of community sector study bank?

Ms Dundas: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Could I ask a question that goes back to the \$131 increase in the concession scheme. We saw a more modest increase last year, but we have also seen big hikes in electricity and water, and we expect that to continue. Does ACTCOSS have an appreciation of whether this \$131 is bringing the concessions back up to where they were, or are concessions still lagging?

Ms Dundas: We think this investment does the final bit of catch-up for the increases in costs that households were having to wear over the last five to six years where we saw electricity prices increase substantially but where last year's concession increase did not meet that backlog. This increase does, we think, go to meet that backlog, but the question is how it will go into the future.

MRS DUNNE: For the benefit of the committee, what is the maximum concession that a household can receive now?

Ms Dundas: Sorry, Mrs Dunne, I did not bring that detail with me.

MRS DUNNE: It is probably something we can pursue through the department.

Ms Dundas: They have that.

MS HUNTER: In the budget there were some announcements around increased money to the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. There is also money, I understand, for the purchase of two community buses. I think one is coming through TAMS and one through JACS. Have you had some feedback from your members around these initiatives?

Ms Dundas: The funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues in the 2011-12 budget is a bit of a double-edged sword. We raised the issue last year that there was a lack of funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the budget, so we were pleased when we saw a range of programs, especially around access to law and justice and some leadership support.

What further investigation revealed, however, was some concern that there was a bit of a double-up and perhaps a lack of discussion behind government doors about how this money could best be targeted and whether or not it responded to the needs of the community.

The money coming through the Justice and Community Safety directorate includes capital for a vehicle, as you have noted, Ms Hunter, to support transport associated with restorative justice. There is also funding under—I am sorry, I am not sure which directorate it is in the new world—TAMS through the transport for Canberra program to provide a dedicated community bus to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. My conversations with the community have indicated they would be happy with one bus and think that the money for a second bus could be better targeted to support the community in the areas that they need.

MRS DUNNE: One bus is good, but two buses are not necessarily twice as good?

Ms Dundas: Correct.

MS HUNTER: Did they indicate where those priorities might be? You have mentioned access to justice. Is that adequate?

Ms Dundas: We will need to see how it is rolled out. There is not a lot of detail in the budget paper, but it is pleasing that it will support adequate remuneration for panel members of the circle sentencing court; there is a lot of support for that. People have been doing this without being adequately remunerated due to their support for the community more generally.

To pick up on your question about the funding going to the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, it is interesting to see that this is perhaps the one initiative in the entire budget that is specifically targeted at extra staff for a government department. When there are staffing changes in the other departments, it is just part of the general revenue discussion. There was some concern that this money was targeted in that way when there is support for the elected body that could be put into place, greater support for education and community programs that I think the community would be interested in seeing.

THE CHAIR: We will have a quick, final question from Ms Le Couteur, then Mr Hanson, and then we will move on.

MS LE COUTEUR: With this budget, does the community sector feel that it has actually been involved and heard in the consultations? It sounds like the answer is no, given the answer you just gave around the two buses. Was that isolated or in general?

Ms Dundas: The buses were a bit of a surprise, so perhaps it was an isolated incident. I did make some reference to the range of consultations and recommendations that we have made over the past 12 months. We did see some of them progress, and I want to make that clear. The out-of-home care funding to support young people aged 18 to 25 to transition from out-of-home care arose from a series of consultations that both the Assembly and government have been undertaking. So that was one key area where we could see some changes. The changes proposed for wheelchair accessible taxis have been part of a conversation that has been going on for two years at least—probably 10 in total but in some detail over the last two years.

We have seen some progress in key areas, but considering the sheer number of consultations that have taken place over the last 12 months, not all of them have been progressed at the same level, not all of them have been prioritised or, to some extent, treated with the same respect in terms of the budget process.

MS LE COUTEUR: And it must take an awful lot of your resources to view the other side?

Ms Dundas: Our role as the Council of Social Service is to be involved in those policy discussions and advocate on behalf of the sector. We see ourselves working under the social compact, which talks about partnership with government and looking at how we, under a shared understanding, provide support to those who are our most vulnerable and in need in our community. Sometimes that works and sometimes it does not.

THE CHAIR: Jeremy, to close.

MR HANSON: I will defer to Mrs Dunne, who is itching to ask a question.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Hanson. So many questions, so little time. Could I go back to the point that you made about drug and alcohol in relation to the AMC. You have commented in your snapshot that there is no clear understanding of whether the drug and alcohol services that are provided by the non-government sector that they want in the AMC are actually being funded. How is the drug and alcohol sector able to provide services if there is no dedicated funding?

Ms Dundas: Our concern is that the contracts that the alcohol and drug services operate under were amended to recognise that there is a need for services at the AMC, but no additional resources were put towards that. The demand is being met within the AMC because services are stretching themselves. They recognise there is a need, and we work in this sector because we want to support those who need our services, and organisations are being stretched to meet that need. It is having an impact on community programs elsewhere, and organisations are continually having to prioritise where their energies are going to go day to day and how they are going to support their staff to meet increasing demand. Staff are being put under a lot of pressure at the

moment, and that is not sustainable in the long term.

MRS DUNNE: Have you or the sector been able to quantify the shortfall in funding as a result of extending their remit but not extending their budget?

THE CHAIR: This will have to be a very quick answer.

Ms Dundas: It will be a quick answer. ACTCOSS has not been able to do that work, but I am happy to follow up with the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association to see if they have.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Dundas, I know there is an immense amount in your document, and I would have gone to the funding for mental health facilities, but we have both your submission and your response. We thank you for that. To finish this part of the session, I need to advise that a copy of the transcript of the hearing will be provided to you to ensure the accuracy of your comments. Also, for the record, Mr Hargreaves sends apologies. Apparently the Labor Party had some sort of meeting this morning, so he will join us later. Thank you for that.

PEARCE, MRS VIVIENNE, Acting President, ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

BAGWORTH, MS MEGAN, Policy Officer, ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

JARMAN, MRS REBECCA, Secretary, ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for estimates this year. I am not sure if you were here when I made the opening statement, but I need to bring to your attention the buff-coloured card in front of you, which is the privilege statement. I need to know whether you have read the privilege card lying on the table before you and whether you understand the privilege implications of the statement.

Mrs Pearce: Yes.

Mrs Jarman: Yes.

Ms Bagworth: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mrs Pearce: Thank you for agreeing to meet with the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations. The ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations is the collective voice of parents of children in the ACT government school system. We are a not-for-profit non-government representative organisation. Council's objectives are to foster a quality public education system in the ACT, provide services for our affiliates and make representations to the government on behalf of parents of government school students.

This is an exciting time in ACT education. This next year will see the rollout of the national curriculum into ACT schools and further implementation of national professional standards for teachers. We are also eagerly awaiting the outcome of the review into improving ACT public high schools and colleges. However, we are concerned that what is needed to fund and facilitate these important initiatives has not been adequately provided for in the budget. While it is pleasing to see that the efficiency dividend has been lifted from the Education and Training directorate and new money provided for students with disabilities, the council is not convinced that the budget provides appropriate funding to ensure that the directorate can achieve its stated 2011 and 2012 priorities or successfully implement its 2011 operational plan.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. The survey that you filled in to assist the committee says that you put a submission in to the government. Under the question "Do you think the budget has addressed the issues raised," you have said no. The area of concern seems to be the level of funding. I note that in paragraph 3.2 in your statement you say:

It is concerning that despite the increasing shift in enrolments from public to private schools, the Budget fails to provide sufficient funding for improving ACT public high schools and colleges.

Would you like to detail what you see are the particular failings or say what the lack of funding means for high schools and colleges?

Mrs Pearce: Megan, I think you can answer that.

Ms Bagworth: Yes. The 2011 census noted that, for the first time in the ACT, public high school enrolments are actually lower than the enrolments for non-government high schools. And the review into improving ACT public high schools and colleges—as council understands it, the goal of that review was to investigate measures that will make public schools the school of choice for ACT parents. In the budget we see that there is \$750,000 over the two-year period, and there is no extra funding past that two-year period. It is to be funded internally. That requires a shift from programs that are already funded within the directorate. We are concerned that the good recommendations that we believe will come from this review perhaps will not be able to have their full effect unless they are appropriately funded. That requires new money.

MS HUNTER: Have you been part of any discussions or consultations with the department around where that money could be reallocated from? Have you been informed about where that money might be coming from?

Mrs Pearce: I can probably answer that from the discussions I had yesterday with the department. At the moment, no is really the answer: we do not know exactly where this money is going to be coming from. It has not been obviously detailed—certainly not to us at this present moment. That is why we are concerned. The review is an important initiative to stop the drain of students away from our public education system so that we have a viable public education system. So we are very concerned.

MS LE COUTEUR: Have you got a view as to why there is the drain from the public to the private education system? I suppose I should ask you to do it in less than half an hour; this is a big topic.

Mrs Pearce: Yes; it is a difficult question, but really it comes back to perceived parent satisfaction. The whole idea of the review was to ask parents. We have made detailed submissions; we have talked to various forums.

Ms Bagworth: We ran a survey; we also held focus groups with parents. We had a very good response from parents in response to this review, which helped in our response to the department for their referral. But even if you look at the parent satisfaction in government schools, it has actually decreased to 81 per cent compared to last year, which was 85 per cent. That is a significant decrease in parent satisfaction. From what we found from the survey and from the focus groups, we think that parents just perceive that the quality of education in the government schools is just not up to the standard of the private schools. There is a perception that public schools are not able to appropriately cope with disengaged and disinterested learners and that there are a number of different types of students within a class and, given the lack of resources and the lack of help with teaching, the classroom teacher is just not able to cope with the different learning needs of the different students within one class.

MS LE COUTEUR: You mentioned that the satisfaction rate has gone down. Do you

think that is because the situation in the schools has actually decreased or have expectations changed?

Mrs Pearce: We have been asking for things like more counsellors and additional literacy and numeracy teachers, particularly in colleges now that we are retaining more students there. We see nothing in the budget. We do not think there is adequate money within the \$11.8 million for the pot for teachers—that these additional people are going to be funded that are going to help students that are at risk in the high schools and colleges. We think that the drain to private schools occurs because if you get in a class a child with unmet needs—whether they be literacy needs, mental health issues or something coming from their family—you need to address those for the class to function properly. And we do not feel that enough resources are being put into that area.

MS HUNTER: Can I just clarify something with the census. It does show, as you said, a drift, but we are talking about high schools, aren't we? We are still retaining in primary school—

Mrs Pearce: Yes.

MS HUNTER: and we are retaining at college level.

Mrs Pearce: Yes.

Ms Hunter: So it seems to be these high school years that we need to concentrate on.

Mrs Pearce: But remember that if you change over to a different system at high school, it is much more likely that you will continue with that school into the college area. You do get some students moving back from the private system into the college system, but it is crucial at that high school level, and that is why this review and having proper money to implement changes are very important.

THE CHAIR: A new question?

MS HUNTER: Yes. You talk about career paths for teachers and school leaders. There is \$11.8 million allocated, and it is a reasonable sum of money. You say that it will only go so far. Can you outline areas of priority from your perspective, and do you see recruitment and retention issues as part of the problem into the future?

Mrs Pearce: It sounds like a lot of money that could be really good—\$11.8 million over four years. But when you look at what has got to come out of that pot, there just seem to be too many things. The things that have got to come out of that pot that we as a council see and that parents are telling us are these. First, we have got to give our ACT teachers a competitive salary, compared particularly to New South Wales. At the present moment, a deputy in the ACT gets eight to 15 per cent less than in New South Wales. Obviously you are going to get a drain. You have got to give an adequate competitive salary.

Also, there have been announcements that salaries of \$100,000 will be given to lead teachers. The number quoted is 200. We just cannot see that there is enough money in

the pot for that as well. Also, it has been floated for a number of years that it is not only attracting teachers but keeping them that is the issue. It is crucial that in the first year out, we keep those first-year teachers that come into our system and they are properly supported. Various things have been put up—things like a reduced timetable load, which many years ago worked quite well. Another thing is mentorship, because we have a high attrition rate in that first year of teaching. It is just such a shock when they actually come into the education system. It all needs money.

In addition to that, as I have said before, there is a huge need for more counsellors and for literacy and numeracy specialists in both high schools and, particularly, colleges—there are not any there. With the retention of more students who would have previously gone into the workforce, that is very important. We just have not got a big enough pot there; that is our perception.

Mrs Jarman: Could I add something?

Mrs Pearce: Yes, Rebecca.

Mrs Jarman: I am a mother who has two very young children in kindergarten and year 1. Speaking from the perspective of the retention of teachers, I have just experienced, at the end of my kindergarten student's first term, his teacher resigning—the first year out teaching, exactly speaking to this point. It is critical. I am certainly an advocate for public education and quality public education. Looking long term down the track, my commitment certainly is to have my children in public education for their whole school career. But that is a very disruptive situation for kindergarten students to deal with in their first experience of full-time education.

I think one of the issues that we certainly perceive with this pot is the rollout of the national curriculum next year—the trialling now and then the full rollout next year. Where is the professional development going to be funded for the teachers to be able to do that really adequately and successfully and support the students and get what they need? So that is definitely a concern.

MS HUNTER: You have definitely picked up in your survey around that point that there is not the money in the professional development pot, particularly when we are looking at the rollout of the national curriculum. Again, have the department or the minister let you know how they intend to ensure that all teachers are across the new national curriculum?

Mrs Pearce: No, it is a bit of a mystery at the moment. There was no money in the budget for more professional development. We are hearing there is not enough there already. It is not only the curriculum. Teachers are constantly being asked to implement new ICT solutions and new initiatives. Already there is not enough money in that area and we have got all these new initiatives coming up. The national curriculum is a biggie. Where is the money coming from?

THE CHAIR: We are getting tight on time. We will have a supplementary and then a second question.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Good morning, Mrs Pearce. It is very

nice to see you here—and your colleagues. Obviously you have mentioned there is a high level of concern regarding the retention of teachers and the ability to fulfil current needs. You have mentioned extra relief teaching being funded. My understanding from previous discussions with your organisation is that you are concerned also about the number of relief teachers. So funding itself is not going to be the solution because there just are not enough relief teachers. Or is that because of funding?

Mrs Pearce: Part of the problem is probably the salaries. If you can do work as a relief teacher at Queanbeyan and Yass and get more money, you might consider that. In terms of relief teaching, it also comes back to the professional development thing. You cannot do professional development and expect teachers to do it all after they have taught all day. You actually have to provide some additional relief to do it properly. If you want it done properly and rolled out to a large number of teachers the relief staff have to be there.

MR DOSZPOT: With all of these concerns that you have enunciated so far and the fact that we are the only jurisdiction that has taken on the national curriculum implementation—no other jurisdiction has taken it on at this stage, as I understand it—do you feel that we are putting additional pressure on our teachers that is not necessarily required at the moment?

Mrs Pearce: As parents we are all really excited about the national curriculum. Rebecca, do you want to say something about that?

Mrs Jarman: I think someone always has to lead the way. As a parent, I think it is very valuable that we roll out the national curriculum, but there is a concern about how it is actually going to be implemented and whether it can be done successfully. Currently it does not seem to be mapped out.

MR DOSZPOT: If you have not got relief teachers to give our teachers the opportunity to upgrade their qualifications or their involvement with the national curriculum does that mean it is a self-defeating exercise at the moment? Is it better to do something correctly or to half do it like we are doing at the moment?

Mrs Pearce: We really like some of the initiatives in the national curriculum, such as sustainability being taught across the curriculum. In the ACT we like to be leaders. We have led in lots of ways, but to do it properly it needs to be funded properly. I am having a bet each way with that answer.

THE CHAIR: Good. We might move on.

MR DOSZPOT: There is a leading edge and a bleeding edge.

THE CHAIR: We will finish there, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: I have one more question, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIR: You can come back to it in a minute. Ms Hunter, a quick question and then a final—and we have to be quick.

MS HUNTER: Budget paper 3 talks about increased front-line support in primary schools. There has been this move to give schools greater autonomy and part of that is going to be the hiring of business managers. Do you believe the funding will be adequate to be able to attract a person with the right sort of calibre—someone who has the right qualifications?

Mrs Pearce: It is really good that the money was there. From the P&C council's point of view, it was good to see the money there. There has been a trend over a long period of time to put more and more on the teachers and have less administrative support. What was the last part of your question?

MS HUNTER: It was really about whether there is adequate funding to provide the sorts of salaries that would attract people with the right qualifications.

Mrs Pearce: Megan, do you want to—

Ms Bagworth: It depends how the schools will eventually use it. It will be put back to the school as to how they want to use those funds. Hopefully it is enough. We would like to see more administrative support within the schools so there is less of a burden on the teachers and they do not have to spend their time on these red tape issues. But it is a good start. We are happy with that and we would like to see that continue.

THE CHAIR: A quick final and then we will close.

MR DOSZPOT: As well as your concerns about extra relief teachers and teacher salaries, have you received much feedback from the parents within your association about teacher librarians and what is happening in that area? Do you feel there are a sufficient number of teacher librarians in the system at the moment?

Mrs Pearce: Megan, can you answer that one?

Ms Bagworth: As we understand it, there has been a decrease in the number of teacher librarians, which is quite concerning. We really want ACT public schools to be up there in terms of providing good library services to students to provide them with good research skills. We really need teacher librarians there to provide this resource. That is one area that we did not note in our budget submission for this year, but it is something that we are aware of and concerned about.

MR DOSZPOT: Are you aware of how many schools are currently operating without teacher librarians?

Ms Bagworth: I would not be able to give you the figure right now. It is something that I could follow up.

MR DOSZPOT: Okay.

THE CHAIR: That would be a good place to finish. If you can follow up and provide that to the committee, we will say thank you for your attendance this morning. A copy of the transcript will be provided to ensure accuracy or clarification. We thank you for

your commentary and your submission.

Mrs Pearce: Thank you for the chance to have a say.

LINKE, MR MICHAEL, Chief Executive Officer, RSPCA

THE CHAIR: I welcome Mr Michael Linke, the CEO of the ACT RSPCA. Michael, I am sure you are aware of the privilege card in front of you. Have you read the card that is on the table before you and do you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Linke: Yes, I have read it and I do understand it, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIR: This is being broadcast and recorded by Hansard. We are also doing Committees on Demand, which will allow the proceedings to be an audiovisual record, so that the public can view them later. I just want you to be aware of that. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Linke: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to present today. I will start by saying that the staff, volunteers, governing council and I at RSPCA were very disappointed with the outcomes of the budget. We have been working with the government for a significant period of time and providing detailed information. We only received an increase of \$150,000 in our overall funding, so that came as a surprise, and something that we were quite disappointed about.

We have been working with the government for about six years now in trying to get the right model and the right service level agreement in place. We are hoping to tweak that and continue to work on that. But we were very disappointed that not a lot of that happened in the last 12 months.

One of the concerns is the continuing refusal of the government to accept responsibility for what are core services that the government should deliver, similar to other jurisdictions and states where local council pounds deliver those services. We see the government as a local council pound in regard to stray animal management, looking after companion animals as well as livestock and wild animals.

As I said, we were advised of a \$150,000 increase last week, taking our total funding to about \$570,000. We believe that is about half a million dollars short of what it costs us to deliver those services on behalf of the government.

It is important to stress that the request for funding is not because RSPCA is poorly managed, or because we are short of funds, or because the community does not support us. The request for funds is a simple request for payment towards services that RSPCA delivers on behalf of the ACT government over and above our day-to-day services. We are quite happy to run a surrendered animal service, neglected animal services, discounted veterinary services and those types of services, but when it comes to animal management, which is the responsibility of the ACT government under the companion animals act, we would expect that government should fund that service, whether through Territory and Municipal Services, through the local council pound, through outsourcing it to another organisation or through outsourcing it to RSPCA. It is something that they have done but they have not paid for it.

The government commissioned an independent audit report of RSPCA in November last year. The auditors found that RSPCA's request for funding was verifiable and

supportable, as well as being valid. The independent auditors also wanted RSPCA to work with the ACT government to develop a new contract and asked that RSPCA undertake an independent cost review of all of our services. The auditors also found that RSPCA was well managed financially and that we have managed our funds very well in the last three years.

This report was handed to government in December 2010. Why did it take government five months to provide us with the report? Why weren't we invited to provide a cost analysis to the government to determine the budget allocation? Why, after the budget, did we receive that advice with no opportunity to negotiate or deal with the contract? We have been given a contract in the last two days and we have got six weeks to finalise that contract. It appears that there is no room for negotiation or no opportunity.

That will leave us in a difficult position. We will have to look at our service model and look at shutting some of our facility and making it not available to stray animals, putting additional pressure on Territory and Municipal Services. I note that there will be a new minister coming in to Territory and Municipal Services, and we would like to make sure that funding has been allocated and provided for what looks like an additional 3½ thousand animals if RSPCA are not able to cover the costs of that care.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. Is the audit a public document, and is it available to the committee?

Mr Linke: I do not know. It was commissioned by the government, so that is something you would need to check with the government. You could probably get it under FOI.

THE CHAIR: Committees have other powers. The longstanding issue of a new location for the RSPCA: has that been resolved?

Mr Linke: At this stage, no. I did not note any capital figures in the budget, but I have been advised by the department that plans are still progressing—how fast, I do not know. It is a conversation I have had with the government for five years. Every day we see more and more development work at Molonglo encroaching on the RSPCA facility there. There is no money in the budget this year. Unless there are any capital funds in somebody's bottom drawer, I do not know where that funding is going to come from. So I suspect it is still a long-term project.

MS LE COUTEUR: Have you got a time line? You said long term but they have not—

Mr Linke: We keep getting told, "One to two years, we're keen to start, we want to work together, Michael."

MS LE COUTEUR: It is always one to—

MR HANSON: Just around the next corner.

Mr Linke: Exactly. Until cabinet puts a \$15 million or \$20 million sum in the budget

against capital works in Canberra, we are going to continue to operate on our current site. We have got a 40-year lease on our current site, so we are comfortable where we are into the long term. It is old, it is dilapidated, it is not coping with demands currently, but, as always, charities make do.

MR HANSON: Maybe there is room in the new office building.

Mr Linke: Maybe.

MS HUNTER: Michael, the RSPCA is obviously disappointed in this budget, in not receiving the sorts of funds necessary to continue the services that you deliver. You do have a contract with the government and within that contract there are clauses that talk about joint reviews, renegotiation of outputs and so forth, particularly when you find that you just cannot deliver the same number of services for a particular amount of money. Have you requested a joint review of some of those outputs and so forth? If you have, what has been the response?

Mr Linke: We have sat down with government. I think I started this conversation about 18 months or two years ago with the then Chief Minister's senior adviser—talking about additional funding off budget and having a negotiation; our contract was ending.

Interestingly, the terms of our current contract say that the amount must be negotiated every year. That has never really happened. We put a budget submission in. We do not get any phone calls or any negotiation and then on budget night it is all announced. I scour the figures or two days later we get a phone call: "Hey Michael, we couldn't give you any more money." To me, that is not a negotiation. That is just an arbitrary decision that government has taken based on our budget proposal, with no to and fro.

This year I think there was a lot more because the government commissioned an independent audit report. We thought in November, when that audit report commenced, that it was fantastic as it had finally given us a real opportunity to show our real costs, to show the expenditure, to show the work that we are doing for government and the government would take that advice.

That audit report found that our figures were valid, they were verifiable and the recommendation was that RSPCA be provided with that funding. The government chose to ignore that report and plucked an arbitrary figure out of the air. Again, has there been negotiation? I do not think so. Have we been open and honest? Yes. Have we shared every fact and figure about our organisation with an independent auditor? Yes, we have. But still that advice has been ignored. So I do not know whether animal welfare is a real priority for the government.

MS LE COUTEUR: The contract sets out, as I understand it, basically the services that RSPCA will provide, but as far as I know it does not really say, as there are three basic areas, how much money goes where and, possibly even more importantly, how many of the services you are going to provide—how many dogs, cats and native wildlife. Have these numbers ever been discussed or agreed with the territory? I suppose we already have the answer but have you analysed the numbers of animals, which I believe are going upwards, and what impact does this have on your costs?

Mr Linke: We have analysed them. The government has an open-ended contract. I think the words the government used were: “We want to make a contribution to your costs, Michael. We don’t want to actually fund, dollar for dollar, the cost per animal.” The auditors suggested that that is a model that should be introduced. I think that is a perfect model because then government pays for what we do. If we do 10 per cent more dogs then there is a cost contribution of 10 per cent more. If we do 10 per cent less dogs then the government experiences savings. So there might be motivation for government to implement legislation and policy to assist reduced intake.

That is what we are hoping for. The new draft contract that I received yesterday—I must admit I have not read it in total; I have only had it for 24 hours—does not appear to have any numbers or specifics in it. Again, it is a contribution contract. The government has agreed to contribute in total \$570,000 and we are to look after lost animals. The figure for that is nought to infinity. So I am going to have to make some decisions and say, “The capacity of my facility to manage stray animals is X,” and it will be less than what it is currently.

MS LE COUTEUR: What happens to the stray animals if you cannot look after them?

Mr Linke: That is the issue that we have addressed with government. We have spoken to the government about that and the government have said, “Don’t worry, Michael”—that they have the capacity to do that. I do not know where. We only have a dog pound in Canberra with capacity for about 50 or 60 dogs. We do not have anywhere for stray cats to go. The government have no facility. I do not think they have any expertise in looking after cats and managing cat disease. So I do not know whether that has been effectively thought out.

Also, I do not think thought has been given by the government about the fact that RSPCA staff are paid 15 per cent to 20 per cent less than government employees and that we generate 30 per cent of our income through donations and goodwill—something the government would not be able to do. So if the government decided to take on additional companion animal management, as is their role as the local council, it would cost significantly more than the half a million that the RSPCA asked for in the budget. Again, I am at a loss as to why government is not looking at this as a really inexpensive way of managing animals when we have got the facility and expertise to do it already.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: In other states and town councils, the government plays a more active role in companion animals and in strays. It essentially lets you pick up the can. Is that basically what has happened?

Mr Linke: Yes. In New South Wales, as an example, there are 172 council pounds that have council run dog pounds and there are 12 RSPCA shelters. Now, RSPCA contracts to some of those councils for payment to manage those pounds on behalf of the New South Wales government. That does not happen here in the ACT. We have the ACT government, which has a pound. Any excess to that capacity just flows to

RSPCA.

So all I am saying to the government is let us put in place exactly what other states have. It happens in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. RSPCA manages the pound facility—essentially what we do now. I have got a pound facility. Stray animals come to me but the government is paying about 20c in the dollar to the value of those services. I am saying that it is time to up the ante.

MR HANSON: How far away are you from either reducing services or cancelling services?

Mr Linke: I am six weeks away. Our contract ends on 30 June. We have got a new contract that we need to negotiate. If we are unable to negotiate an increase in funding commensurate with what we need we will need to look at reducing services and reducing facilities. I think the Chief Minister, the outgoing Chief Minister, said that in the paper last week—that RSPCA needs to manage its services based on the funding that it has got. So I will take his advice and that is what we will have to do.

MR HANSON: And you will outline what services will no longer—

Mr Linke: We will. When we sit down with government and start to negotiate the contract. We will outline the services that we are cutting. Some of the services that we do are picking up stray animals across Canberra, which is the responsibility of rangers. When the rangers cannot do this, they ring us or Canberra Connect ring us.

MR HANSON: So that would be one of the services that would go?

Mr Linke: That would be a service that would go. We would convert some of our facility perhaps to commercial boarding. So rather than putting stray animals in it I would use it as an income earning facility. Then that would be available for the government to rent from us or the government would need to rent facilities in one of the commercial boarding facilities across Canberra to house stray animals. We would look at discontinuing some of the mental health services and low income support services that we offer—long-term care for these people.

I want to deliver all these services but I am going to have to cut my cloth to match the income that I am going to generate next year, remembering that we are already in a difficult economic climate. Donations and that type of support and bequests are down across the board not only for RSPCA but for all charities. It is a difficult time. We cannot borrow. We would hope that governments who have activities to run deficit budgets could look at \$200,000 or \$300,000 extra. [It is a very small amount when you look at some of the spending that the government is putting into other priority areas such as sport and supporting interstate sporting teams.

THE CHAIR: Ms Bresnan?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, chair. You mentioned legislation previously in your answer to one of the questions. In terms of current legislative measures, do they have an impact on your capacity to deal with the number of animals that you have coming into the shelter—particularly, I guess, in relation to desexing and those sorts of issues?

Does that impact on you?

Mr Linke: It does indeed because desexing—every year we are seeing continual increases of kittens coming in specifically. We have mandatory desexing here in Canberra, which is fantastic and RSPCA is a staunch supporter of mandatory desexing. We have had it for 11 years now, I think. But it is never managed, it is never monitored, it is never policed, it is never enforced. So people go to pet shops, people go to the newspaper, people go to the internet and buy an undesexed animal because there is no desexing at point of sale, which is a flaw. I think desexing should be introduced at the point of sale because RSPCA ends up with litters of these animals. So these animals get taken home, they mate. The person has bought their cute puppy or their cute cat and all of a sudden they have got six more puppies or six more cats. What do they do? They take them to RSPCA.

If that was tightened up you would get a reduction in the number of animals coming in if mandatory desexing was policed or introduced at point of sale. If you had more policing of the sale of animals—not necessarily banned but more policing around sales and more regulation around the sale of animals—you would be able to better manage the flow of animals into the territory from puppy farms.

RSPCA has closed puppy farms down in New South Wales and Queensland and it stops the flow of intensively bred puppies flooding the market through the internet, through classified advertising; so tightening up those areas—not necessarily banning the sale. RSPCA accepts people are going to get animals, but it needs to be regulated and focused. If we tap away at that end, it will save some expenditure at our end.

THE CHAIR: Does the RSPCA have any trend data over the last couple of years and projections as to what the need is and what the unmet need is?

Mr Linke: Yes, and we have supplied that to the government a number of times. I have got 10 years worth of very robust, very reliable data now with trend analysis and trend lines of where animals are going, plus you factor in the additional increases when we build another 50,000 homes in Canberra and all these people own animals. The ownership of animals has stayed consistently in the 63 to 65 percentile range in the community; so you add another 50,000 households, there is another 30,000 animals.

THE CHAIR: Can you provide the committee with that data?

Mr Linke: Happy to provide the committee with that data.

MS LE COUTEUR: Can I just continue on the question about services? It seems fairly clear that you will not be able to provide all that is required and we will talk about it later, but it is unlikely that the government will pick up the slack. What is this likely to lead to for the animals of the ACT? Is it going to end up with more euthanasia?

Mr Linke: Well, that is my—

MS LE COUTEUR: Without wishing to sound alarmist, but I am sort of going

through logically what—

Mr Linke: That is my—

MS LE COUTEUR: Is that where we are heading?

Mr Linke: That is my gravest concern and I hate to be flippant about it. Sometimes I think governments rely on that fact, the goodwill of the organisation that would never allow that to happen. I could never knowingly send a cat or dog to another agency where the outcome would be likely euthanasia.

We run a very low euthanasia rate through our facility. We are recognised internationally for the work that we are doing and some of the homing strategies that we are using. To knowingly send animals off that may get euthanased is disappointing to me and it is regrettable that the government would allow that to happen for the sake of a quarter of a million dollars or \$350,000. It is ridiculous to me that we are ending up in this scenario.

THE CHAIR: Ms Bresnan, a final question from you perhaps?

MS BRESNAN: No, I am fine. Thanks.

THE CHAIR: The implications of the new offer on staffing, will it lead to a reduction of staff?

Mr Linke: It may well do that if we reduce some of our capabilities. If we convert some of our capabilities to income earning capabilities, then obviously we will retain those staff and we have income generation. But if we just reduce capacity, we would remove a vehicle, which would mean that we would remove a person from driving that vehicle. But we need to look at it across the board. We employ a lot of casual people. There would be a reduction of casual hours that were used; so those casual people would need to pick up casual shifts elsewhere in the community.

There are a whole range of things, but that is the whole ambit of what we are currently going through now. Now that I have got the audit report and a contract, something we waited for for five months, we have now got six weeks and a bit of pressure on us to deliver when we would have appreciated that information in November-December before decisions were made about funding and we could have solved these problems.

THE CHAIR: You obviously undertake a lot of fundraising. I understand there is a ball coming up. A free ad for the RSPCA would read as—

Mr Linke: We have got our ball on June 18 and we have got our million paws walk this Sunday. We have already have over 3,000 dogs registered; so it is going to be a big day on Sunday. I think it sends a message to government how in love we are with our animals and how important RSPCA is to the community.

It is just continually disappointing and regrettable to me that the government has not taken our calls for funding over the last two years more importantly. We have had to tap into capital reserves—bequests that people have left us, funding for capital

investment to build buildings, to buy vehicles, to replenish computers and infrastructure. That income, that asset, has been used to fund government services, which is criminal to me.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Linke. A transcript of the hearing will be provided to ensure accuracy. We look forward to getting the trend data that you have promised. Best of luck in your negotiations with the government.

Mr Linke: Thank you.

HOLLAND, MR TONY, Chief Executive Officer, Arthritis Australian Capital Territory Incorporating Osteoporosis ACT

THE CHAIR: Mr Holland, welcome to the estimates committee of the ACT Assembly. There is a privilege statement in front of you, and I have to ask you two questions: have you read the privilege card lying on the table, and do you understand the implications of the statement?

Mr Holland: Yes, I have, and yes, I do.

THE CHAIR: All right. For your information, this is being recorded, webstreamed and broadcast live and will also be available on Committees on Demand as a trial that will finish on 30 June. Are you happy to proceed?

Mr Holland: Yes, I am.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Holland: Thank you. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to address the committee this morning. Before I begin, I would like to express our appreciation to the ACT government for the provision of the funding that we receive, because without this financial assistance we simply would not be able to continue our important work.

Ladies and gentlemen, according to recent reports by the Australian Health and Wellbeing Institute, arthritis, with nearly one in five Australians, is the leading cause of disability and workplace disengagement in our country. In 2007 the total cost of arthritis to the Australian economy was estimated to be \$23.9 billion, an increase of more than \$4 billion on the costs calculated by Access Economics in 2004. Almost half of this is due to the non-financial costs, while health costs, including hospitals, pharmaceuticals and aged care, account for around 20 per cent. A further 17 per cent of total costs are productivity costs reflecting the impact of arthritis on employment and workforce participation in Australia.

In addition to the huge impact of arthritis, our organisation is also the peak osteoporosis health promotion body in the ACT. In the words of Associate Professor Paul Smith from the Canberra Hospital, we need to be preparing for the tsunami of osteoporosis to arrive in the next 10 years. According to a 2011 study by the Health and Wellbeing Institute, it is estimated that close to 700,000 Australians have medically diagnosed osteoporosis, although, due to the nature of the disease, the real incidence is likely to be much more significant than this.

Anecdotally, this disease is seen to be the most poorly diagnosed by the medical community and poorly understood by consumers. By the very nature of the disease, it is commonly known as the silent killer due to the fact that people are not aware that they have the disease until they suffer a fracture. The direct cost of osteoporosis in 2004-05 was over \$300 million, although the real cost is clearly significantly greater than this.

Ladies and gentlemen, these diseases place a huge burden on the healthcare budgets, a

burden that will continue to increase unless more can be done in the areas of awareness, education, management strategies and as well, of course, access to high quality and affordable healthcare and medication. Arthritis ACT has been working in the ACT community for over 30 years providing trusted information, advice, quality programs and services and support networks for people with chronic conditions. Although the burden and effects of these diseases are immense, there is much that can be done and is being done to ameliorate the impacts on both the individual and the community.

In a study recently completed by Arthritis Australia entitled “The ignored majority: the voice of arthritis 2011”, some alarming findings were highlighted. Of the more than 1,000 Australians with arthritis included in this survey, less than one-third indicated they were coping well. Fifty-two per cent said they were doing fairly badly and 16 per cent said they were doing badly. The report found a person’s ability to cope had nothing to do with the severity of the disease, their age, their income level, their level of health cover or where they lived. It was, however, directly related to how much access they had to what they considered to be proper treatment options.

The main areas of concern were essentially all treatment related, including perceived poor quality medical care, an inadequate understanding of the disease in the medical community, poor access to rehabilitation, poor access to effective pain relieving medications and poor community understanding. Additionally, half of those surveyed said that the disease affected their ability to work and put strain on their relationships with friends and family. The report also estimates that there are 2.6 million Australians who suffer needlessly from chronic pain by arthritis.

Arthritis Australia President, Professor Patrick McNeil, says only about one-third of people cope well with pain, while two-thirds of people suffer. He says the healthcare system is not comprehensive enough. The issue is that over the last 15 years we have actually had some fantastic breakthroughs in managing certain types of arthritis. One of the problems, unfortunately, is that there is not enough awareness amongst the medical practitioners of what can be done, and so there is the view that arthritis is something you have got to cope with and not much can be offered. It seems clear, Professor McNeil says, that the current healthcare system is not comprehensive enough and is not bringing together different health professionals such as physical therapists, occupational therapists, GPs, specialists into a more comprehensive model of care than is provided currently in the healthcare system.

Arthritis ACT provides more services than I have time to talk about, and it is a salient point to note that total staffing for our organisation is two full-time equivalent staff. Arthritis ACT delivers these services, but the low level of funding means that, to reach our community, the number of services we can deliver is extremely limited because we are largely reliant on our 80 volunteers. As can be seen from the information that I have presented today, the community’s need is enormous. Our need is for additional funding to allow us to increase our reach to the community to deliver high quality and effective programs to support the individual and also the community, the medical fraternity and others.

Ladies and gentlemen, our current contract with the ACT government is to provide services to the community. Although very much appreciated, \$116,000 per annum is

well below what is required to meet the need. The request of Arthritis ACT is for this funding to be doubled to around \$250,000 per annum on an ongoing basis at the earliest possible time to ensure that the cost-effective, evidence-based and high quality services and programs we deliver can be provided to a much larger number of individuals and community groups in the ACT. Our strong belief is that it will not only increase access but it will also save healthcare costs. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity, and I welcome your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for that, Tony.

MR HANSON: The immediate doubling takes care, I suppose, of the need you see right now?

Mr Holland: Yes.

MR HANSON: But you are talking about the tsunami that is coming, particularly for osteoporosis?

Mr Holland: Absolutely.

MR HANSON: What is the sort of long-term need that you would envisage if you could increase the awareness programs and some of the support programs you are running? Have you done that analysis?

Mr Holland: We have not gone that far out yet. However, we are a very efficient organisation. We deliver a large number of services extremely efficiently, and there is not a significant increased need for funding over the longer term. We can do a lot more with a little bit more. Obviously as the need arises, as that bubble of the baby boomers increases across the age, there will significantly be an increasing number of people with arthritis and osteoporosis in the ACT. At the moment, we estimate there are around 70,000 people with arthritis and osteoporosis in the ACT, and in the next 20 years that could easily double.

MS BRESNAN: What has been your level of funding, say, over the last five years? You talked about burden of disease and the analysis that has been done about that. Has that been taken into account, or has it primarily been just typical CPI increases?

Mr Holland: CPI. I have been in this role for three years, and, unfortunately, I have been unaware of this opportunity to actually state our case to government. Our funding three years ago was around \$102,000. It is currently \$115,000, and has been indexed to \$119,000. It just clearly is nowhere near enough to run a viable organisation. Although we are extremely efficient and run services way beyond our level of capacity, our opportunity to do more is very limited because of a lack of funding.

MS BRESNAN: In terms of the burden of disease that you have mentioned, has there been any analysis that you are aware of in terms of a program fund to actually build that in?

Mr Holland: Sorry?

MS BRESNAN: You mentioned that the burden of disease is a leading cause of disability. Are you aware of any analysis—whether it is by government or whoever—that has been done in terms of working out what should be the level of funding you are getting as an organisation to reflect that burden of disease?

Mr Holland: I am not aware of any such studies, but I would be very keen to read them. No, I am sorry, I am not.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you.

MR DOSZPOT: Mr Holland, first of all I would like to congratulate you and your association on the way that you recognised your volunteers the other day. It was very good to see that you are helping the people who are helping you.

Mr Holland: Thank you.

MR DOSZPOT: That always is the best base to start from—

Mr Holland: Sure.

MR DOSZPOT: but you cannot do much without adequate funding. Is there currently a list of priority areas where you desperately need to implement some activities at the moment? Do you have a priority for those?

Mr Holland: There are a number of areas that we are currently working on that we need to expand, yes; for example, hydrotherapy. We deliver around 700 sessions of hydrotherapy in the ACT community every year. We have four pools that we access. We are the largest provider, other than the hospital, of hydrotherapy services—all run by volunteers. We currently have around 220 people—there should be 2,000 people—in that program. Our capacity is to get to those people and actually show them the benefit. There is huge benefit from hydrotherapy for people with arthritis and many other chronic conditions, stroke recovery victims and so on. So that is one area, one classic area.

Community education: we have currently around 1,500 people we actively communicate with, of the 70,000 people that have arthritis. So we need to be communicating with 10,000 people, 15,000 people on a regular basis. We run many good quality seminars and education events and I think it is simply because of people not being aware of our services that we do not have more people coming. So with more funds available we would have greater reach in the community.

THE CHAIR: I will just ask a quick question and then perhaps go back to Ms Bresnan. Is there enough capacity for hydrotherapy in the hydrotherapy pools that are currently available in the ACT, or are more facilities required?

Mr Holland: Yes, there are. There is clearly a weakness. There is no facility in the Gungahlin area and there is no facility in the Tuggeranong area. Hydrotherapy is a really critically important issue. In fact we were very concerned when the redevelopment of the hospital site was raised a couple of years ago that the

hydrotherapy pool would be shut down for a period of time, so we obviously made submissions around that, because that would have been disastrous. In fact, even when the car park was being built and the pool was being rebuilt about 18 months ago, it caused major problems.

So, yes, at the moment we have probably got the capacity to double or triple, but much beyond that then we may be looking at other sites, because we use facilities like Black Mountain special school and we have no more space there. That pool is used pretty much five days a week, all day. For now and I think within the next few years the amount of facilities is reasonable, but certainly over time if we can attract more people into the programs then there may be a need for more pools, absolutely.

THE CHAIR: All right. Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: You mentioned about capacity and service issues around facilities.

Mr Holland: Yes.

MS BRESNAN: Are there any other issues around unmet demand that you have identified?

Mr Holland: Yes, there are. There are actually quite a lot of services that, for example, other arthritis foundations around Australia are providing. The first one is our access to non-English-speaking communities. We do not have a strong attraction in those communities. We strongly desire to get into those areas but find it difficult. We have very little impact on the Indigenous community, and we have no input at all into juvenile arthritis. It is a very significant area of disability, so increased funding would allow us to get greater traction in those three areas in particular.

MS BRESNAN: In terms of the work you do with government across programs they might have around falls prevention and those sorts of things—

Mr Holland: Yes.

MS BRESNAN: as well that have an impact, what communication do you have with government in terms of doing those sorts of things?

Mr Holland: We have very strong support from ACT Health with health promotion grants. We receive additional funding for one-off programs. The trouble with health promotion grants is that they are one-off, although we have had quite a number of years of success with our falls prevention program, and we have developed an excellent strength and balance exercise program which we are now launching into a much larger array of opportunities within particularly retirement villages.

So our linkages with ACT Health are very strong. We are very well respected. But obviously they are piecemeal, and so we plan and then we stop and then we plan and we stop, which I am sure is something you hear all the time from groups.

MS BRESNAN: Just one quick one: do you get quite a lot of referrals as well?

Mr Holland: One of the challenges we have is to get doctors to understand that we are there to help. All groups want to engage with the doctors. We have a very good relationship with the division of general practice and with GPs generally. Yes, we do; we get strong referrals from doctors. We have a great relationship with the local rheumatologists, who very much respect our work and value what we do, and we want to work very closely with the medical community. But again that is one of the challenges: we have two full-time equivalent staff, total, to run our programs. So the capacity to engage is limited by the number of hours we have in a day.

THE CHAIR: A quick one to close from Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Do you have a demographic idea of where most of your clients are concentrated?

Mr Holland: Within the ACT?

MR DOSZPOT: Within Tuggeranong in particular. Would you know what numbers you would have?

Mr Holland: I can get that.

MR DOSZPOT: Could you?

Mr Holland: Yes, sure.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that, and with that we will close the session. Mr Holland, thank you. A copy of the transcript will be provided to you shortly for you to check and ensure the accuracy of what you have said, that it has been recorded appropriately, and we thank you for attending today.

Mr Holland: Thank you very much.

Meeting adjourned from 10.29 to 10.40 am.

ROBERTSON, MS EMMA, Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT

ROBBINS, MR JARRAH, Policy Officer, Youth Coalition of the ACT

THE CHAIR: We will begin. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome back to the hearings into the estimates for the 2011-12 budget. We have now before us the Youth Coalition of the ACT. Before we start, there is a privileges card in front of you and I have to ask: have you read the card and do you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Robertson: Yes I have, and yes I do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Mr Robbins: Yes I have also.

THE CHAIR: Are you happy to proceed?

Ms Robertson: Certainly I am.

THE CHAIR: Emma, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Robertson: Yes, certainly. As you are no doubt aware, the Youth Coalition is the peak body representing both young people aged 12 to 25 years and the services, programs and agencies that work to support young people in the ACT. I would like to start by saying thank you for inviting us to appear today before the estimates committee. We are really pleased to have the opportunity to make some further comment about the ACT budget 2011-12. We have provided both our budget submission and our analysis and comment on the budget to the committee, so we would welcome any clarification of any of the comments that we have made.

I want to start by saying that, with the changes that are happening across government, particularly in relation to the Hawke report and the changes in the ACT public service, we really were looking to this budget to utilise those changes, I guess, and take advantage of the opportunity that we have to have much more cohesive service delivery across government. We did not really feel that it quite hit that mark, and some of the opportunities that we are particularly interested in for cross-government collaboration are in the areas of things like workforce development for the workforces that ACT government fund.

Also, early intervention work is happening, certainly for young people, across a number of portfolio areas in relation to young people and particularly starting to look at some of the big-ticket issues for young people in the ACT, such as affordable housing. Particularly when we talk about affordable housing, we are not talking about more government housing or just social housing, we are talking about a whole system that actually supports people to have access to affordable housing.

I think possibly the biggest gap overall for the population of young people in the ACT is access to affordable rental housing. We are particularly concerned at the downward pressure that puts then on social housing initiatives and government housing initiatives and the fact that many social housing initiatives are focused around a

percentage of market rent, which is still well above what young people can afford on their income.

The other opportunity, I guess, is to look at the changes we have seen in the last couple of years in relation to the education and training requirements of young people in the ACT and appreciate we have been working quite closely with both the department of education and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services around that. But given that the government made a legislative decision to enforce compulsory education, training or employment for young people, we were really looking to see some further investment in supporting those young people who are perhaps struggling to meet that legislative requirement to be able to really set themselves up to do better in life.

We know there are direct links to young people dropping out of school and experiencing homelessness. We know there are direct links around future employment opportunities. So we really see that that investment in education is one of the key cornerstones of any kind of early intervention work when it comes to working with young people.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. I also need to say that Mr Hargreaves sends his apologies. He is otherwise occupied this morning. On the issue of housing affordability, can you quantify how bad it is for young people, both in the number of individuals that cannot get affordable housing and what the financial implications are?

Ms Robertson: Certainly I do not have access to a set number of young people but it is something that we constantly hear about. We certainly have agencies raising concern with us about the number of young apprentices who are experiencing homelessness, for example, and I believe that anyone who walks around Lake Burley Griffin early any morning will actually see that there are people sleeping in cars because they do not have an affordable option. There is certainly the data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare which cites, I think, 1,364 people are homeless in Canberra, with 60 per cent of those being under the age of 25.

But I guess one of the difficult things for us in looking at that data is that I do not think that it captures people who are couch-surfing, it does not capture people who are living in crowded accommodation, students who are looking at options like the illegal suburban boarding houses that we have seen emerge in the ACT because there simply are not affordable rental properties available.

We do appreciate that the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs is currently holding an inquiry into the needs of students with regard to accommodation but I guess the concern is that across the board if you look in the paper at rental properties, for someone on a student income or a young person's apprentice wage, there really are not any properties available for them at the moment.

MS HUNTER: I note in the submission that you recommend the government increase the funding to the youth services program and the family support program by at least 10 per cent and it was really around allowing that service delivery to 18 to 25-year-olds. Can you explain your concerns and the reason for including that

recommendation in your submission?

Ms Robertson: Yes. Certainly. We have seen a major shift, I guess, in policy through the reshaping of the framework of the youth and family support program. It is very much seen as a secondary intervention program and has shifted the focus, particularly for older young people, to transitioning them to adult services and we are only really looking at working with the group of young people who have had some kind of statutory involvement, either through Care and Protection or Youth Justice.

Our concern is that we do not want people to have to get to a statutory engagement, to that escalation, before they are able to access support services. In particular, the example that we will use is that many of the young people who are experiencing homelessness in the ACT and who are not accessing homelessness services are receiving support from youth services, particularly those who might be couch-surfing et cetera. We do not want them to have had involvement with the criminal justice system or the care and protection system in order to be able to seek that support.

I think one of the very difficult things from the outset around combining these two programs without an increase in funding was recognising that they were quite different age groups that they serviced previously and we are picking up work with the young people in that eight to 12-year-olds gap and really trying to, I guess, create efficiencies and stretch our program. In doing that and realigning the priorities of that program, some people are going to miss out. From where we sit, it looks like it is the 18 to 25-year-olds initially who are going to miss out in supports that they might currently have access to.

We think this is out of step with some other areas of government and certainly with what is happening nationally, as the research recognises that many of the transitions to full independence and adulthood that young people undergo are happening later now because of things like federal government policy around income support, because we are encouraging people to stay at school longer and legislating for people to stay at school longer. I guess the difficult thing from our point of view is that just because you have turned 18 does not mean that you now no longer need support and you are fully adult and fully supported. Our other concern is that adult services are not necessarily currently geared towards supporting young people.

So I think there was an assumption there in shifting the focus of that program that we transition people to adult services. There is no mapping. We have not said which adult services or that they exist or that they have a proven record of supporting the specific needs of that target group. Yes, that is our concern.

MS HUNTER: And in fact if you look in the area of mental health, they extended that support up to the age of 25. Again it continues this ridiculous situation with young people where there are all sorts of different cut-off points and there is no consistency.

Ms Robertson: Absolutely. And it is out of step with one of the budget initiatives we were really pleased to see, which is around increasing the support for those young people who have been in care, in their being able to access transitional support up to the age of 25. We were very pleased to see that initiative get funding and see that that

brings us into line with best practice in supporting young people.

MS HUNTER: I think it is one of the good initiatives. I wanted to ask about that. There has been some funding allocated. How would you like to see that funding spent? Have you got any ideas? Have you been talking to young people who are in that group of leaving out-of-home care as to how that should be spent? And do you have any concerns that it appears that more money is going to be spent on the administration of this than is actually going to be available for young people to access?

Ms Robertson: Certainly we would be worried about more money being spent on administration than actually providing service, and I think that is in some ways a bit of a no-brainer. I think there needs to be quite a lot of work done jointly between government and community around the setting up of this service so that we have effective mechanisms in the ACT to engage with young people who are living this experience. I think that the CREATE Foundation will be a key organisation to engage with. They do a great job of supporting young people to have a say around these issues that affect their lives.

In regard to effective case management, we are pleased that there is going to be some brokerage money in the funding but I guess it is a whole new world and a whole new service and we would be really keen to be seeing that it was very accountable, not just back to government but accountable to the young people who are needing to access the service.

MS HUNTER: Your understanding is that this service will be run by government?

Ms Robertson: Yes, that is my—

MS HUNTER: Or will it be tendered out? Through a consultation I did, it was very much the view of the community that it should be a community-based service. Do you have a comment on that?

Ms Robertson: Yes, certainly. My understanding is that it will be run by government and our consultation regarding our submission, both to the ACT Greens and to the ACT government on this issue, revealed the same thing. It was very much the opinion of those who are currently working in supporting young people in out-of-home care settings that it should be a community-based service.

THE CHAIR: Ms Le Couteur and then Mr Hanson.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. I realise you cannot say a lot because we have not got a lot of detail but what do you think is needed in the community kinship care program to support the children and the young people and the kinship carers?

Ms Robertson: Again we were really pleased to see the kinship care program get funded. That was something that in our consultations people talked about a lot, and I think that the figures are now that over half of the young people who are in out-of-home care are in kinship care placements.

Again it is very early days. We would argue that there needs to be really close consultation done with carers around their needs and support needs, and there are certainly existing mechanisms to do that. And I think the fact that this has received funding is really indicative of how proactive kinship carers have got in the last couple of years around raising their issues and their concerns. I guess this service needs to recognise that we are seeing a really increasing need for support for kinship carers. That trajectory looks like it is going to increase. We will see more and more kinship care places be the norm rather than non-related placements.

It is very timely and again we will be really looking to see that that service is accountable to those who are needing the services as well as accountable to government.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: In terms of your own funding, I am just curious how much you got from government this year and whether you find that is enough to do what you need to do in terms of advocacy in the operations you run, or have you put in bids for more and were you successful?

Ms Robertson: Yes, certainly. Our kind of core activity funding which we get through the youth support program, which is part of this merger, is approximately \$300,000 per year. And then we do receive other funding for projects, specific project work. Certainly we have argued that we would not like to see any decrease in that funding.

In terms of whether it is enough to do the work, I think the nature of peak bodies is that there are always going to be smaller community agencies because I think it is a fine balance between peak activity and service delivery. We probably have seen such an increase in the last 12 months in the demand for our service in the sense that there is so much change happening in the community sector, specifically the youth part of the community sector, that it has been, I suppose, a real struggle for us to be across everything. Part of our work is really about trying to make sure that those systems and those changes are linking in together so that we do not see decisions made about changing youth homelessness services over here without consideration of what we are doing over here for youth centres, for example, and knowing that those two have an impact on each other.

So in that sense I think that there are certainly some key areas of work that we would be looking to see perhaps project funding be available for if we are able to put the full investment that we would like to be able to put into them. But in terms of the core funding at the moment, we are hoping to maintain our current level of funding.

THE CHAIR: When will you actually find out whether you have maintained it?

Ms Robertson: At the moment there has been an extension to the youth and family support program's current contracts to 29 February. The peak activity was not tendered for in the same process that all of the other agencies tendered, so we are in ongoing negotiation with DHCS around that. I am hoping that it will be resolved soon. But at this stage everyone's funding is guaranteed till the end of February.

MR DOSZPOT: I am particularly interested in a project that you and I discussed with a member of the board, one of the recipients. I think it was to do with multicultural affairs and it was youth development or personal development within that project. Was that funded again?

Ms Robertson: We run, in partnership with a number of agencies, the multicultural youth affairs network. Is that the project that you are referring to? We received a small amount of funding through DIAC to resource a worker one day a week to support that network. The network certainly achieved some great things this year and I am happy to send some information to the committee about the specific activities if you are interested.

MR DOSZPOT: Sure.

Ms Robertson: That DIAC funding will run out at the end of June and we were really looking, I suppose, to continue the support to that network's activities for a relatively small amount of investment, the coordination activities that we have been able to engage in with not just multicultural services but youth services. Everyone working to support multicultural young people has been quite significant.

There was an allocation in the new youth and family support program framework under a multicultural youth service that included capacity for sector development. The issue that we have is we have had momentum around work, the project will end at the end of June and now we potentially will not see the outcome of any of that new work until February next year. So we may have a small gap, if indeed we are successful, in continuing the work of the MYAN through the new framework. So we certainly will be writing to the department around providing support to continue those activities in the interim.

MR DOSZPOT: Is that a continuation through DIAC or through—

Ms Robertson: We are actually going to write to both the ACT government and DIAC around supporting it. As I said, it is a relatively small amount of money. We are talking about \$12,000 for a year's worth of that project. You may be interested that that project is still working at the moment. One of the key things that have come out of the work that we are doing is some focus on education and the needs of multicultural young people. We have a forum coming up, but a forum of young people themselves during Youth Week certainly raised education as a key issue. So it has got very clear links to the work that is happening around youth attainment and transitions and we really see that network as a piece of work that feeds into all of these other things that are happening in government around diversion, around education, around housing.

MR DOSZPOT: I was particularly impressed with the way you approached that particular project and it would be a shame if that seed funding that enabled that to come to fruition was lost. We certainly would like to have some information as to the ability to continue the project.

Ms Robertson: Yes. I am happy to send that on.

THE CHAIR: ACTCOSS in their summary of the budget under mental health say:

It is also disappointing that again no funding has been allocated to the building of the Adolescent and Young Adult Inpatient Unit.

What is the effect of that delay on young people with mental illness?

Ms Robertson: The effect is that there is not a service there and that is an issue that the community sector have been raising for a very long time now.

THE CHAIR: In 2005 it was first promised.

Ms Robertson: Yes, since we were all young people perhaps. The reality is that young people do not get the services to match their specific needs. We were quite excited when it was initially announced that it would be funded. Quite a lot of consultation has gone into the location of the building, what the building might look like et cetera. So again to lose that momentum is quite concerning. We know that the figures for young people around mental health are quite alarming and the Australian government investment in mental health indicates that this is not just an ACT specific problem. We know that 25 per cent of young people are likely to experience a mental health issue in any given year; that is one in four. So we need to significantly look at what supports are in place there.

While we welcome the announcement from the Australian government, there is no guarantee that any of that money will come directly to the ACT and we are concerned. We did get a fantastic initiative with headspace ACT. That has continued to receive funding from the commonwealth and recently a very small amount of money from the ACT government. But our concern would be that, should that commonwealth money dry up, that service would potentially fall over, and it has become an integral part of the service system in Canberra.

MS HUNTER: I did want to pick up on that because headspace ACT had asked for more in the way of ACT government funding, and you are right: even though there has been a federal announcement now, we do not know whether it is going to flow through to the ACT. So I think you are right in expressing some concern about what has become an incredibly important part of the youth service system.

I also want to go to a couple of others and one is around the youth health feasibility study. No money was allocated in the budget to progress that. What do you envisage will happen to the outcomes of that study? Is it going to be something that sits on the shelf and gathers dust?

Ms Robertson: We certainly raised that in our budget analysis and again it is disappointing. This is a feasibility study that was announced two budgets ago. It got rolled over in last year's budget and the fact that it is still not completed as we come into this budget cycle is quite concerning and potentially it means that the outcomes then do sit on the shelf at least until next year and we try again then.

Dr Charles Guest, the Chief Health Officer in the ACT, spoke at the end of last year

about the fact that the ACT government had not invested significantly in youth health in the way it has in other kinds of areas of health, particularly child health, and said that it was timely that we looked at the needs. Again, coming back to early intervention, which we talk about in every area, this is a real opportunity for us to look at what the needs are and to provide services that mean that we inevitably save money down the track because we make that investment early.

MS HUNTER: Focusing on preventative health.

Ms Robertson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Ms Le Couteur?

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you have any idea how the youth commitment will impact on the youth sector into the future, given that on my understanding no additional funding has been allocated to support students who just cannot engage in education?

Ms Robertson: Yes. Again we have been working quite closely with DET and DHCS around the youth commitment and I must say that when I first heard the aims of it I thought it was such a fantastic aspiration and if we could do that we could significantly change the outcomes for young people in the ACT, and we really appreciate that the relationship that DET has formed with the youth sector in the last couple of years has been very significant.

That said, with the changes that are happening in the youth sector, increasing the tracking and the identification of student support needs in schools does not necessarily result in there being service available. So we certainly believe that there is still a large area of work to do in terms of matching what schools have capacity to do and what the youth sector has capacity to do and how those things will work together.

Our concern is that in taking on board the actions of the youth commitment in having better pathways planning we are just going to identify a whole bunch of problems that we do not necessarily have programs for. We certainly know from all of the research about young people's help-seeking behaviour that if young people are going to develop a relationship with a trusted adult, be that a teacher or someone else in the school who is assisting them in this process, if they talk about their needs and those needs then do not get met we actually can do further damage and set them back quite a way. So that is really the reason for our comments that particularly supporting those at risk of disengaging from school or those who are disengaged from school has to be a key priority area for spending.

MS HUNTER: Can I just ask about that? You talk about the good relationship that you have developed with DET over the last couple of years around the youth commitment and so forth. Is that going to be able to continue with youth services once this funding decision is decided next year under a new framework? Is that going to throw all the services out and are we going to lose some gains made in that relationship?

Ms Robertson: Potentially. One of the good things in the new framework is its alignment with the DET regional structure. When I talk about the good relationship,

that has been very much at a policy level. There is ongoing work around the direct engagement between services and schools and we recognise there are some great relationships out there. We are very interested in that being systemic rather than on an ad hoc basis because worker A in that school happened to know a bunch of services, which is kind of how it happens at the moment.

As I said, there are really good examples of great collaboration, but we want to see a systemic structure that means that that collaboration happens irrespective of the particular personalities of who is there at the time. I think the essential intake service idea that has been floated within the new framework certainly is potentially good for schools in that teachers identify that one of the problems they have is they do not know what services are available. But again, if the service shift has been towards other focuses and not necessarily young people and youth engagement, we would potentially see fewer programs available or less capacity. So I think that is one of the things that we will be definitely keeping an eye on and I think we all need to be very mindful of what is coming in under the youth attainment and transitions agreement as well, because some of the programs that schools are heavily relying on are commonwealth funded programs, so we would be hoping to see them continue to be funded in order for our service system to be able to cope with that demand.

THE CHAIR: We will just go to Mr Hanson and then we will come back to Mr Doszpot.

MR HANSON: I know there are delays with the children's mental health facility, but the big gap seems to be there in the adolescent mental health area.

Ms Robertson: Yes.

MR HANSON: Have you got any observations on that and any view of what needs to be done? Most people seem to have to go to Campbelltown or somewhere else if they are going as inpatients.

Ms Robertson: Yes. Having services that are available locally is really important. It is very important that young people who are experiencing problems, particularly if it is an inpatient need, are still able to connect with family and have visitors and be supported in their community. So that would be our concern about people having to travel to access services.

MR DOSZPOT: To follow on from Mr Hanson's comment, in general for youth with disability what sort of programs have you been able to maintain? Do you have many projects that are currently pending in that area?

Ms Robertson: We certainly have not been heavily involved but I think the investment in disability was welcomed in the budget. Following our budget analysis I did a little bit more talking with Education and we were quite excited about investment in education, although my understanding is that that is not for any new programs; that it is because there has been some borrowing—I am not sure of the financial details—essentially to maintain what is currently being offered. I think it is well recognised now that the demand for support in ACT public schools for students with a disability has increased while overall enrolments have gone down. So that

would be a concern, and again, looking at some of the issues like the number of young people in schools who are on the autism/Asperger's spectrum, whether or not as they move through the process of education, training and employment they are getting the support they need would be a concern to us.

MR DOSZPOT: My question was more towards probably after-school activities and younger people who are wheelchair bound and who would like to take part in some youth activities. I am sure there are some avenues there. I keep getting inquiries about that, so I am just wondering—

Ms Robertson: Yes. Certainly again in the budget there was an initiative announced that I understand is after-school care for 10 places, so we would welcome that. There are some existing after-school programs based in community settings. Again I would wonder about their capacity to operate under a new framework because they operate in youth centre settings at the moment, so if those—

MS HUNTER: And there is a concern whether youth centres will be there in the future.

Ms Robertson: Yes, and how they will look in terms of drop-in et cetera, recognising that quite often the way that services operate is that they are able to triangulate some of their funding to be able to cover staffing et cetera. So we would have a concern about whether the youth and family support program changes would affect those programs and really whether or not those programs are adequately resourced, because our understanding certainly is that there are huge wait lists for those programs and very few exit points.

THE CHAIR: And a quick one to close.

MS HUNTER: Yes. I just wanted to follow up; I had noticed under this new framework that there was quite a significant amount of money put aside for a central intake service. I guess I am trying to understand what the purpose of a central intake service is. I can understand it when you are talking about, say, the area of homelessness to have a single contact. Is there an importance here? Do you feel we need to have a central intake service and how does that fit into the whole new framework?

Ms Robertson: The central intake service has been modelled on the success of the connecting families project that initially was a pilot that came through again some Australian government funding through the protecting Australia's children initiative. I think that project has been very successful in the family support setting and in the work that that project has done in bringing together agencies, looking at people who are not necessarily getting full engagement through care and protection but have been flagged as needing some support, and then discussing which agencies have capacity and where the referral might be appropriate.

That has been very successful in the family support setting. Our concern would be whether you can immediately translate that to young people. I recognise that some young people will get picked up through family support referrals, but again what we know from the sector's experience is that many young people access services in other

kinds of ways and it might be through coming to a service and kind of hanging out and checking it out before they approach anyone for help.

My understanding is that under the new framework young people will not be precluded from seeking support in those ways. But I guess that a significant amount of money has been put into that central intake service. Is it going to result in there being places to refer people to? Not necessarily. So again we would see from some of the experience of central intake services both in housing here but also in other jurisdictions that quite often once those services are set up they reveal other gaps in our service system that make it very challenging for them to be effective.

THE CHAIR: With that we will end there and compliment Jarrah on his ability to avoid saying anything in this hearing this morning; well done! Emma, thank you for your comments. A copy of the transcript will be provided later for you to ensure the accuracy of what you have said. We thank you for your submission and your attendance here today.

Ms Robertson: Thank you very much.

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

FOWLER, MR GLENN, Assistant to the Secretary (Industrial), Australian Education Union, ACT Branch

SMITH, MS CATHY, Assistant to the Secretary (Professional), Australian Education Union, ACT Branch

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the hearings of the 2011-12 estimates committee. Before you, there is a privilege card on the table. I have to ask two questions. First, have you read the privilege card? Second, have you understood the implications of the statement?

Ms Gilmour: Yes, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. The proceedings this morning are being recorded by Hansard for transcription as well as being webstreamed and broadcast live. And in an innovation, we are trialling Committees on Demand, where people can access the tape later. That will be available until 30 June this year. Are you happy to proceed?

Ms Gilmour: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Gilmour: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to the committee this morning. First of all, I think it is important to recognise that there are some good things in the budget. There are some disappointments for the AEU as well, though.

To deal with those positive things first, we certainly echo the comments that we heard the previous speakers make in regard to the mental health initiatives in the budget. We believe they will help support our young people in schools and we think that it is critical that we do everything we can to support young people with mental health issues so they are able to remain engaged in the system. We are a little disappointed that government has still not seen fit to take up our idea of some kind of day facility or residential facility for students who really have serious needs that might better be met in settings other than schools, but nevertheless there is a step in the right direction.

We are very pleased that the department has been exempted from the efficiency dividends for next year. Certainly we supported the department's decision to exact the efficiency dividend from central office rather than going to schools, but it is true that that had a disproportionate impact. In fact, in terms of the central office budget, it was a reduction of around seven per cent. And while we are pleased that schools were quarantined from having to find savings themselves, there is no doubt that the efficiency dividend has had an effect on the levels of service that schools have been able to access. I am sure the committee would be well aware of the furore about the loss of the teaching resource library from the centre for teaching and learning; and because things have gone quiet it does not mean that that is not still an issue of concern across the profession.

ICT infrastructure has some good initiatives, but there is not much, if anything, on the ground in schools. And while we certainly support the position in principle that

equipment used across our schools should be no more than four years old and should be running up-to-date software, probably the unintended consequence of moving to that level of provision is that many of our primary schools that currently do have reasonable levels of access will in the short term have significant reductions in their student per computer ratios, as we understand it, because they simply have a lot of machines that are much more than four years old and are not able to run the new software.

We are concerned and disappointed that the disparity between ICT provision in the primary and secondary structure remains. There are very high standard provisions represented in facilities such as Gungahlin and the new Namadgi school, but those are not replicated across the system. Our constant question of our minister is: when will the department be providing a consistent level of ICT across the system for all students in all sectors to enjoy?

In terms of the things that we see as significant issues, clearly this year is an important year for the union, because we are bargaining a new salaries agreement. The general provision of 2.5 per cent is very disappointing—representing, as it does, a real wage cut, given that the most generous estimate of national cost of living increases is three per cent and that some commentators put it at a level of four per cent in the ACT. So government is actually asking teachers to not only take a wage pause but, for the third bargaining round, make a contribution to the territory. And this is at a time when our salary scale does not have any competitive steps measured against New South Wales at all.

I have provided to the committee a copy of our latest schools e-bulletin. The information in the CIT and school support staff e-bulletins is similar in the sense that there is no other provision for wages apart from the 2.5 per cent. There is nothing in CIT that recognises trades issues or the competing market for teachers who have got trade skills. I am sure that at least some members of the committee will have seen correspondence from at least one teacher at CIT saying that that individual is seriously considering their options to return to the electrical trades in the mining industry, given that they can earn significant additional income with a slightly more relaxed and less pressured lifestyle.

And on CIT, one of the things that is of concern in the way government appears to be funding CIT is that private providers of course seek to cover the ground where there are courses that are easy to provide and do not have high costs associated with them. CIT has got some really excellent niche courses, but they are expensive to run. I am referring to some of the courses that are offered at Fyshwick in the trades area there. If Canberra loses those courses because they are not funded—recognising that the numbers may be small, but they are fitting a market niche—the closest campuses where you can do some of those things like fitting and machining and heavy vehicle maintenance will be Wagga or Campbelltown. That is a significant matter that government—whatever persuasion, wherever—needs to keep in mind in terms of access to trades training in the territory itself.

Courses like spray painting and panel beating are expensive to run, but flexibility in the CIT management of apprentices and workforce demand means that students can start a range of courses at CIT at any time of the year. That is a bonus that should be

remembered. I am advised that, on the Fyshwick campus in particular, redundancy and cutbacks have been flagged with staff if numbers in some of those courses do not improve. While we certainly acknowledge that government does need to look at the cost-benefit analysis, we caution against removing the capacity to provide niche training that may give the ACT market an edge, given the closest geographic proximity of other opportunities.

Returning to the school sector, because that is the part of the territory's budget that we were hoping to see some real benefits in—the most disappointing aspect of it is that, of the \$11.8 million provided to fund new initiatives in schools, there is insufficient allocation to meet any of the government's initiatives. The minister told us that he had personally supported submissions to budget cabinet to fix the deputy principal salary. What level of fix was not described, but the committee should be aware that a deputy in an ACT public school is currently paid 16 per cent less than their counterpart in New South Wales. In dollar terms, it is \$98,000 versus almost \$114,000, so it is a very significant margin.

The introduction of accomplished and leading teachers is a matter that is subject to the successful negotiation of our new enterprise agreement, but those new classifications are matters that the union has long had policy about, believing that we should have rigorous standards of assessment and that teachers should be able to be recognised and rewarded for meeting those standards. While we do not think that it is appropriate to try and quota access to those classifications, we recognise that you do have to start somewhere. When the federal government was talking about such reward and recognition schemes, the figure that they used was approximately 30 per cent of the eligible workforce, "eligible workforce" being defined as people generally at the top of the scale who have more than five years of teaching experience.

If you do the maths for the ACT at the moment, 30 per cent of the eligible workforce is about 1,300-odd teachers who would currently meet the criteria, whether or not they chose to put themselves forward or were successful. Based on a salary increase of only 2.5 per cent, if 30 per cent of those eligible succeeded in reaching accomplished teacher, in the first year alone, on an increase of 2.5 per cent, it would cost \$20.5 million.

So there is manifestly insufficient money to deliver the government's election promise. Indeed, at our EBA negotiations, while we await further detail, it is certainly the case that the figure that the government appears to envisage in its funding is something more like 100, which is just over 10 per cent of the potential eligible workforce. That is something of an insult to our teachers. But alongside this, there is no money left in the pool to do anything other than a 2.5 per cent salary increase for teachers along the scale or to completely rectify the deputy principal aspect.

The department, on behalf of the government, has made a proposal that would go some way towards addressing deputy principals but would still leave them 6½ per cent behind their counterparts in New South Wales. And given that New South Wales will bargain a new agreement in the latter half of this year, they will move again as well. So from a situation where the government's first move when it came to office in 2001 was to close the gaps in the salary scale between ACT and New South Wales teachers, those gaps have now opened up again and are bigger than they ever were.

This budget unfortunately has done nothing to address those. So it is a mixed bag.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. I might start with the mental health issues and the need for the day or residential facilities. Is there a model around the country that we could base such a facility on that you are aware of?

Ms Smith: Yes. For the last three or four budget submissions to government we have promoted the idea of a day or residential facility for young people so that they can receive support around addressing their mental health issues, but also access education—to ensure that they are staying in school. We have seen some models in New South Wales; one is called Rivendell. There are a number of models around the country that the ACT could look at implementing here. We obviously support further input into mental health support by both the ACT government and the federal government. We have received reports from our members around the headspace centre—being very supportive of being able to refer students to that centre. And we would support other centres in Canberra and in regional areas so that they are more accessible for young people to get to.

MS HUNTER: You have raised the issue around the money that is being set aside for this program around school leaders and so forth—this so-called six-figure salary that will be able to be allocated. You have spoken about your concern around the amount of money, which probably equates to around 100 teachers who may be able to access it, and said that that just does not seem at all adequate. Do you also have some concerns about how that would be decided? Obviously what is critical is who makes the decision about who would be able to get that supplementation to their salary, what sort of criteria would be applied and so forth.

Ms Gilmour: Yes. We certainly are concerned about that. We believe we have some protection in that our current enterprise agreement has a clause in it that says that the introduction of the new categories of accomplished and leading teacher will depend on agreement—at that time it was between the union and the department—around matters such as the method of implementation and the process for access. Certainly the advent of the national standards that were released at the end of last year will inform the discussion, but there is a debate going on at the moment nationally about the purpose of the standards. While you certainly would be unwise, in my view, not to use them as a reference point, the ACT, in my view, would be equally unwise simply to adopt them holus-bolus without looking at their direct relevance. It is a matter of negotiation.

And apart from the concern about the budgetary provision to fund the introduction of these classifications, I am concerned that the federal government's announcements around bonus pay for teachers may drive the government here to undermine what discussions have already been had in the previous EBA, where the reason that these classifications were not included, other than by reference, was that there was insufficient money to fund them.

We have done quite a lot of work about establishing benchmarks. For example we have agreed that it is a requirement that somebody must have a minimum of five years of experience and that we must agree the professional standards that people have to demonstrate they meet in order to have access. The sticking point has always been

around not a hard discussion of rigorous standards but a quota on the outcome. In my view, if it is a standards-based approach, you put yourself forward voluntarily for assessment against the standards. How can you then say that only 100 people are able to meet those standards and be paid at that rate? Alternatively, if you have 250 people who meet the standards, are you going to turn around and say, “Only 100 of you can actually be recognised for that”? I do not think that that does a lot to ensure long-term confidence in the future of the profession and its attitude to reward and recognition.

Mr Fowler: I would like to supplement that. The situation with professional standards is that if a scheme about paying some teachers more is to be implemented badly it would be very divisive across the profession. We have, luckily, got that industrial protection in our agreement to make sure that we are involved in exactly how that is implemented. In the current context, and with the money on offer, it is, I guess, more unlikely that our broader membership is going to support something like that, which rewards some and forgoes the needs of the majority. That potential for divisiveness is increased by asking the majority of our teachers to support the budget money for this and leave the rest of them high and dry.

MS HUNTER: I just wanted to link it to federal budget announcements about the bonus pay, which you have raised. Have you got concerns that that will be linked to NAPLAN results, which seems to be a ridiculously flawed approach and system?

Ms Gilmour: Yes, certainly, given the Prime Minister herself has in fact uttered that phrase, as Minister Garrett has too. Even ACARA says that using NAPLAN results for that sort of purpose is flawed. The idea that across our nation only 10 per cent of teachers would be performing at the level sufficient to get them a one-off payment of between \$5,000 and \$8,000 is also pretty mind boggling.

In the ACT in the government system alone there are about 3,000-odd teachers. Ten per cent of that figure is 300. So across all of our 84 schools—recognising that you are dealing with 3, 5, 7 and 9 in terms of potential teachers—it is still not sufficient to cover the pool of teachers who may be working at that level. Also, as the profession has said ad nauseam, these kinds of approaches take no account of the developmental nature of children’s learning and the contribution of teachers on the way through to underpin and support students as they develop their skills.

I do not think the federal government’s announcement gives the prospect of a well-thought-out, well-founded scheme. My concern is that they may very well use the big stick of COAG to try and force that through. That would undermine the capacity of the ACT department of education and the union to negotiate in terms consistent with the clauses already in our enterprise agreement. I concur that the attitude of our members, from what I am hearing already, is that they do not see any great attraction in working towards implementing a scheme where a few people will be rewarded but the fundamental structural problems in our salary scale remain unaddressed.

THE CHAIR: A supplementary to that question, Mr Doszpot, and then Ms Le Couteur.

MR DOSZPOT: Ms Gilmour, in your list of priorities, your three priorities, the number one priority consistently has been—as I have heard and has been heard here

today—the lack of funding for competitive salaries for ACT teachers. I have read somewhere, and I hope I am not misquoting you here, that the budget allocation was farcical. Did you—

Ms Gilmour: Yes, indeed. That is the headline for our salary bulletin.

MR DOSZPOT: I was looking everywhere for it. If we look at the farcical situation that we are faced with at the moment, how far is the budget out of kilter? Have you done any calculations, any modelling, on what would be required to bring up the minimal standards that your teachers are pushing for?

Ms Gilmour: The single biggest problem in the classification structure, as I indicated earlier, is that deputy principals are currently 16 per cent, some \$15,000, behind their counterparts in New South Wales. Based on lifting the deputy principal rate from \$98,000 to the current New South Wales rate of \$113,889 and not taking into account that New South Wales deputy rates will move again, the AEU has reckoned the cost of deputy parity as just under \$14 million over a three-year period. Once again, it is more than has been allocated for the whole of the four-year period.

Certainly, the position has been put to us that the department does not anticipate or has not witnessed to date an exodus of deputy principals. I know that you cannot rely on anecdotal evidence forever, but certainly we are in receipt of consistent, regular feedback from our deputy principals saying that they will look at their options if this matter is not rectified. The reason for that is that there is no longer a competitive superannuation advantage in the ACT either, except for those who have been employed for long enough to be in the older schemes. The only superannuation on offer is nine per cent, unless you contribute three of your own, in which case the employer's super rises to 10.

In the same way that many people use Canberra as their place of residence and commute out to the surrounding satellites for other occupations and come back in, deputy principals will do the same thing too. And why wouldn't you? If you were doing the same job but being paid more why would you not look at your options? It would be worth your while to commute for an hour or an hour and a half for that kind of money, in my view.

Mr Fowler: We have talked about deputy principals. At the beginning teacher level our teachers are [6.3](#) per cent behind New South Wales. At the top of the classroom scale they are 7.5 per cent behind New South Wales. For head of department or school leader C they are 7.5 per cent behind New South Wales. Our casual relief teachers are about [11.8](#) per cent, I think—about \$35 a day—behind New South Wales. That shows the inadequacy of the 2.5 per cent salary offer which, given that New South Wales will be bargaining again, starting very soon, for a new agreement on 1 January next year, will put us way behind. The costing that we have looked at for that suggests that the offer is around \$90 million short over the period.

THE CHAIR: I am sorry; 90 million short over three years?

Mr Fowler: Yes.

Ms Smith: That does not take into account the negotiations we have been having around the new classifications for teachers to remain in the classroom who are showing high level skills and it does not include the cost of accelerated progression through the classroom teacher scales—so that teachers that are, through an application, showing high level skills are able to jump steps in the classroom teacher scale.

Mr Fowler: In summary, the money available in the budget would just about fix the deputy principal salary differential and nothing else.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you for that. We have heard this morning from the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations of their concerns about what they see as a leakage of teachers already. They raised it as a serious concern. Given that the discrepancy between, say, New South Wales and ourselves appears to be so great, do you see the leakage or the loss of teachers to be a serious issue that we are contemplating?

Ms Gilmour: Yes. I think there are a number of aspects that are as true now as they have been for the last few years. One is the straight demography of the teaching service. There are still a majority of teachers at the top of the scale which means they are experienced. They are in the latter part of their career, many of them, and if you look around, lots of them are baby boomers and are expected to shuffle off into retirement. Under the current conditions there is not much incentive for teachers who leave full-time employment for retirement to put their names forward for registration as casual teachers or to seek approval to work on contracts. In their view, the money is simply not worth it and, if they were going to do it, they would be looking to do it interstate.

In terms of the attraction of new recruits, the government provides the bulk figure of how many applications it actually gets to the ACT system as a matter of public record. While that number has been more than we have needed in terms of vacancies to be filled, it has been falling steadily over the years. What it fails to take into account is that it would be almost unheard of that a teacher applying to the ACT would only be applying to the ACT. They might be applying to ACT government and non-government systems, but they are probably just as likely to be applying to New South Wales as well.

They will go where, all things being equal, their salary and promotion prospects are the best. When you consider that a young person at the start of their teaching career is carrying a HECS debt, if the salary paid is behind and the superannuation is no better then I think it is pretty logical to assume that they are not likely to see the ACT as a jurisdiction of choice unless they have a particular reason for wanting to work here. I certainly think that we are in for some difficult years ahead because, along with every other country in the OECD, Australia has not trained enough teachers to replace the expected bulk of retirement over the next five to 10 years.

Mr Fowler: The number of applicants annually has almost halved over a five-year period.

Ms Smith: The other thing to remember about that is that the ACT department of education is not recruiting enough teachers in the areas of shortage. People like maths

teachers, school counsellors, teacher librarians—those sorts of specialist areas—are not being recruited in enough numbers to cover the vacancies. Unfortunately, in some ACT public schools there are teachers who might not have a specialty, say, in maths, but have had done a minor in that area and are teaching that at a year 11 or 12 level. It is not necessarily the best scenario.

MR DOSZPOT: I also understand that in terms of—

THE CHAIR: I am sorry, Mr Doszpot; Ms Le Couteur was praying for a question.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. In your introductory remarks you talked about computers being four years old. Can you elaborate a bit more on that? The impression I got was that in many cases they were still quite serviceable, but that it was a direction from above. Certainly I know in other areas four-year-old computers are still quite regularly used.

Ms Gilmour: This one is a bit of a mixed blessing. Fundamentally, the AEU supports the provision of current and high quality IT provision across the service. I do not think anyone would disagree with that—that students and teachers in schools should have access to technology that is of a standard comparable with what those of us who work in an office environment, for example, would enjoy.

The reality is that as IT—and this is not singular to the ACT—is rolled out into school systems, schools have frequently adopted bandaid approaches to make limited resources go further. So you find that there will be a range of profiles of equipment in terms of their age and their serviceability and a range of profiles of software currently running on them and often local fixes put in place to make sure that software that does not run comfortably on particular machines will work serviceably in that environment.

The department has undertaken a program of updating both its software and hardware provision as part of its technology rollout. We certainly support that. One of the difficulties that it will bring many schools up against, though, is that if you cannot localise something to make a standard product fit your local variations, your local variations will not work anymore. Machines that are more than four years old generally will not run Office 2010 software, which is what the department is rolling out across the system. We support that, but the unintended consequence of it is that if you go into a primary school and look across the range of computing equipment that they have, you will find a whole spectrum of, I suppose, models and ages of models and anything that is more than four years old is not able to run Office 2010.

We certainly support the standardisation of equipment, but there is going to be a challenge confronting teachers in schools. Parents will no doubt ask how come their kids who had access to a computer last week or last month now do not have as ready access because those 10 machines in the corner there no longer work because they cannot talk to the new software? This is not a criticism or saying this is a bad thing, but it is a problem that the system and the department are going to have to grapple with in the changeover of provision. The funding of the changeover is insufficient to simply pick up all the old ones and move them out and drop the same number of new ones in. It is a staged provision.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you have the same problem with printers, having to get rid of them after four years, or can you keep them?

Ms Gilmour: I must admit I am not across the exact detail of printers, but my understanding is that the in-principle position is that the technology hardware will be no older than four years. I think that that will be a problem potentially. As the system gets into a cycle of replacement, the problem is likely to resolve itself, but I think that it will take some time for old equipment to be replaced to the point where the ratios are the same as they may be now.

THE CHAIR: We might finish there with just a quick question from Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Mr Chair. Ms Smith, you enunciated a couple of other areas where there is a shortage and a shortfall in the teaching profession. We have got some anecdotal evidence of a problem with the availability of relief teachers. Is that also related to the disparity in pay scales of teachers who want to do relief work, who are available to do relief work? Are they in fact going elsewhere? What is happening there?

Ms Smith: We are aware that some teachers do not even register with the ACT department of education; they register with New South Wales. Obviously people can drive a similar distance to Queanbeyan to do some relief work there. Thirty-five dollars a day certainly adds up. There is a significant disparity—

MR DOSZPOT: So a \$35 difference between—

MS HUNTER: You said before it was 11.8 per cent behind on casual teachers, which equates to \$35 a day.

Mr Fowler: That is right.

MR DOSZPOT: So that also has an impact on teachers who want to do professional development for the national curriculum that is impending, I should imagine.

Ms Smith: It has a widespread domino effect of teachers not being able to attend professional development because they cannot get a relief teacher. It affects students in terms of sometimes classes being split so that the teacher can go and do those sorts of things—the classes are spread out across the school. It affects student learning programs as well. As I said, if you cannot get a specialist teacher in a particular area, the program has to be modified so that the casual relief teacher can teach a class safely. There are certainly a whole range of issues around casual relief teachers and the lack of them.

Ms Gilmour: It is not just professional development. It is when people are sick too. It is easier to plan a long-term leave absence. If somebody is simply ill then it can be quite difficult to get appropriate relief for them.

THE CHAIR: All right, we might roll that up there. It is a big area and it is impossible to cram it into half an hour. Thank you for your attendance today. A transcript of the hearing will be provided to allow you to ensure its accuracy. Thank

you for your attendance.

Ms Smith: Thank you.

Ms Gilmour: Thank you very much.

Mr Fowler: Thanks.

LE, MS MARION, President, Grandparents and Kinship Carers (ACT) Inc
MANNION, MS SUZANNE, President, Foster Care Association ACT

THE CHAIR: Good morning and thank you for your attendance at the 2011-12 estimates hearing. Before you on the table is the privilege card. I need to ask whether you have read the privilege card. Do you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Mannion: We do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. For your information, the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. They are being webstreamed and broadcast live. As well this year we have a trial of Committees on Demand, which makes a video of the proceedings available. Are you happy to proceed?

Ms Mannion: We are.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Mannion: Yes. Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to talk to you. We are not a well-known face in this room. I am Sue Mannion. I am the President of Foster Care Association ACT and a carer of some 16 years. I would like to open by saying that I am not here to denigrate the department or to demoralise any further the people who are working in this area. But I have to tell you that after 16 years I am tapped out—absolutely.

The situation is no better than it was. It is no better than it was before Vardon. Huge amounts of money seem to be being thrown at a black hole and we just do not see any real on-the-ground benefit. We are full on rhetoric and short on practical examples of where that money has been well spent. The morale is pretty awful. Between us, I think we represent 98 per cent of the kids. It is just really difficult.

We are here also to support the kinship carers, but as the Foster Care Association our main complaint is that in 2009 we had \$25,000 of our extremely meagre funding taken off us to provide a position in the department that simply has not worked for us. Departmental people cannot advocate for carers. The only people that can advocate for carers are other carers. The only people who walk this life is us. So I guess we are here to say that if you want frank and truthful advice about how the system is travelling, you need to support your associations because they are the only people who can deliver it for you. We cannot get system improvement. We cannot tell you how the kids are doing.

Cut and paste should be totally banned from the department. We get reports that are so obviously cut and pasted. They have other children's names in them. The foster parents read it and say, "Am I supposed to believe there is any real interest in my child when it does not even have my child's name in it?" All of the things that were brought to bear by the Vardon report really have not improved.

The majority of Indigenous kids still live in general foster care and the ATSI programs have provided no support to us whatsoever. Cultural care plans are insulting

to the children and their culture. You cannot just tick boxes. You need real work. As I said, I am not here to denigrate the people who are attempting to do that, but clearly the model that we have is not working.

How many times do we have to go to the well to import workers from another culture into Australia? Some of the ones they brought over last time lasted a few weeks and then shot through, and we are still here with the kids. Our lives, their lives, are determined by these people who shoot through our lives. The model just is not working.

THE CHAIR: Marion, would you like to make an opening statement as well?

Mrs Le: Yes. This is the second time that I have appeared in my present role. I think I was vice-president last year, but I am president this year. I can support Sue in what she is saying about change not having happened. Nothing effective has happened for us since last year. In fact, in some ways it has gone backwards. Last year I came here with a question which I asked and with some effect, I have to say, as to what had happened to the funding that had been allocated two years previously and which we had not seen.

They quickly called for tenders. I would say that we were set up to fail. You might like to ask the department about that money and get, hopefully, some honest answers this time. But of that money \$40,000 over three years has been allocated to KARSS, which the minister is launching this week I think.

But, again, if you want to ask some questions or even go online and ring the number, see what sort of response you get. \$40,000 a year buys four hours of office work from someone who is working under Marymead. This is not to denigrate that person. We asked her to come to our meeting last week and she was pretty frank about the fact that she cannot meet the expectations put on her. It needs at least three days, full days, a week.

Again, we have got money thrown and it has gone nowhere. It does not get to the kinship carers. People ring the line. I have rung it several times. There is never an answer because she is not there. She works, as I say, four hours in the office.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, that is four hours a week, four hours a day?

Mrs Le: Four hours a week.

THE CHAIR: A week, yes.

Mrs Le: A week, and we are paying for that. Taxpayers are paying for that.

MS HUNTER: Could I clarify, Marion, did you say it was \$40,000 a year that has been allocated?

Mrs Le: Yes, out of that huge pot that was there three, four years ago, that was the only allocation. I understand, and there seems to be some query about this I understand, that some money went to Relationships Australia to provide counselling.

But again, one of our committee members actually did go to that person—counsellor—and find that useful.

Again, we come to the question that general counsellors out there in the community who do not have any input to us have no idea of what kinship carers are going through, or carers for that matter. Suddenly, they get a bit of money back but no money went to ATSIC, no money went to direct advocacy, which is what the government said it put it forward for.

We read in the paper this morning about another \$1.7 million the minister says has gone to the kinship care program. Again, I think we should ask the questions as to where that has gone. That is the question we want to know. I understand it has gone to putting two more caseworkers into the department.

I could go on with case stories and I hope you will ask me some questions about that. But I would like to say that there is another group out there who are not funded at all to our shame here in the ACT. Unlike other states, there is a group of people who have gone through the family courts.

I had two children—one has now turned 18—but I have got one child who is now in intensive care at Woden hospital who I have got under Family Court orders. That child does not come through the care and protection program at all. No funding to me for that, for that child or for those two children; none at all.

I have been working, but I am now 64 years old and I start to get worried about what will happen to the children in my care under kinship care programs where I am being supported with money by the department. But there are a huge number of people—the most calls that I get now, the majority of calls, are from people who are not receiving any funding, who have been told by the department to go through the Family Court.

Then you go to the Family Court and you get no funding at all except family allowance. Just one quick case study: one widow rang me in absolute tears. She said: “I do not know what to do or where to go. I have got three children in my care.” The family was unable to care. I think one parent of the children died. One of the children is not biologically related to her, but is a half-sibling of the other two. She took them all in because she was asked by Care and Protection. Then she asked them, “What do I do about formalising this?” They said, “Go to the Family Court.”

She has borrowed money from Centrelink. She is on an age pension. She could not pay for her husband’s funeral, so she borrowed the money from Centrelink. She said, “When the two of us were there getting the pension it was better.” Now she is living on just her own pension and family allowance. She owes money to Centrelink. I had a meeting with her with Centrelink. There is nothing they can do.

She could not even afford to buy a new fridge. Now, that is one case. That lady lives in Dunlop. I am beside myself trying to advocate for these people. There is no funding in the ACT, but in other states—a woman rang me two days ago. She is living in Batemans Bay. She moved from here to there. She is getting money from DoCS, but no support.

They are actually being paid, and that is the Family Court thing. So we have got huge problems in the ACT that are hidden. We see them when they emerge in the paper when someone goes into a house and they find derelicts and people living there without help or support. Then we throw the poor mother in jail, or whatever.

But the situation here—it sounds emotive; we have got a very short time to put something to you. But I am looking at carers in foster caring, people like Sue, who have done this as a labour of love over all these years and are absolutely at the end of their tether, and we are just starting out. The majority of children are in kinship care. That is only part of it, because you have got this other hidden lot of people living below the poverty line with children who they cannot even support at school.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. Marion, to start the questioning, last year you told the committee that the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support was guilty of what you call institutional abuse of your members and the children in their care. Has anything practically changed in the last 12 months?

Mrs Le: Of course, I got a lot of flak for that, but I would say that it is still there. Again, we have—you see, what we are looking at is a department that is focusing on the needs of the children. There is nobody focusing on the needs of the carers, whether it is the kinship carers or those grandparents or other carers that are out there that do not fall under what we call kinship care.

No-one focuses on that. The department looks at what they are using the money for, where that is going, but they focus on the child and usually they are focusing on restoration to the parents or to the mother or whoever, and their care and concern is, “Okay, we are trying to get this family functional again.”

But the kinship carers, who may well be the mother of the mother—the grandparent—who also cares for her own daughter or the dysfunctional family, they are getting no support. So we have had grandparents who care for their grandchildren, have looked after them for three, four, five years. Suddenly a departmental worker rings up and says, “Those children”—again, I am talking about a real case—“are going out of your care next week,” and the grandmother says, “What?”

Ms Mannion: We get that too. We had the most awful case of institutional abuse that I have ever seen in the last few years where a severely disabled young man was taken from his family of 14 years and institutionalised. They were told on the phone. They asked for some assistance. They asked for some respite. They asked for his medication to be reviewed. He was taken away and never returned at a cost of—I do not know—\$1,000 a day maybe to put him in institutional care where he was abused in institutional care.

Now, we yelled and yelled and yelled about that. It made no difference. We have asked the minister to look into it. We have heard nothing. That money—I mean, tell me how his life was improved? His foster parents had to listen every day to calls when he asked, “When am I coming home?” What did they do wrong? Nothing, absolutely nothing.

THE CHAIR: We might follow that example up with the minister. You might like to

provide, confidentially, the actual case to the committee.

Ms Mannion: I am sure the minister will know it immediately.

THE CHAIR: We will leave the names out of it, but if you would like to provide it we will work out a way of how we might approach that with the minister. In trying to establish a path to improve care both for the children and for those that provide the care to them, is there a model anywhere in Australia that actually works? Is there a system that is better than ours?

Ms Mannion: There are pockets of excellence and I have to say that there are things here—it is not all terrible. Like I said, I would not want to demoralise anybody because we have to be optimistic, but we have to work towards real goals. What I think we do need in these summits—we have had some terribly complex cases like that one. Part of the problem is that we do not have a decent appeal process. We have an appeal process based on housing.

Our problems are usually a little more immediate than that—on a Friday afternoon at five o'clock where a carer is being asked to put children in a situation maybe that they feel is unsafe. They cannot talk to anyone. The only people they can get to is us to try and intervene. The first thing that happens, of course, is that they threaten to take the children off them. That is what happens when you complain.

THE CHAIR: Where would we look to?

Ms Mannion: Western Australia.

Ms Le: The department funded some of us, and the Foster Carers Association gave the committee members some money to go as a group, and we went to Tasmania to the conference there, which was eye opening and really impressive. I learned a lot about what other states are doing. It is up and down and there are patches and pockets, but I was very impressed by the presentations from Western Australia. There is a conference again this year in Queensland, and I think the next year it is here.

Ms Mannion: No, in 2013 it is our turn to have the conference. I would love to be in a situation to be able to showcase what we do. You know, if we cannot do it here, we cannot do it anywhere. We are such a small jurisdiction, it should be easier here than it is anywhere else. These are the same children. They present with the same difficulties. Whether they are there or here, they are the same children. Respite carers are absolutely desperate to have a bit of a break. If they do get it at all, which is pretty unusual, they do not get what they ask for. They ask for overnight and they get two hours once a week. People cannot keep going. We cannot improve these kid's lives unless we can give them a stable place to live. That is the bottom line.

MS HUNTER: I wanted to go to a question you raised earlier around the \$1.7 million over four years for the community kinship care program, and you asked the question about what this is. I actually put in a series of questions on notice, and I am happy to provide you with those. The answer to that was that the initiative recognises the importance of children and young people staying with kin and provides a specialised support service model that targets the needs of kinship carers. The funding provides

for dedicated outreach workers to support carers and children and young people in kinship care. So that was the response. What I would like to know from you is: do you think that is proper targeting of that money? How do you think that money should be targeted?

Ms Mannion: Well, if \$1.6 million funds two outreach workers, God, what are we worth?

MS HUNTER: It just says dedicated outreach workers. It does not actually have a number next to it in this answer.

Ms Mannion: Well, we were told two this year and four next year.

MS HUNTER: Thanks.

Ms Le: What is happening is, as it comes across to us, there is a total lack of respect for the carers. Every phone call—I think I said this last year—to me starts with, “I am not stupid. I just wanted to ring you up and introduce myself. I understand you are the president, and before I start, I would like to say I am not stupid. I’ve got a university degree,” or whatever, and they go through it like that. Then they say, “And I just need to talk to someone who is going to understand and respect me. Unfortunately, I think it is a real lack of respect to go in, as in that one case I quoted, and suddenly say to the person who has cared for these children, without any consultation, “We are taking them back and giving them back to the father, because he seems to have got his act together.” And the grandparents are like, “You’re joking. Who told you that?” Grandparents want to see the families back together. They want their grandchildren to be back in the family where they should be.

The other night when I was making life and death decisions, signing away for operations on my little boy, I thought, “Where’s his mother? Why am I doing this?” We are all faced with this kind of thing. There are dysfunctional families, and kids have come into our care. We love them, we care about them, but the support mechanism is not there when you need it. What I was doing was under a Family Court order, not a child protection order. In that case, you would have to call the department and they make the decision. You may not agree with them, and that is the other thing.

These are complicated, complex issues, and it is offensive to say, “We’re giving that allocation to kinship carers in the ACT,” and then say, “We’re doing it through an outreach worker.” I am sick of outreach workers. We do not see them, and when we do see them, as Sue said, they come and go. The report reported in the paper this morning talks about children going from one foster care situation to another, but one of the biggest problems that carers and kinship carers have is that they get case workers who come and go. They meet one and then the next week or the next month they have got another one. So there is no consistency through the system.

Ms Mannion: And you could be arguing for three months for something for your child, and then the next time you manage to get face to face with a worker it is a different worker and they go, “Oh, well, I’m not responsible for that,” and you go back to square one and start the argument all over again. There is no corporate responsibility. As I said, what we need for some of these complex cases is an

independent panel with people who have experience.

In terms of supporting people, we do not want outreach workers; we want something a lot more simple. We would like an ID card so that when you are at the hospital in an emergency you are not wasting time trying to explain who you are and whether you have any authority over this child who has a different name.

Ms Le: Sorry, can I just say that the other night I went to the hospital. My child who I had there the other night is Vietnamese, but he is Australian born. He is Australian. He does not speak Vietnamese, but he is Asian. So there is an Asian doctor. They were wonderful at the hospital really, but the Asian doctor looked at me very, very suspiciously and said, “Who are you?” I said, “I’ve got this child in care under a Family Court order.” “Do you have it with you?” “Well, of course I don’t. You know, I called an ambulance.”

Ms Mannion: Just went in the ambulance.

Ms Le: “We went 190 kilometres an hour to get here. I don’t have that.” So he says to the boy, who is lying there bleeding extensively, “Can you just sign this?” Now that child is not capable of signing it, and someone said to the doctor, “She has to sign it,” and he said “All right, okay.” So I signed it. The doctor, the nurses, what do they know? Who am I? I am there. I have asked them, “We just need simple things like ID cards that you can carry in your pocket along with your Medicare card.” I had his Medicare card.

Ms Mannion: You are lucky you have a Medicare card.

Ms Le: Yes. That is right.

Ms Mannion: We have carers who, after four years, have no Medicare cards and no health care cards. We get kids brought into care and the carers are still telling me they do not know the name of the children they are being given. We do not get any health background. We do not know whether those kids have got allergies.

Ms Le: That is right.

Ms Mannion: We could kill them and not know.

MS HUNTER: I want to pick up on that point because last year there was a lot of talk around a guide, a resource book, that all carers would receive. It would include extensive fact sheets and information around everything you need to know and how to access services available. What has happened with that?

Ms Mannion: The minister launched it. We did point out it has got some inconsistencies with the act in it and various other things in it that are not quite accurate. It—

MS HUNTER: And have they been corrected?

Ms Mannion: Not yet. They are going to review it in October. That probably means

we will get something done in, I do not know, 2013. The wheel grinds very slowly here. But these are simple things that we want—very simple things.

Carers are quiet people. They are not going to be marching in the streets. We are basically naive. Some of us wonder how did we ever survive, we are so naive. They are scared to ask. These are very basic things that we are asking for. I had a carer ring me at 9.30 last night. She has got a child she is at her wit's end with. The professional counsellor, her agency and everyone agrees this child probably has something along the autism spectrum. She has been denied an assessment because, "No, we do not really like to assess kids because trauma causes them to act out." Yes, they do. But if this child does have something in that spectrum there are a whole range of services and supports that could kick in that would help maintain the place that—

MS HUNTER: But you have also picked up an important point. These children are traumatised. It has been recognised as a very important thing. The child needs to be provided with therapy and so forth. What access have you got at this time to those sorts of specialised services?

Ms Mannion: They are limited to so many services per child. You can get better in six service instalments. I am not a fan of open-ended counselling that goes on for years. It did not do Woody Allen a whole lot of good. But carers were led to believe that their colleagues' input, their team members' input and their knowledge of the kids that they are expert in are valued.

Yet when we come to our professional colleagues with this knowledge and say, "We have noticed this or this or really this is getting out of hand, the kid cannot go to childcare or it cannot go to a holiday program, the school cannot cope with it and so on, we would really like to get to the bottom of this," we are left in the hands of one worker who has life and death over what happens after that. That is why I am saying we need our associations to be funded because we are the only ones who can really go in to bat for them for some of this stuff and say, "Hey, this should not be left in the hands of one person who may not have even met the child."

THE CHAIR: We are going to have to wind up.

Ms Mannion: I understand.

THE CHAIR: And I know there is just so much to say. Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: I have a couple of quick questions. I know, Ms Le—and correct me if I am wrong—you get no funding for your organisation.

Ms Le: For our organisation?

MRS DUNNE: Yes.

Ms Le: No.

MRS DUNNE: Ms Mannion, how much do you get for yours?

Ms Mannion: We get \$55,000 currently, after we had that \$25,000 taken off us a couple of years—

MRS DUNNE: \$55,000 a year to do what?

Ms Mannion: Everything—advocacy, which is a big part, training. We have even brought specialist Australian experts to Canberra on attachment because that is the bottom line for a lot of these kids, the ability to actually attach somewhere. We do everything with that. We have a resource library and so on. Because we are so penny-pinching with our money we are told we do not need any because obviously we do not go over budget.

We never wanted to spend our money on administration. We have got access. We had a PhD student who helped us with the reform of the mental health service. It burnt her out in four months, to the point that she had to take a break from it. But we need to be able to pay to provide real information back to the system so that we can help. We want it to be better.

Ms Le: One of the biggest problems I think in the ACT—and I have asked this question at various meetings where I think Ms Hunter was when we were talking about transitioning out of care—is research in the ACT. And the answer is that there is no research here. I find that and again—

MS HUNTER: Thank you, that was my next question. You had it in your survey.

Ms Le: Yes. There is no research that is actually dedicated. I do not know about this one this morning that is reported in the *Canberra Times* but when I talked about that at the transitioning out of care meeting, which was very valuable, I must say, afterwards people from the department and elsewhere came up to me and said, “The ACT is too small to do research.” Hello, I am sorry? That is like saying we cannot look at the needs of a family within a school system because it is only one family or something. It is just ludicrous to say that.

We need research. We need to know how many children are in care, how many foster carers are there, what is the need for foster carers, the need out there. The advertising at the moment is enormous. There is a lot of funding going into spending to advertise and the turnover rate, as I understand it, for foster carers at the moment is very high. Kinship carers are being burned out. They are sitting there, they are too scared to say anything because they are scared their children, who are their flesh and blood, will be taken away from them. The pressures on them are enormous. We do not know what they are.

We do not know the vast pool out there of people who have gone through the Family Court and got children and who really cannot afford things. One woman whom I quoted before said, “I cannot even afford to buy my foster daughter, who has now turned 16, the clothes she wants or a computer, a laptop.” She is hurling abuse at the grandmother, who is not her blood relative, because she cannot provide that. She said, “I just do not have the money.” She was crying on the phone and that was when I got her in touch with Centrelink and they said, “There is nothing we can do.” So we have—

Ms Mannion: I had a carer recently who had urine soaked mattresses and who was told that she was not entitled to have those mattresses replaced. I have got a single mother in public housing who was told, “You cannot work more than two days a week. We will not help you with childcare.” She said, “I am locked in. I cannot improve my life and the life of my long-term children and I am not getting any help here to get us all out of this mess.”

Ms Le: There is no research. I think that is what it comes down to.

THE CHAIR: We hear that and I am sure we will take that up with the minister. I am sorry to draw this to a conclusion. Have you got something to finish with?

MRS DUNNE: There are so many questions.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Le: It is huge and I feel like we have sort of babbled a bit today, because it is such a short time and the issues are huge. But the real issue out there is the children and people cannot care for those children properly if the funding and the respite are not there and the understanding is not there. I am appalled at the fact that that funding that was promised all those years ago, eight hundred grand—just ask where it went. Ask who got the money that was supposed to go in three little buckets, education, advocacy, from among the grandparent and kinship carer people.

I know we are over time, but August last year was the last time we had a meeting with the department. We were having meetings and they kept saying we will put it off till Christmas because we have this new business.

THE CHAIR: So August 2010?

Ms Le: August 2010. Guess when we got the invitation. This may be just coincidental, but two days ago after we were told we would be appearing here we—

Ms Mannion: And we have not had our meeting with the new one yet, either.

Ms Le: We got the invitation to have a meeting in two weeks time—none since August. I am not going to give you the list of things we raised with them.

MS HUNTER: I have got answers to some of those questions about the money. I will pass that on to you and certainly I hope that assists with discussions with the department.

Ms Mannion: Can I just ask you to ask—

THE CHAIR: We are going to have to—

Ms Mannion: Yes, I know. One question I would like you to ask, though, is: why does it cost more to do one supervised contact visit than the carer gets to raise the child for a week?

THE CHAIR: That is a question I am sure someone will ask the minister. Thank you very much.

Ms Mannion: Thank you.

Ms Le: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your passion and your interest in this very important issue. A transcript will be provided when it is available, to ensure the accuracy of what you have said. We will, of course, be taking some of these issues up with the minister throughout the estimates. Thank you.

HARPER, MR BRYAN, Chairperson, Victims of Crime Assistance League (ACT)

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, and welcome. Thank you for attending the estimates hearings. There is a privilege card on the table in front of you. Have you read the card, and do you understand the implications of the privilege statement?

Mr Harper: Yes, I have read that.

THE CHAIR: We are recording today for Hansard. We are also webstreaming and broadcasting live, and the hearing will be available on Committees on Demand. Are you happy to proceed?

Mr Harper: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Harper: Thank you. As an opening remark, I would like to mention that VOCAL commenced operation in 1988 and was a pioneer in the provision of services to victims of crime in the ACT. It has 22 years experience in providing a range of services and was the forerunner to the establishment of the government's victim services scheme, which was established by the ACT government in late 1999.

In the lead-up to the 2010-11 financial year, VOCAL, in view of funding constraints and increased demand for services, made a detailed submission for extra funds to enable it to create two new roles, particularly for recruitment and training of volunteers and also a role for a support person at the courts. That is an area where some clients first learn about the availability of services for victims. The extra funding was required to enable VOCAL to return from four days a week to five days a week, because it previously had to drop back because of funding constraints. These changes were also aimed at reducing the heavy workload of existing staff.

Actual funding, however, for 2010-11 only allowed VOCAL to increase its hours of operation from four days a week to five days a week. Unfortunately, there was no additional funding for those extra positions or roles. As a result, the heavy workload on existing staff remained. In fact, it may have even got worse because of the five-day-a-week operation. Circumstances in recent years, particularly the funding constraint and the ongoing demand, have made conditions extremely difficult for the survival of VOCAL as an organisation and for the survival of its provision of services.

By way of background in relation to the funding, I would like to mention that the funding to VOCAL currently represents about 10 to 15 per cent of the total budget directed towards victim services. However, in recent years, VOCAL has provided services to a significant proportion of the total number of clients seen in the ACT in the provision of services.

Of course, VOCAL provides support to victims who are not eligible for government-based services, in particular, those whose crime may have been committed outside the ACT and those victims who have exhausted their allotted hours provided by the government. VOCAL is an important additional service for victims of crime who would not otherwise receive services.

In addition, VOCAL is the only organisation to provide a dedicated 24-hour, seven-day-a-week, after-hours telephone support service. That service has never been funded by the ACT government.

In summary, VOCAL represents extremely good value for money from government and taxpayers' contributions, as well as providing a broad range of services to victims of crime.

THE CHAIR: Mr Harper, thank you for that. I notice in your survey that you filled out for the committee that VOCAL receives \$236,000 a year but that you feel it would cost \$360,000 a year to run the service. How do you make up that shortfall?

Mr Harper: In the last few years staff have put in additional unpaid time. That is one way. Also, we can only do as much as we can do in that time. So it has been an extremely difficult period over the last few years, as you can imagine. Our detailed submission of some one to two years ago provided a good case, we believed, for those additional positions.

THE CHAIR: Is there any data that shows the trend in the need for the services and the growth in need?

Mr Harper: Yes, there is. We provide statistics for the annual report of the scheme, and those statistics should be readily available through the department.

THE CHAIR: And this coming year, what sort of growth are you expecting?

Mr Harper: Well, that is a difficult question to answer. Because of the funding constraints, there is a limit to what we can do, but we have not noticed any dramatic reduction in the demand for services. There have been some issues in recent years. We originally had a memorandum of understanding with SupportLink for the direct referral of clients, but a couple of years ago that lapsed and there was a change to SupportLink referring directly to the government-based service.

MS HUNTER: You make the comment in your submission that this budget has increased funding for the prison population but not for victims. You might want to take this on notice and come back, but do you know if there is any work that compares state-by-state total funding for prisoners versus funding for victims of crime?

Mr Harper: I am not aware of that. I have not had the chance to research that. That may be something that the Assembly or the department may wish to do. We are largely a volunteer organisation, and most of our time is spent surviving day to day. But the point we were making was that we noted that additional funds were made available for the long-term management of the perpetrators and other areas of the justice portfolio, but there has been no increase as such for direct provision of services to victims of crime in recent years, apart from indexation and the increase I mentioned previously, which was the four to five-day-a-week operation change.

MS HUNTER: Thank you.

MR HANSON: I remember when we attended your AGM—I think it was about a year ago, and I remember you were there, Ms Hunter—there was a discussion about the duplication that you were suffering and the cross-over and almost tension between your organisation and the organisation provided by JACS. Has that improved at all?

Mr Harper: There have been some further discussions, but I think there are significant opportunities to further develop the partnership between the community and the government, because we provide different types of services. I think there is an opportunity there to improve that partnership and working relationship.

MR HANSON: How many volunteers have you currently got?

Mr Harper: It varies from time to time. Off the top of my head, I would say it is in the range of 30 at the current time. But in recent years many organisations have noticed a drop-off in the availability of volunteers for various economic and social reasons.

MR HANSON: You said conditions are becoming difficult for the survival of VOCAL. Can you just expand on that and explain what you mean? Does that mean a reduction in services? Does that mean folding completely?

Mr Harper: Funding constraints in recent years have placed a very heavy load on staff, particularly long-term, dedicated staff. So there are issues there. Also the funding level and the uncertainty of future funding makes it extremely difficult to attract and retain staff. Because of the frustrations, it makes it difficult to have volunteers, particularly management committee volunteers, to continue in that role.

MS HUNTER: You mentioned uncertainty. In your survey response to us you spoke about the funding running out very shortly and you have absolutely no idea whether that funding will continue. Is that still the case today?

Mr Harper: It is not the case. In fact, just this week we met with the minister, and we were pleased to hear at that meeting verbally that there was an undertaking to provide a six-month extension of funds.

MS HUNTER: What is the reason for only rolling it over for six months?

Mr Harper: Our committee was extremely concerned that this was creating a very difficult situation for our staff and for our long-term planning, because we only had six weeks to run before the end of the contract.

MS HUNTER: But in some ways you are still in the same position in that, yes, you have got another six months, but there is still the uncertainty. Why would staff stay around when there is only a guarantee of a wage for another six months?

Mr Harper: Yes, that is right.

MS HUNTER: Did the minister explain to you what the plans were and when they would be able to talk to you about whether you would have certainty in a three-year

contract or whatever, or has all that just been left up in the air?

Mr Harper: There was very little time to discuss that, but we did start discussions with the department in about January, so we were concerned about the long delay. The verbal notice of the extension came one week too late, because one of our staff members resigned, naturally, to go to a more secure job.

MS HUNTER: Having run organisations, I know that you just cannot plan on that sort of uncertainty.

Mr Harper: That is right, and it is extremely difficult to recruit staff under those circumstances. If I were going for an interview I would be wanting to have a 12-month contract, not six, but that is another issue.

In addition to this committee's consideration of the level of funding, I think it is important that the Assembly look at a review of those processes in terms of the liaison and the notification about future funding arrangements. VOCAL also has noticed that it will be facing another issue into the future with an open tender process for the provision of services.

MS HUNTER: We do have a social compact in the ACT.

Mr Harper: That is right.

MS HUNTER: That more or less outlines or articulates the relationship between government and community organisations.

Mr Harper: That is right.

MS HUNTER: Part of that is an understanding that if you were going to defund a community organisation, you should give them the courtesy of at least three months notice. It is obvious that you were not informed and left until six weeks out for when your funding ran out. That is quite an appalling situation, and it is a breach of how it should be running.

THE CHAIR: The funding is normally annually?

Mr Harper: The funding agreements have generally been three-year terms, although there have been a couple of 12-month extensions that we have had at very late notice, and that seems to be a recurring pattern.

MS HUNTER: That is an issue that needs to be explored further.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for attending today. We will wrap up the hearing at this point. A copy of the transcript will be provided so that you can ensure that you have been recorded accurately.

Mr Harper: Thank you. Our representatives would be happy to provide further information to the committee or to individual members if necessary.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Meeting adjourned from 12.33 to 2.00 pm.

SAWYER, MR BOB, Chair, Technical Aid to the Disabled (ACT)

THE CHAIR: I welcome Technical Aid to the Disabled. There is a privilege card lying on the table before you. I need to know that you have read the card and understand the implications of the accompanying statement.

Mr Sawyer: Yes, I have read it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. For your information, today we are recording for Hansard for transcription; we are also webstreaming and it is being broadcast live. We are also trialling Committees on Demand, which allows an audiovisual record of proceedings to be in the public realm for a couple of weeks. Are you happy to proceed on those terms?

Mr Sawyer: Yes, I am.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Over to you, Bob.

Mr Sawyer: Before you is a small package of information that I have provided, and I will talk to that. The first page is simply a description of what TADACT is about. I will read some of it out:

We charge clients a fee which incorporates Project costs (material costs and a Project Volunteer's incidentals), and a small administration fee. We do not charge for a Volunteer's time. The Project commences after a cost estimate is accepted by the client.

Our current level of funding severely restricts our ability to continue the service and to develop awareness of, and interest in, this service beyond about 1% of the ACT community. We believe that there exists considerable undetected, and consequently unmet need for our service as the ACT has 16.1% of the population with disabilities.

Those figures are the latest ABS figures. I will continue to read from the document:

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

- . No other Not-For-Profit organisation within the ACT area provides the service that we do.
- . All equipment is made or modified by highly skilled volunteers who donate their time and expertise to provide innovative solutions.
- . We provide customized solutions and modify and create items to suit the specific and individual needs of the client.
- . We also provide a free advice and referral service.

Our service is designed to provide affordable assistance to people with low incomes.

What are we asking for? At the moment we get government funding of \$126,000,

which provides about half of our operating costs. We are asking for \$120,000 without GST. Over the page, I have provided a graph, which again is from ABS statistics, which shows the percentage of people with disabilities in the Australian population in various age groups. TADACT gets funded up to the 65 age group; we do not get funding for anything else over that. Those figures are from the ABS.

The next page I have provided is from one of our volunteer newsletters. The page after that gives an indication of about six weeks of projects that we have completed. It provides an idea, an indication, of the sort of work that we do, ranging from very simple wood or metal work to very complex electronic materials. We have got volunteers that cover that whole range of materials.

We do not provide items that are commercially available; we would be unfairly competing against the commercial sector if we did. However, we do modify and repair commercial material. If somebody brings a device to us and says, "This doesn't do what I want it to. Can you make it do what I want it to?", then we do.

The last page is a breakdown of our clients by age group. We do not collect age statistics from the clients we deal with, because it is not information we need. We just make a guesstimate on the basis of our experience with these people of what their ages are.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. Just for the information of the committee, why are you not funded to provide services for those over the age of 65?

Mr Sawyer: Disability ACT operates under the commonwealth, state and territories funding agreement, which provides funds up to age 65. We have not been able to get access to HACC funding. I know that HACC is about to be transferred to the commonwealth. We have been trying to follow up that angle, but there does not seem to be any information available at the moment. From 1 July, it is going into a transition phase.

MS HUNTER: I want to pick up on that issue of HACC funding. In other states I understand that organisations such as yours do have access to HACC funding.

Mr Sawyer: Yes.

MS HUNTER: What has been the response from DHCS around this? Have you asked for access to HACC funding? What has been their response?

Mr Sawyer: Yes. In the past we have asked for HACC funding, but the answer that we get when we do that is: "I am sorry; it has all been allocated. Try again next year." To do that, we have to apply for a tender with HACC. We have attempted to do that this year. We have gone and spoken to the people who run HACC in the ACT, but their advice is, "We are waiting for information from the commonwealth as to what is happening with HACC." We have not heard anything as yet; I guess it is still dependent on the budget or whatever. I just do not know.

MS HUNTER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Caroline, have you got a question?

MS LE COUTEUR: Given your funding situation, are you a sustainable organisation? Is there enough funding? Clearly the demand for your services is more than sustainable, but do you have enough funding so that you actually will continue?

Mr Sawyer: We are continuing on the basis that we have severely cut our funding. We are not operating as a normal business would operate, because we just do not have the funds, but we are paying our bills and we have got funding to do that.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you envisage that you will continue?

Mr Sawyer: Yes. We have a funding committee, a fundraising committee, but, as with these things, they start off very slowly and build up. The thing that we find with funding is that if you apply to a foundation, various people may require you to have some sort of project that you want to fund; administrative funding is not acceptable. That is our problem, and that is the problem with a lot of small organisations. For us to continue, we need administrative funding. We still have the bills to pay.

MS HUNTER: Could I just get an understanding of what your \$126,000 goes on at the moment?

Mr Sawyer: Salaries.

MS HUNTER: So you do have paid employees?

Mr Sawyer: Yes, we have two paid employees. One is a professional engineer and the other is an office manager.

MS HUNTER: Okay.

Mr Sawyer: At the moment the professional engineer is forgoing some of his salary and using salary sacrifice. We are very lucky where that is concerned. We are only getting a small amount of donations—something like \$16,000 this year so far. This financial year we had a grant from Disability ACT of \$20,000 to do some upgrading of our accounts and to look into some legal matters.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot?

MR DOSZPOT: I have a couple of questions regarding the same question that Mr Smyth started off with, regarding the age limit of 65. One is this: if you have got someone who is a client—is that the correct expression?

Mr Sawyer: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: If they have been with you since 63, at 65 you have to cease doing work with them, do you?

Mr Sawyer: No. If you come to us and you say, “I have a disability,” age does not come into it. We will provide service to anybody.

MR DOSZPOT: But you are not funded for anyone over 65? Is that correct?

Mr Sawyer: Yes. That is all that Disability ACT is able to provide—funding up to 65.

MS HUNTER: So you are covering it out of your own volunteers and so forth?

Mr Sawyer: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: I find it quite incomprehensible in terms of today's political correctness that we can draw a line there. I would like some more information about this. I am not sure if you are the one to provide that information, but if you have it I certainly would like to know more about it.

Mr Sawyer: In the past, with work I have done with Disability ACT, we have operated on the basis that funding is provided under the commonwealth, state and territories disability agreement, which only funds up to 65.

THE CHAIR: It might be a question for the minister.

Mr Sawyer: Funding over 65 is done under HACC.

MS HUNTER: And, as you stated, you have not had access to any HACC funds, and that has been the issue.

Mr Sawyer: No, we have not been able to as yet.

MS HUNTER: It is more the issue that you have not had access to those funds?

Mr Sawyer: The problem that we have had in the past is that we have attacked the issue from the wrong side. We have gone to these departments and said, "Can we have a top-up of funding?" They have said: "No; there is no funding left. We have allocated it all." So we have come to you guys to try and attack it from the front end rather than the back.

THE CHAIR: Amanda?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you. I have a follow-up on that. HACC is a program which is run in every state and territory. How is it that other states are able to get funding under the HACC program, which is an Australia-wide program, but here in the ACT you have not been able to?

Mr Sawyer: I do not know whether other states have a department such as Disability ACT. I guess it depends a lot on how the process was started initially. I do not know the answer to your question.

MS BRESNAN: You said that HACC have said to you, "We can't do anything now because it is transferring to the commonwealth." But as I understand it, all contracts have been extended for a further year because basically the process is not ready to go ahead. Is that the main reason they gave you for this year in terms of the tender

process?

Mr Sawyer: They are waiting until they understand what the transition arrangements are before advertisement for tenders is made. I have not seen anything. I may have missed it, but I have not seen anything yet.

MS BRESNAN: Have they informed you that the contracts have been extended for a further year? It is my understanding that they have.

Mr Sawyer: The HACC contracts?

MS BRESNAN: Yes. It is my understanding that they have been extended because basically the process is not ready to go forward.

Mr Sawyer: We would be a new contract.

MS BRESNAN: So that could extend it out for another year for you, essentially—potentially.

MR DOSZPOT: I have a final question on that. Are there any people that fall into this category that are caught up in this no-man's land or—once they reach 65, they have got funding access from HACC at the moment?

Mr Sawyer: We will service anybody who comes to us. We do not discriminate on the basis of age—or anything, in fact. If you tell us you are disabled, we do not actually go and check to see if you are disabled; we will provide you with a service.

MR DOSZPOT: But if you are doing your acquittals for the government, that does not count?

Mr Sawyer: I have never been asked that question. We provide the service. Our contract was on the basis of 240 contracts a year to provide service to the ACT community.

MS LE COUTEUR: How many do you actually do? You said your contract is for 240.

Mr Sawyer: We do about 320—as I said, one per cent of the community. There is 15 per cent of the community out there that could possibly use us, but we do not have the facilities to develop our services.

THE CHAIR: What is the unmet demand? These are obviously people who are aware of you when they come to you. Are you aware of what the unmet demand is? Do you turn people away that you do not have the facilities to be able to deal with?

Mr Sawyer: If I do my sums right, 16 per cent of the ACT community, according to ABS stats, are people with disabilities. Ten per cent of the ACT community are people over 65. So that is 26 per cent of the community. Any one of those people could come to us.

THE CHAIR: Do you turn away people that you are unable to help with their requests? No? You meet everybody?

Mr Sawyer: You cannot turn people away if they have a need.

THE CHAIR: Other questions?

MS BRESNAN: I do have one other question. It is around the policy that has been developed around disability and ageing. The government has been looking at the policy framework for people with a disability who are ageing, which is obviously the key issue you have brought up. Has TADACT had any involvement in those discussions or has the government spoken to you about that?

Mr Sawyer: We have spoken to the Productivity Commission recently.

MS BRESNAN: Was that on the disability insurance scheme?

Mr Sawyer: Yes. We have not spoken about the ageing population.

MS BRESNAN: So the policy framework that the ACT government is developing—there has not been any engagement on that?

Mr Sawyer: No.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Bob, thank you. A copy of the transcript will be forwarded when it is complete for you to check for accuracy. If there is anything you want to comment on, please get back to us. Thank you very much for your attendance today.

Mr Sawyer: Thank you.

JOHNSTON, MR DARRYL, President, Tuggeranong Community Council.

HOLMES, MR DUGALD, Vice President, Tuggeranong Community Council

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, gentlemen. The committee welcomes the Tuggeranong Community Council to this afternoon's hearing. Before you on the table is the privilege card and I need to ask: have you read the card and do you understand the implications of the privilege statement?

Mr Johnston: Yes, we have read that.

Mr Holmes: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I need to remind you that the sittings are being recorded for Hansard, for transcription, as well as being webstreamed and broadcast live, and we are also trialling Committees on Demand, which will leave an audiovisual record of the proceedings to be viewed until 30 June. Are you happy to proceed?

Mr Johnston: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make a short statement to introduce the Tuggeranong Community Council to the committee?

Mr Johnston: Yes, thank you very much. Firstly, I wish to thank members for allowing the Tuggeranong Community Council to address the Select Committee on Estimates and its inquiry into the ACT budget. The Tuggeranong Community Council is an incorporated, voluntary, not-for-profit, non-political, community-based association operating within the Tuggeranong district of the Australian Capital Territory.

The TCC is formally recognised as the peak community representative body in Tuggeranong, representing the interests of local residents and communities within the Tuggeranong valley. The TCC receives partial funding from the ACT government and as the peak community representative body of the Tuggeranong district.

I described last year's ACT budget as a bit of a mixed bag for Tuggeranong residents and I will say it again this year. While this year's budget contains a number of Canberra-wide initiatives that will benefit Tuggeranong residents, funding for ongoing works in Tuggeranong and a number of new capital projects, it has a sting in its tail. On the bright side, the Tuggeranong Community Council welcomes, among other things, funding for a new multipurpose indoor community facility, a men's shed, restoration of Isabella sports grounds, design works for a new CIT learning centre, a pedestrian bridge at Kambah, works associated with a new southern cemetery, ongoing works including the expansion and refurbishment of the Tuggeranong Health Centre, a new bus station at Erindale and the development of master plans for Tuggeranong and Erindale.

The sting comes in that for the second time in as many years Tuggeranong residents are being slugged with the highest average increase in general rates, with an average hike of 5.5 per cent. This is compared to south Canberra of -0.16, north Canberra of 2.82 per cent, Gungahlin of 3.68 per cent, Woden Valley of 2.81 per cent, Belconnen

of 3.89 per cent and Weston Creek of 4.79 per cent. Tuggeranong's higher than average rate increase follows the highest average rate increase in last year's budget of 6.57 per cent.

For the second year in a row, residents in my suburb of Chisholm will be hardest hit with an average increase of almost 7.45 per cent alone or an additional \$94 to the yearly rate bill. They are followed by residents in Banks with a 6.7 per cent increase in their rates, Calwell and Isabella Plains on 5.88 per cent and Gowrie with an increase of 5.78 per cent. These increases are much higher than the consumer price index of 3.3 per cent and much more than many families in Tuggeranong can afford.

I am concerned that the increases in general rates will have a significant impact on many Tuggeranong families and individuals. Many Tuggeranong residents are already doing it tough with recent rises in their weekly grocery bills, petrol prices and in the coming months, according to warnings from the banks, another round of interest rate rises. This is an issue that also concerns the ACT Ratepayers Association that has said in the past that rates have been going up by about 30 per cent greater than the consumer price index for the last four years.

Meanwhile, charitable and social welfare organisations in the Tuggeranong valley again report a significant increase in demand for their services from families and individuals suffering hardship. One major charitable organisation that works in the Tuggeranong community, St Vincent de Paul, reports a 12 per cent increase in the demand for its services in the last nine months. It also reports a 22 per cent increase in the number of employed people seeking assistance. These are people who, despite working, are facing difficulty keeping up with rental and mortgage repayments and the general costs of living.

Other charitable and community welfare organisations tell similar stories. For example, Communities@Work reports an 18 per cent increase in the last nine months in the number of individuals and families to whom it provides emergency relief. This does not include those that seek assistance from Communities@Work and have to be turned away or referred to other organisations because Communities@Work is already overstretched. Meanwhile, the Salvation Army expects a 10 to 15 per cent increase in the demand for its services when it ramps up operations in the Tuggeranong valley.

Tuggeranong residents realise that if we want community services and facilities we have to be prepared to pay for them. However, it appears that we in Tuggeranong are shouldering a greater proportion of the cost of running and maintaining Canberra than our neighbours in other districts within the national capital. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. I note on your statement you also seem to feel Tuggeranong has been a bit hard done by from the lack of infrastructure. What are the critical infrastructure projects that need to be funded?

Mr Johnston: I will hand over to Dug here.

Mr Holmes: We are aware of some of the capital works, new ones that have been added this year. For example, there is a pedestrian bridge for the new K-10 school at

Kambah, but we have made submissions prior to the budget for other infrastructure, including consideration of a footbridge, pedestrian bridge, for the new Uniting Care aged development down at Gordon. We have had representations from the community on the roads. We know that obviously the master planning has been kicked off around the Erindale and Tuggeranong centres master plan, but specifically around Athllon Drive, Erindale Drive—the lack of road infrastructure.

Mr Johnston: We canvassed organisations and other community groups in the Tuggeranong valley, asking them to provide us with suggestions and ideas of what they would like to see in the ACT budget. For example, the Lanyon Community Forum requested such things as a community kitchen cum meeting place where people could come to if they were in need of meals for themselves or for their children, to seek assistance or guidance on how to gain employment and just basically to link up with other members of the community. Other suggestions that came from the Lanyon valley residents were such things as a library.

MS HUNTER: In the survey to us, plus also in your opening statement, you talk about the increase in rates, and of course rates are based on increased land value. What it reflects is the fact that the price of properties in the Tuggeranong valley is rising. You then go on to say that you feel that the ratepayers in the Tuggeranong valley are paying a disproportionate cost, if you like, or they are basically subsidising other parts of Canberra.

I just want to talk a bit more about that, because obviously there are different parts of Canberra at different times that have needs. How would you justify that as a community council? You obviously have engagement with other community councils. Is this something you have talked to them about? Do you feel that the Tuggeranong valley is raising more rates and it should have that percentage of the pie and others should lift their game and if they are not going to put into the rates pot then they should not get their needs met? I am just trying to understand what your argument there is.

Mr Johnston: When you are looking at the average rate rises across Canberra in the last two years, Tuggeranong Community Council appears to have been slugged with a higher than average rate increase than other districts within Canberra. That is basically what we are saying, and we are also saying that those increases are hurting people down in the Tuggeranong valley. That information is coming from community and welfare organisations down in the valley. At the same time we also recognise that, as I said before, if you want services you have got to pay for them. But maybe we should be looking at spreading that burden equally across the city somehow so that you do not have one particular area in Canberra paying a higher average rate rise than, say, other areas of Canberra.

MS LE COUTEUR: So are you suggesting that we all pay the same rates per block—

MS HUNTER: Regardless of where we live?

MS LE COUTEUR: regardless of where we live? There are some reasons to do an approach like that. I am just wondering if that is where you are going.

Mr Johnston: I am sorry, you are—

Mr Holmes: The flat rate.

Mr Johnston: The flat rate idea.

MS LE COUTEUR: The flat rate. The reason you have been paying more presumably is that land values in Tuggeranong have been going up faster than in other parts of Canberra. But you may well not be paying more than other people in absolute terms. I am just wondering if you are suggesting that every household should pay the same rate, which has some social equity pluses to it. I am just disinterested; I am not arguing one way or the other.

MS HUNTER: We are just trying to understand your arguments.

Mr Johnston: I have looked at the idea of a flat rate system. That was something that was suggested down on the South Coast when I was living down there. They had a similar situation where people were paying exorbitant rates and they were looking at the flat rate suggestion. That really is something that possibly we should be looking to our political leaders to guide us on, to investigate for us.

MS HUNTER: If you are not suggesting that, I am just trying to get an understanding. You seem to be suggesting that a greater percentage of the revenue raised from rates should be spent in the Tuggeranong valley over Belconnen, Gungahlin, inner north, inner south or Weston Creek. Is that what you are saying?

Mr Johnston: No. What I am saying there is that Tuggeranong residents are asking themselves: we appear to be paying, as the figures are suggesting, a higher than average rate increase than the other districts in Canberra, but it appears that we are also getting less of the pie.

Mr Holmes: There is less capital works value in the Tuggeranong valley.

Mr Johnston: And while we appreciate what we have in the budget—as I went through and listed them, we appreciate that—we are paying a higher than average rate increase this year, as we did last year, but we are asking ourselves whether we are getting less of the pie. Does it appear that way?

MS HUNTER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Given the time, we will move on. Caroline, have you got a new question?

MS LE COUTEUR: Absolutely. You would expect this question from me, I suppose. The Tuggeranong Community Council have been active in a number of planning issues that come to mind: obviously the southern cemetery and broadacre Tralee, and there are no doubt many others. What do you see as the key planning issues for Tuggeranong valley?

Mr Johnston: I will hand over to Dug on this one.

Mr Holmes: There are many, as you say, and we are engaged in a number of consultations. One thing that came to light, for example, with the southern cemetery was the lack of feedback when you participate in those consultations, also the resources. The TCC has to make do with the resources it has available to try and engage or encourage people to engage and to participate; and then when they do to find there does not seem to be any clear feedback or confirmation of the issues raised is disappointing. As you say, the main ones of course that are ongoing are eastern broadacre, which includes obviously the area for the southern cemetery, Tralee—everything you have raised; all the conflicting developments if you like.

MS LE COUTEUR: But there is nothing that particularly stands out, is there?

Mr Holmes: The main example was the cemetery—trying to get further information on that when it seemed like it was a foregone conclusion. We raised a number of issues, including its location, public transport access to it, the competition between funeral processions and the people going to the tip on a Saturday or Sunday. It was not—

THE CHAIR: Yes, do not get confused.

Mr Holmes: That is right. You do not want them turning up with bodies at the tip. The point is that we did raise these concerns and they did not seem to be addressed. We have not seen any sort of follow-up.

Mr Johnston: The council itself recognises the need for a cemetery in the south and we welcome a cemetery in the south. But, as Dug said, we have raised concerns about its location and the fact that it is not linked to public transport. There are concerns that there are water springs popping up down there and are we going to see Uncle Fred floating down the Monaro Highway? The location itself—is that really the best location? Are there other areas where it would probably suit better?

MS LE COUTEUR: Have you any issues about the crematorium that is proposed there as a part of it?

Mr Johnston: That is an issue that has been raised by the Tuggeranong Community Council. A number of members of the council and residents in the Macarthur area have expressed concern about its being sited there and possible emissions from it. Also, questions have been raised over just how much the one at Mitchell is being used. We have been told it is being underused and we have been told, no, it is running to capacity. Okay, if we do not have the crematorium down in the south, has any consideration been given to whether we can use the one which exists over at Queanbeyan?

A number of residents down there and members of the council have actually suggested: “Okay, let us not put a crematorium there. Maybe what we do need more of are chapels.” If you go to the one at Mitchell, people are lining up one behind the other to use that one chapel.

Mr Holmes: For the services, specifically. Yes, the proximity to residents of whichever suburb you want to pick—but obviously the northern end of Tuggeranong has been raised.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: I will defer to the members for Brindabella.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves?

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, I have got a couple of questions. Gentlemen, I understand from your evidence to the committee that the view you express is that you are paying a significant amount of rates but you are not getting the return on that money essentially. Firstly, did you suggest an alternative which would reduce the amount of rates payable by Tuggeranong residents or are you happy enough with the formula that is applied across Canberra? Secondly, did you put in a proposal to the estimates process which addresses that imbalance? I have not seen it but it may be that I have missed it.

Mr Johnston: No. Last year I appeared before this committee and I raised my concerns last year about the higher than average rate increase that Tuggeranong residents appear to have received out of last year's budget. In this year's process, yes, we actually did put forward a budget submission that was presented to Joy Burch. It listed a number of items that Tuggeranong valley residents would like to see in the budget and they were canvassed by the Tuggeranong Community Council with other groups and organisations in the valley. There was no mention in that submission of rates or rate increases or whatever.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you. You mentioned the comments from the Lanyon community forum.

Mr Johnston: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Was that item included in your budget submission?

Mr Johnston: Yes, it was. Yes, that came from Susan Foley, who is down there at the Lanyon Valley community forum—

Mr Holmes: The centre manger.

Mr Johnston: The centre manager.

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, I know Susan.

Mr Johnston: She specifically raised as number one her issue of a community kitchen, which they felt was needed down there to provide meals and connectivity—provide meals for residents and that connectivity between residents and particularly people who are out of work, seeking work and just wanting contact.

MR HARGREAVES: Was that in relation to the provision of the services at the

Mura centre being originally young person oriented and now is starting to flick in the demography of the Lanyon Valley into the more senior?

Mr Johnston: From what I recall—

Mr Holmes: Yes, it was specifically to build an extension to the Mura centre to provide a space for the community services.

MR HARGREAVES: I am pleased to see that. Can I just—

MS BRESNAN: I was just going to say that as I understand it, I think they do use the facility in Belconnen, but it is actually getting to capacity there; so they actually want the same sort of thing in Tuggeranong.

Mr Johnston: That is right, yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Yes. I was there at the beginning and the intention was for Mura to change as the demography of the Lanyon valley changed. I was interested to see whether or not we are seeing that change occurring. That is where I was at. The last question I have relates to the stone wall which signifies the northern boundary of Tuggeranong Homestead. It is in dire need of repair. Does the council have a view on that and did you express a view on that in terms of the budget process?

Mr Johnston: No, that was not anything that was actually presented to us.

Mr Holmes: No.

Mr Johnston: I have actually been down to—sorry, which?

MR HARGREAVES: On Drakeford Drive near the swimming pool, you will see the stone-form wall. It goes on either side of Drakeford Drive. I have actually put in a submission of my own on that one, but I was interested to see whether or not the council was aware of the need for that repair work. I was interested to know whether the council felt that it would support the listing of that wall for heritage purposes.

Mr Johnston: I would actually like to go down and have a look at it for myself.

MR HARGREAVES: You have not seen it yet? I would recommend that you do that.

Mr Johnston: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Just for the sake of accuracy, that wall was built in 1995 and it is the—

MR HARGREAVES: It is a replica wall.

THE CHAIR: It is from original materials. It was actually built as a symbol of the entrance to Tuggeranong as part of the 50th anniversary of World War II celebrations.

MR HARGREAVES: It was, in fact.

THE CHAIR: We are going to move along to Mr Doszpot.

MS HUNTER: A little bit of history in estimates.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Mr Johnston, I was very glad to hear your concern about the rates, the level of Tuggeranong's contribution and the lack of return from the government. Mr Smyth and I have been raising these issues now for the last 4½ years and it is good to get some backup too. That is just a comment. In terms of going forward with some of the ways to push some of these issues, I understand that the Tuggeranong Community Council met with the Chief Minister in the last six months. Is that right?

Mr Johnston: Back in April. Yes, last month.

Mr Hargreaves: Which Chief Minister are you talking about?

MR DOSZPOT: Which Chief Minister?

Mr Johnston: I think it was the week before Anzac Day—

MR DOSZPOT: The previous Chief Minister, yes. The question is: what sort of reaction did you get from him when these issues were raised?

Mr Johnston: We raised a number of issues with him resulting from a meeting that was held prior to the meeting with the Chief Minister. There were motions that came out of that meeting calling for a number of items—such things as a combined CIT-cum-university campus down in Tuggeranong. We sought update on a whole heap of other issues. The issue of rates and what was going to be contained in the budget actually was not covered because our meeting unfortunately was not as long as we had hoped. He had just come back from the National Press Club and had back-to-back meetings. It was prior to the budget.

MR DOSZPOT: Moving on, because I know that Ms Bresnan would like to have a go as well, the other issue that is concerning a lot of people in Erindale in particular at the moment is the problem that the shopkeepers have, especially around Gartside Street where the situation is intolerable from their point of view. There are some real safety issues there as well. On top of that, with the planning that ACTPLA is sort of alluding to, do you have any comment on just how much attention is being given to that area and what the community needs to do, and can the Tuggeranong Community Council assist the traders to press their claims as well?

Mr Johnston: Yes, we have actually been playing a fairly active role in the development of that Erindale master plan, which includes a proposal for a new bus interchange, a new bus station and everything there. We have had them to our general meetings and we have actually hosted a special public meeting where we have briefed the community on the plans for that Erindale master plan. I have been trying to encourage the Tuggeranong community to get on board with that and to get involved in it.

We are involved; they are consulting us; we are in regular contact with them. We are

publicising and promoting it as much as we possibly can to get community involvement. Our people have been providing input to it as well.

Mr Holmes: We do recognise the issues with Erindale and also with the Tuggeranong town square parking issue now that the government buildings are down there on Anketell.

MR HARGREAVES: Just on that one, are you aware of the extent to which the community consultation around the Erindale master plan has actually produced a lot of community input into that master plan? Is the council aware of that?

Mr Johnston: Yes, as I said, we hosted a public meeting on that and we had somewhere between 60 and 70 people turn up to that public meeting. We actually video-taped it and it is going up on our website as a video on the website. They have had meetings down in Erindale, one of which I understand was very poorly attended. They have had information booths and community consultation going on at the Tuggeranong Hyperdome. So it has been quite extensive.

MR DOSZPOT: There has been supposedly—

Mr Holmes: We have limited funds for trying to advertise these meetings that we hold ourselves, obviously.

Mr Johnston: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We are going to have to move along. Ms Bresnan?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, chair. I will be quick, because I know we are over time. I know public transport is an issue which the TCC have identified and you have a committee which looks at transport issues.

Mr Johnston: Yes.

MS BRESNAN: You have mentioned the Erindale bus interchange. Are there any other sort of key infrastructure items in terms of public transport that you think that southern area of Tuggeranong or southern area of Canberra and Tuggeranong particularly need?

Mr Johnston: Yes, I know that there is some activity—we have actually been involved in it as well—to promote park-and-ride facilities down at Calwell and park-and-ride facilities generally around Tuggeranong. I know that there have recently been introduced a Redex-style or blue-style bus service to Tuggeranong. But I think it all goes back to trying to encourage people to actually use public transport, having bus timetables and bus services that actually fit in with people and their habits and their daily requirements.

MS BRESNAN: Yes, all right. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: We might call a halt to it there, gentlemen. Thank you very much for attending today. A copy of the transcript will be provided when it is ready for you

read to ensure accuracy and we thank you for your attendance here this afternoon.

Mr Johnston: Thank you.

Mr Holmes: Thank you, chair and committee.

JARVIS, MS JENNY, President, National Council of Women
DIXON, MS ROSLYN, Past President, National Council of Women

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, ladies. I welcome the National Council of Women ACT to the 2011-12 estimates hearings. In front of you on the table is the privilege statement card. I need to ask you: have you read the card and do you understand the implications of the privilege statement? Thank you. I need to tell you that you are being recorded by Hansard for transcription. We are also webstreaming and broadcasting these hearings live. We are now trialling a Committees on Demand audio replay that people can access. Are you happy to proceed and would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Jarvis: I am very nervous about this.

THE CHAIR: You will be right.

Ms Jarvis: I have not done it before.

MR HARGREAVES: Don't worry about it.

MR HANSON: Me too. You're intimidating me!

MR HARGREAVES: When we bite, we don't draw blood! Don't worry.

Ms Jarvis: Just as an explanation of our organisation, the National Council of Women operates at the state, national and international level. We are an umbrella organisation to which many women's organisations are affiliated. In the ACT we have 17 organisations and 31 individuals who are affiliated members of NCW ACT. We work on an advisers system which covers a very wide range of community interests. For example, there is health, education, the environment, housing, consumer affairs and many more. That system works both at the state level and the national level and then to the international level. We concentrate on how decisions made by governments in these various areas affect women and families in particular. In the ACT we can only act on or respond to matters concerning the ACT. Any national issues must go through the national body, but we can recommend to the national body that they follow up certain areas.

In preparing our budget submission we took the decision to urge that the government give special attention to the impact of all budget decisions on the elderly and children, the most vulnerable members of our community. The areas we listed as being of most concern were health services, children's support and transport. We note that health and transport have been given some attention in the budget and we will follow those developments with interest.

I will just add here that many of our members are in the older women's bracket. Most of the women's organisations these days consist of older women because younger women are too busy working and mothering. That is why we have chosen particularly to look at the elderly. It was in the areas of health and transport that many of our women had concerns, particularly for hospital visiting and things like that. Where they can catch one bus and go to where they have to go it is all right, but when they

have to go to an interchange and stand around and wait, it is a real problem. I have not been to a bus interchange recently. I used to do it on a regular basis a few years back. They are not very nice places to spend time, with the language, the spitting and the things that I used to note. That is why health and transport were in our budget.

However, we are still concerned about the level of support for our children. Last year we held a public seminar entitled “What’s best for our children?” I have brought along a copy of our program. We had excellent speakers and it was very well received. We learnt a lot about the problems associated with children these days. Dr Sue Packer was one of our speakers. There was Kate Butler, Dr Jan Taylor and Narelle Hargreaves, who is our education adviser.

In the preparation for that seminar we had dealings with both our children’s commissioner, Alasdair Roy, and Dr Helen Watchirs, who actually opened the seminar for us. During that time we became aware that the funding for the children’s commissioner and the resources available were not really sufficient to adequately meet the demand. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which we are a signatory, requires us to ensure the survival and development of every child. It is a concern that there are children not having their needs attended to.

We also stated in our submission that we saw that the role of government first and foremost was to provide core services. One of those core services which we as an organisation have been asking for for quite a long time is a green garden waste pick-up bin. We put in a submission on the waste strategy. I attended the public consultation at Woden along with two other people, apart from the people who were running it. It was not well publicised. The writing in the little column where I found it was very small. But when I mentioned this I was told that this had been of great interest to a lot of people in the community. It is not rocket science. I cannot understand it. People tell us all over the place, “I was in so and so, I was in Melbourne, and they all have green pick-up bins.”

This is particularly important for older people who cannot manage trailers and things like that. It is quite important. I actually wrote a comment. I do not really think the gardeners of this city are appreciated very much. Gardening is their sport, their relaxation and their hobby. It is marvellous therapy. Gardeners keep the city beautiful, but all this does not count because it does not bring in dollars to the government coffers or to business groups. A young person actually mentioned to me that waste garden rubbish left lying around becomes a real fire hazard because she has to wait until her husband is quite ready to fill the trailer and take it to the tip.

That was one of our major concerns. We have written a number of times and asked about green waste, but we always get the same answer. In fact, I wrote to Jon Stanhope, bless his soul. I heard him quote his mantra on talkback as to why we could not have a green waste pick-up bin. Every time we have mentioned it we have got the same answer back, as though it was mantra.

MS HUNTER: What has that answer been? What has the former Chief Minister’s response been?

Ms Jarvis: It has been that a great percentage of our green waste is already picked up

and he does not see that we need to have a government doing it. But I pointed out that I pay \$360 a year to have my trash pack emptied. I have a nice garden with a lot of rubbish. It costs me \$30 every month to have it picked up. We really feel that is a government responsibility.

MS HUNTER: A lot of people have raised, and various constituents do raise, the issue of the green bin. I was wondering, for the women that your organisation engages with, is it also around the old fridge, the old television—those sorts of goods—as well? We hear that from a lot of older people.

M Jarvis: We have had a little victory there because we have been writing about bulk waste too. That has just started last week, which we are pleased to see. One of the things in the waste strategy was to have a free pick-up for electrical goods. We feel we have had a little victory over bulk waste.

MS HUNTER: Who is eligible for that? I understand it is concession card holders?

Mrs Jarvis: People with concession cards, yes.

Ms Dixon: One of the things that we are concerned about with the green waste is that if you have got a tree that has been pruned, like when you have overhead wires or things like that, they are large items that people who are older cannot handle or carry. There is no way they can get rid of that easily. When you are pruning roses, for example, that has got to be got rid of. That is the sort of thing that we are looking at being removed.

THE CHAIR: Are you finished with your statement?

Ms Jarvis: No.

THE CHAIR: If you could be quick, because we are going to run out of time.

Ms Jarvis: I have just got this: we have found that many in our community—and this was mentioned in our submission—are quite irate about the amount of money this government spends on elite sport. We do not see that as a core service. Does Manuka Oval really need more seats? I particularly noted last week that there were many empty seats at the one and only AFL match to be played there this season. As for paying out money to the west Sydney football club, I rest my case. Our plea is—

MR HARGREAVES: What about rugby league, Ms Jarvis, and the Brumbies?

Ms Jarvis: Yes, they get a lot there. The Raiders are getting their clubhouse all done up.

MR HARGREAVES: Don't pick on AFL, please, Mr Jarvis, I beg of you.

THE CHAIR: Order, Mr Hargreaves!

Ms Jarvis: As to amateur sport, a lot of that is done by parents so we have no problems there. We also flagged the idea of a commissioner for the elderly, but we

thought that was just really blowing in the wind. A lot of money has been spent on public art. This was not in our submission but, having received a letter from the Canberra Symphony Orchestra this morning, I wonder how much money the ACT government gives to the Canberra Symphony Orchestra.

MRS DUNNE: \$200,000, roughly.

THE CHAIR: We are going to run out of time. The questions of the chair and the deputy chair have been asked, so we will go straight to Ms Le Couteur and work our way quickly down the line.

MS LE COUTEUR: As you represent a number of more elderly women, I was wondering if you had any knowledge of or interest in the consumer protection issues with retirement villages. I understand that the other states of Australia have specific legislation for people who have bought into retirement villages, but the ACT does not have this as yet. I wondered if that was an issue that was concerning you or your members at all.

Ms Jarvis: It is an issue that has been raised and we have followed it. A number of years ago we held a whole seminar on all the options for retirement. One of the reasons why we flagged the idea of a commissioner for the elderly was really for the safety and protection of the elderly, even in retirement homes and nursing homes. Have you got anything to say about that, Ros?

Ms Dixon: I am aware of this because I am in an over-55 lifestyle at Bellerive in Woden. A number of members at our own place are on the committee and we have met with Mary Porter, who is doing the legislation. We have had a look at the legislation. As far as our organisation is concerned, we have not been looking at it.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: I will defer my question to Mrs Dunne.

MS HUNTER: Could I just follow on—

MR HARGREAVES: Just a very quick question.

MS HUNTER: Just quickly following on from Caroline's, I was wondering what the expectation was—

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves has the floor. We will come back.

MR HARGREAVES: This is just a very quick question and I apologise for not knowing enough about the council. I presume that you are representing the ACT chapter of the council. Am I correct there?

Ms Jarvis: The Council of Women.

MR HARGREAVES: The Council of Women—the ACT chapter of that council.

Ms Jarvis: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: How many members do you have and how many members are there nationally?

Ms Jarvis: We have 17 organisations. Each organisation is entitled to send two delegates to each monthly meeting that we have. We have 31 individual members, because individuals can join as members.

MR HARGREAVES: In addition to those other organisations. Would you be kind enough to give the secretary a list of those organisations, please?

Ms Jarvis: I can do that, yes. I have not got it with me today.

MR HARGREAVES: No, at your leisure. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Ms Jarvis and Ms Dixon, I apologise for being a little late. When I came in you were talking about the issues in relation to transport. One of the issues that constituents raise with me—and this is an issue mainly for more elderly people and people who are reliant upon public transport—is the difficulties that people have on Canberra Day, as an example. It is a public holiday and therefore the buses run on a Sunday or a reduced timetable. It is very difficult for people, because they have to negotiate two buses to get anywhere. Also, the bus timetables slow down, so if you want to go to, say, the concert in the evening and watch the fireworks there is no way of getting home. Is this something that you have raised with the government, those sorts of issues, and have you looked at possible solutions to address those issues?

Ms Jarvis: We have not really. Our members have told us that they have problems with transport, particularly those who are no longer driving, but we have not actually raised that with the government before.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you.

MR HARGREAVES: Has the over-75 gold pass made any difference to your members?

Ms Jarvis: It has, yes. I only know because I have got friends who use it, and they are very happy with that.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you.

MS LE COUTEUR: Can I just quickly follow on with my question. Have you any idea when any legislation will be introduced?

Mrs Dixon: No. It is being developed. I understand that they are getting material from all the other states so they can look at it and get the best of what is happening in other states. One of the members of the Older Women's Network, I think, is on the

committee for looking at this.

Ms Jarvis: The Older Women's Network is one of the organisations affiliated with us.

THE CHAIR: Ladies, thank you very much for appearing this afternoon. We will take some of those issues up with the relevant minister in due course, I assume. When the transcription is finished from Hansard we will forward that to you for you to read and ensure its accuracy. We thank you for your attendance today.

Ms Jarvis: Thank you. At least you know we exist now!

MR HARGREAVES: I do. I am severely chastised now!

GRIFFITHS, MR ROD, President, National Parks Association of the ACT

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, and welcome to the estimates committee for the budget 2011-12. Before you on the table is a privilege card, and I need to ask: have you read the privilege card, and do you understand the implications of the statement?

Mr Griffiths: Yes, it is the same as last year.

THE CHAIR: I inform you that proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription. They are also being webstreamed and broadcast live. Additionally, we are trialling Committees on Demand, which leaves an audiovisual record that people can access and view until 30 June this year. With that in mind, are you happy to proceed?

Mr Griffiths: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Griffiths: Yes. I thank the committee for providing us with the opportunity to make a response to our submission and to make comments to you.

The National Parks Association has been around for 51 years. We are a very proud organisation within the ACT. We have three major things. We have been working basically in the ACT to protect the natural environment, and we do that through outdoor activities—both walks programs and work party programs to improve the natural surroundings. We also have an education program. We have quite a comprehensive range of field guides. We have just recently produced a coffee table book on Namadgi called *Namadgi: A National Park for the National Capital*, but we also hold seminars and meetings to provide information to the public in general. The other key area we work in is the engagement of government on its policies and programs.

We really want to today reflect on our submission and the fact that the conservation reserves within the ACT actually make a contribution to the ACT. They are vital to the ACT for providing water. We have got some of the best water, I think, in Australia. It basically comes down to the fact that our water supply principally comes from the Cotter region within the Namadgi national park. But our reserves also provide other benefits to the community. There are health benefits, both physical and psychological, and they provide opportunities for recreation, tourism and also employment for the ACT.

We see that our conservation reserves are an asset to the ACT. I sometimes feel that the Treasury may see the park system as a liability, but we definitely see it as an asset. In respect of assets, you actually have to maintain them to make sure they are working and providing what we want. That is one of the things we tried to bring out within our submission—maintenance is an issue for our conservation reserves. The reserve estate has expanded quite significantly over the years, but I am not sure that the funding has necessarily been commensurate with that increase.

Our reserve estates are facing increased pressure resulting from the fact that there is

increasing interface with the ACT suburbs. We certainly have one of the largest urban natural interfaces within Australia for our national parks. There are increasing recreational demands on our parks. They all experience the effect of climate change as that kicks in, and there is naturally the existence of weeds and pests within our reserves. Certainly the fantastic climate we have had over this last year sees a significant increase in the amount of weed work that needs to be done.

In our submission we outlined our concerns about the funding for the maintenance of our conservation reserves. In a recent report commissioned by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, there was a survey on recreation users within the ACT. One of the key findings from that was concern about the levels of funding for our reserve system and also the pressures that are falling upon our reserves.

We see it in our work within the reserve system in a seeming lack of ranger numbers, evidenced by the fact that there seems to be a reduced level of interface between park staff and park care groups. Certainly within my role as president of the NPA, I get to talk to park care groups and, when we get together, one of the key issues is that they are not getting the support that they seemed to get not so long ago. We call for in our submission stabilisation of the core funding for reserves and expansion in the number of rangers—rangers really make a big difference in how we maintain the estate—and additional funding for feral pests and weeds.

Also, we raise a concern about the accountability indicators in the budget. Looking at the paper again this year, under land management, there is only one indicator associated with our reserves, that being satisfaction with the management of our reserves. I bring your attention to a quote I have heard—what you measure is what you manage for. A very broad statement like that really does not give any incentive to manage the key issues that face our reserves.

We should be looking at indicators on how our biodiversity is going, the quality of water that is coming out of our reserves, the effectiveness of our weed and pest control, impacts on vandalism, how public safety is measured and our heritage estate within our conservation reserves. All of these probably should already be managed, and we indicated in our submission that there is already a lot of work done on this and that the ACT bureaucracy has identified that this work has been done and that we can draw on it.

We were very happy to see some of the measures in the budget—the funding for woodlands estate is welcome. We have a real treasure in our yellow box-red gum woodlands. We probably hold one of the best examples of that within Australia, and we really need to manage our lowland woodlands in a significant way. We were pleased to see some increase in the funding for pests and weeds. I will leave it there, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I am sure you could have gone on for a lot longer, but, unfortunately, we are limited in time. Two questions to start with: you talked about the number of rangers, non-specialist rangers. How many do you think we need, and at what cost would that come?

Mr Griffiths: We were pleased to see that the government has provided a position for

a specialist woodlands ranger. I think that is an important thing. We also called for at least three other non-specialist rangers. I think it is important to get specialist rangers in, but also we need those non-specialists in there, and we need at least three. We identified them in Googong, Namadgi and the Murrumbidgee River corridor, because it is one of those high usage areas. Increased ranger numbers just provides that visibility. It reduces the potential for inappropriate behaviour within the reserve estate and also just allows people to be sure that things are actually happening.

We have had concerns on a couple of occasions where we have noticed that there is only one ranger on for the whole of the southern half of the ACT on a long weekend. We have certainly been provided with information that, at least in one case, it was simply the fact that it was just a bad piece of planning and everything did not work together. But once you get two instances within a year, you start thinking, “Well, maybe there aren’t enough rangers to really cover the whole process.”

THE CHAIR: You also mentioned the need to maintain the assets. Do you have a figure on what the association believes would be required to maintain the assets?

Mr Griffiths: At the moment we understand that, under weeds, the budget contains just over \$1 million. Some \$300,000 of that will be funding that will not be around next year once the insurance money runs out. So that next year our funding will go down to \$700,000. We believe that, given the size of our estate comparable to the number of people and the number of rangers, we probably need a little bit more, probably at least \$1.5 million, but I cannot give you an exact figure on that.

THE CHAIR: All right.

MS HUNTER: I want to go to this recurring theme around the lack of rangers across the territory. First, what services do our parks provide that you do not believe are costed properly?

Mr Griffiths: That are costed properly?

MS HUNTER: That we do not cost properly. So what services are not costed or have a value placed on them?

Mr Griffiths: I think the key thing, certainly from the park care point of view, is ensuring that the work that is done by the park care volunteers is useful and that it fits into an overall plan. This is where the liaison with the parks services is so vital, so we can draw together the scientific information that supports the service and apply that into the work being done by the volunteers, so that the work the volunteers are doing is achieving an overall outcome for our reserve estate. That is the key thing that I seem to be getting a message about—the level of interaction has dropped off so that the park care people feel like they are not valued and that we are losing that drive in some areas.

MS HUNTER: Yes. I know I have got that back from people in my own electorate. One idea that has been put out there—it was flagged by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment—is introducing a levy to contribute to the management of our parks.

Mr Griffiths: Yes.

MS HUNTER: Does NPA have a view on this? What are the pros and cons of introducing a levy?

Mr Griffiths: Certainly we recognise that the parks need some sort of funding. The idea of a levy really is a user-pays concept levied upon all of the ACT, but then all of the ACT actually benefits from our reserve system. We applauded the commissioner for the environment for at least putting out the idea that there needs to be some way of funding our reserves. The ACT community as a whole recognises that our reserves are important. Certainly they want to use it. You can see from all the recreation users and their comments that are associated with the reserve system that they value it. So it is appropriate for a user-pays concept to be put in place.

There will definitely be some reaction, a hold-back by the community, but there needs to be a level of communication. The introduction of levies has been tried in the past. Where they failed to be introduced is where there was a lack of key education right up-front about the benefits.

MS LE COUTEUR: One of the issues I am aware of is this recreational use of the parks, and I know you have had concerns about this in the past. I assume you still do.

Mr Griffiths: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Could you please talk to us a bit more about your specific concerns?

Mr Griffiths: Yes. I think you are probably referring to at least a very recent letter in the *Canberra Times*. One of the things my organisation has been calling for is an overall outdoor recreation strategy, simply because there are so many people who want to use our reserve systems. A recreation strategy would allow us, the ACT, to determine where the best spots are within the ACT estate as a whole—not necessarily the conservation estate but the ACT as a whole. How do we best plan for outdoor activities within the ACT?

My conversations with the parks service have led me to believe that they have tried to instigate this but there is no funding available to get that last little bit of seeding to get them over the line and achieve a recreation strategy that will allow guidance on where we can go. It is important to consider how developers can help in this way, whether there are other parts within the ACT other than our conservation estate that can meet recreation demands.

MS LE COUTEUR: Have you any idea how much such a plan would cost to create? It may be a hard question.

Mr Griffiths: Given that there is an awful lot of work already done—there is already a mountain bikes strategy, there is a trail strategy in place—my initial feeling is that it probably would get, not costing it, not being someone sitting in there—

MS LE COUTEUR: No.

Mr Griffiths: I would not have thought it would have actually been that much more of a step forward, and certainly I have offered my association to help in any way that we can with the parks service. In many ways, it is trying to identify a grid of what is available, who is using what and who needs to use what.

THE CHAIR: I think there is a supplementary on that one.

MRS DUNNE: I have a supplementary question on this one. The National Parks Association over a long period of time has been somewhat cautious about what could be classed as ecotourism in parts of the reserves. How would you see these issues being resolved through a wider plan for recreational uses?

Mr Griffiths: We would still maintain that the best place for accommodation et cetera is actually outside our parks so that the broader community achieves the effects of accommodation et cetera. Certainly my association is not anti recreation, as long as it maintains the ability to be done in a way that does not affect the conservation values of the parks, because that is what they are actually set up for. Under the planning legislation, you will see that the primary objective of our conservation reserves is conservation and that recreation, research et cetera tend to be less primary objectives. So with that in mind, we are very much for low-impact recreation. We see it actually as important that people get out in the parks, because that way they can learn firsthand the benefits of our environment.

MRS DUNNE: So what would you characterise as low-impact recreation?

Mr Griffiths: There are some very easy examples: bird watching, relatively small groups of walkers. Some of our large, thousand-group events in one place tend to have an effect on the estate. The Easter before last there was a major event in the Gudgenby region by the orienteering associations. It was the national championships. We were able to work with them to create a study on the impact of that, and that is the sort of research that we still need to get in place to ensure that we know what the impacts are. Then we can say, "Yes, this sort of activity is useful and fits within the parameters of what the park is for," or, "No, maybe this should be put somewhere else."

THE CHAIR: Is that study available to the committee?

Mr Griffiths: I think it is still actually underway. The last little bits are actually still being completed, because you wanted the effect at the time and then throughout, over time.

THE CHAIR: Given the time, I have got a fresh question from Mrs Dunne, and then Ms Hunter can close.

MRS DUNNE: We have talked about funding. Ms Le Couteur raised the issue of a levy. Does the National Parks Association have a view about other models of funding, the sorts of models of, say, conservancy trusts, those sorts of things, that would assist and aid in the involvement of the community more generally and augment

government funding?

Mr Griffiths: Certainly that example has been put in place in the Mulligans Flat sanctuary and I believe it is an example for the Jerrabomberra region, the management areas there. I would not rule out its benefit for the wider estate. I think it is great that we have these jewels that we are putting significant resources into, but I believe that they should not be so resourced that we are actually reducing the benefits for the wider estate.

Certainly our Mulligans Flat sanctuary is fantastic. It really does contribute to research within the ACT on lowland woodlands, but we have a much greater expanse of lowland woodlands within the ACT. That is why my organisation is actually putting forward a proposal for a national park that incorporates lowland woodlands. That would raise that within the community's view, because they recognise national parks as something special as opposed to nature reserves, and may have benefits for the ACT. It may have tourism benefits, research benefits. It may also improve the ability to attract grants for the funding of the lowland woodlands.

MS HUNTER: At the beginning of your opening remarks, you spoke about the accountability indicator and output 1.4. You spoke about customer satisfaction about the management of parks being hardly a good accountability indicator.

Mr Griffiths: That is right.

MS HUNTER: Do you have any thoughts on what would make a better indicator?

Mr Griffiths: What we would like to see is as I indicated—probably not. I cannot give you exact details at this stage, but we are looking for information on biodiversity, how the water comes out of the national park, the quality of that water, the effectiveness of weed and pest controls, how we are actually managing our work on the action plans and the management plans associated with our reserve estate—something that is concrete and that allows someone to say, “Yes, we are actually managing our estate in an appropriate way.”

THE CHAIR: You might want to take that on notice and forward the committee some suggestions later.

Mr Griffiths: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for your attendance here this afternoon. I am sorry for the brevity of the conversation. Sometime in the near future, a transcript will be forwarded to you for accuracy. If you could read that and get back to us as quickly as you could.

Mr Griffiths: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We thank you for your attendance here today.

Mr Griffiths: Thank you.

HYNDAL, MR PETER, Executive committee member, A Gender Agenda
YATES, MS HEIDI, Member, A Gender Agenda

THE CHAIR: Welcome to A Gender Agenda and thank you for attending the 2011-12 estimates hearing. You have a card, the privilege statement, before you. I need to ask: have you read the privilege card and do you understand the implications?

Mr Hyndal: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Would you like to make a short opening statement?

Mr Hyndal: Okay. A Gender Agenda, which I will just shorten to AGA, has been around in some form since 2004, but over the last two to three years we have experienced an astounding increase in requests for services delivered. We work with a sex and gender diverse community in Canberra and that term “sex and gender diversity” covers a whole range of people, including transsexuals, transgender people, intersex people, cross-dressers and people who have some fluid or other non-conforming gender identity.

I assume everyone has read this submission. Is that a fair assumption? Yes. So I will just recap on that briefly. In that submission, we made, I think, a strong case that this community, the sex and gender diverse community, is highly marginalised and we drew on evidence from national and international studies to make that point. The key things that we highlighted there were the really high levels of education in our community. We have got rates of 50 per cent university educated within our population. Twenty-five per cent of our population in a recent survey had post-graduate or doctorate qualifications.

So despite really high levels of education, we have got very high rates of unemployment, disproportionately low income levels, high rates of homelessness, not surprisingly leading to high rates of depression and suicide, low rates of social inclusion and participation and two really big key issues, one of which is about really high rates of discrimination. There have been studies done in Sydney that have highlighted discrimination in almost every aspect of people’s lives, perpetrated by almost everyone that they come into contact with. Studies have shown in excess of 80 per cent of the sex and gender diverse population experience discrimination and most of that discrimination is experienced on a very regular basis.

The final kind of key area was poor interactions with health services, both in terms of service and the quality and respectfulness of the service delivery and in terms of the actual access to accurate health-related information.

There has been one small thing that has changed since the submission we made in December, which is that we actually, just last week, released an ACT-based report. It does not cover all of those areas but it certainly covers the area of health services. The findings of this report are completely consistent and in line with the national and international research that we relied upon in December.

I guess our sense is that the ACT government and the ACT community have a

longstanding commitment to work with marginalised communities, with an aim to reduce their marginalisation. In 2002, the ACT government articulated that commitment publicly in terms of an overt undertaking to work with the trans and intersex community to try to reduce some of the barriers to our participating fully in society. In 2004, the ACT social plan reiterated that commitment, and again overtly referenced the importance of working with trans and intersex people.

Now it is 2011, seven years down the track, and when I look around no-one is really doing much about addressing what has been agreed that we as a community need to address. In our view, the main reason that no-one is addressing it is that there has never been any allocation of money to do it. It is no-one's job to actually do it in the community sector. So our budget submission primarily is asking for a specific quarantining of a pool of money that can be used to resource activities to actually address those concerns.

There are four priority areas that we have identified, and they have been identified by the evidence we have got from the research that I referred to earlier. The first is for the establishment of a gender centre which we would see operating as a community organisation that provided advocacy services, resources, information, random events and activities, primarily for the community, our community, and for partners and family.

The second really big area is counselling for individuals within the community and training for external service providers, which might be community organisations or health services. The third area has a legal focus and is around trying to reduce the incidence of discrimination and increase the reporting of that discrimination. The fourth area that we have identified is in relation to trying to improve the health outcomes and the health experiences of trans and intersex people.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. You mentioned that there has been a strong increase in requests for assistance since you started operation in 2004. What sort of year-on-year percentage increase are you experiencing?

Mr Hyndal: The period from 2004 to about 2009 was fairly static. I will give you some figures that I have off the top of my head. In the first two weeks of December 2009, we received eight individual requests for counselling services. By the end of January, that figure had doubled. We had received a further 16.

Towards the end of February, on one of our email lists, a member of the community made a really disturbing post which essentially read like a suicide note, which spurred us into immediate action. Without funding, we managed to coordinate a volunteer psychologist for three hours a week with an existing community organisation who auspiced that arrangement, and we finalised arrangements for a temporary, three-hour-a-week counselling service at 4 o'clock on the Thursday, and by 9 o'clock the next morning the psychologist rang to say: "My appointments are booked. Do not send me anyone else."

Since 3 March, we have had the possibility of running 21 hour-long sessions. All 21 of them have been filled and we have got a wait list.

THE CHAIR: And that is on a voluntary basis?

Mr Hyndal: That is a completely voluntary basis.

THE CHAIR: At this stage you receive how much money from the ACT government?

Mr Hyndal: We receive no funding for our core activities. We were successful in receiving project funding for the first time this year, and we have got two projects running through ACT Health's promotion grants program. One is aimed at social inclusion work and it has a series of activities. The other is the start of some work in terms of information and resources for medical practitioners. But in terms of the core services that we see being requested within the community, there is no funding for those.

MS HUNTER: Thank you for attaching the survey and thanks for the invitation to come along the other night to the opening of your new premises and the launch of that survey. Page 18 of the survey makes interesting reading. It reports that around 22 per cent of respondents were able to produce 100 points of ID that did not disclose their status. Can you talk a little about the sorts of problems and issues that are faced around this issue of ID?

Mr Hyndal: Yes, I can. The submission that we made did not really focus on those areas—and they are being looked at by other processes at the moment—but in terms of that issue of ID, because there is currently no standard recognition between different levels of government and different departments and government agencies, it is very difficult for trans and intersex people to get ID documentation which is in accordance with their identity and which is consistent.

This means that every time I, for example, have to open a bank account I have to out myself to the bank teller who looks at my documentation and looks at me and says: "That is wrong. That is not your birth certificate." So it is not just a process of outing myself to the bank teller; it is also a process of outing myself to the very annoyed long line of people behind me who are wondering why it has taken so long. I gave that as a personal example but that is the experience of the vast majority of sex and gender diverse people.

MS HUNTER: And is that being addressed through the law reform process?

Mr Hyndal: The law reform process, in terms of the current referral, is in early days. So we certainly are very hopeful that it will be addressed through that process, yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: I have a very quick question. I suppose I should have found it but I have not managed to find it in your submission. About how many in your community are there in the ACT, do you think?

Mr Hyndal: We do not know the answer to that. One of the problems is that we do not know where all our community is and, because we are such a socially isolated community, it is very hard to locate.

MS LE COUTEUR: Most people do not know. Do you have some rough ballpark idea? Are we talking hundreds, thousands?

Mr Hyndal: Ten years ago, all the kind of official stats would have said one in 100,000, which would mean there would be three of us in the ACT, which is absurd. In the last 10 years, those rates officially have reduced and reduced and reduced. The most recent rates I have seen out of the University of Queensland are that four per cent of people are born with some form of intersex condition, and that eight per cent of the population at some point in their lives will have some serious issue around gender identity that will need some assistance and some processing. That is certain. I am not suggesting that eight per cent of the population are transsexual but that issues of gender identity do come up with surprising commonality.

MS LE COUTEUR: And certainly your response indicated that the budget did not meet your expectations. What would you be able to do if you did have more budget funding?

Mr Hyndal: If we had core funding? We would be able to respond to the requests that we are getting, and we are getting requests not just from individual people, some of whom are quite desperate; we are also getting requests from fully funded community organisations who are really keen to help but who themselves identify that they do not have the skills, the knowledge, the resources or the confidence to actually be able to provide good service delivery at the moment to sex and gender diverse people.

Ms Yates: I guess there are two sides of the coin there because we are talking about individuals who are needing individual support and also looking at building social networks and peer support amongst the community and promoting access to services. But then the other side of the coin is looking actually at government and non-government service providers who are seeking expert input in relation to how they can better service the sex and gender diverse community.

So a lot of the call for AGA as a largely volunteer organisation has been from organisations as broad as the AFP, the Women's Health Service here, the tertiary counsellors network, Sexual Health and Family Planning, saying: "We need you to come in and train us. We do not have the expertise and we want to increase access to our service." So we are looking at wanting to have a key clearing house or an organisation that is looking at both of those sides and assisting both service providers and individuals.

Mr Hyndal: And in addition to the community organisations, we have also had a request from ACT Health, from the ACT Department of Education and Training and from the Canberra Hospital to go and train them as well. The need for that kind of work is self-evident, I think.

THE CHAIR: In your submission you ask for core funding of between \$300,000 and \$400,000. Is that still what you would require to do the job properly?

Mr Hyndal: Yes. There is so much to be done. If there was more money then we could spend it usefully, but I think \$300,000 to \$400,000 is in line with our view of what comparably sized organisations would receive and, from our rough workings,

that would allow us capacity to maybe employ a caseworker, someone who is compiling and distributing resources, some admin, and maybe a little bit of counselling and community education work which would address the primary needs.

THE CHAIR: All right, final questions?

MS HUNTER: Yes, a final one. Peter, I think you did raise this in your opening comments, and that was that a concerning result of the survey was around people not accessing health services. And you have spoken about going out and training a whole lot of front-line workers. Are you able to continue that work? Obviously you have not been given the funding you require. What does that mean around doing that work, advocating on behalf of people to ensure they can actually access health services in the next 12 months?

Mr Hyndal: I do not know. Our capacity, in terms of being reliant on volunteers, is stretched to the limit. A range of people have been volunteering huge amounts of time and effort so far, and that cannot go on indefinitely. Yes, we hear stories every day of people whom we want to be able to help but we just do not have the capacity to.

Ms Yates: And I think a lot of those volunteer hours, if I can just jump in, have been committed on the expectation that it is clear that the need is there, the services are being provided but that commitment has been made on a short-term basis with a view to getting permanent funding and getting this work done into the future. So it is not the agreement that the volunteer hours are never-ending. It is about saying, "Let us do the work, show it needs doing, and then we need to get the funding to do it on a permanent basis."

Mr Hyndal: Which is the case with the space that we have got as well. That has been given to us only for a period of two years.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much.

Ms Yates: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: At the end of the hearing we will get you a copy of the *Hansard*, which you can check for accuracy. Thank you for coming before the committee this afternoon.

Ms Yates: Thanks for your time today.

Meeting adjourned from 3.42 to 4.01 pm.

STUBBS, MR TONY, Chief Executive Officer, Heart Foundation (ACT)

BELLIS, MS NERIDA, Cardiovascular Health Manager, Heart Foundation (ACT)

THE CHAIR: Member, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for attending this afternoon's session of the public hearing for estimates for the 2011-12 budget. In front of you is a privileges card. Have you read that card and do you understand the implications?

Mr Stubbs: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. We are recording, of course, for Hansard and it will be transcribed. We are also broadcasting and webstreaming and we are also trialling Committees on Demand, which will have an audiovisual presentation that people can view until about 30 June. So on that basis we will proceed. Would the Heart Foundation like to make an opening statement?

Mr Stubbs: Absolutely. Firstly, I want to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear today. I would also like to table some kits for each member as well, some light reading for you this afternoon. They include *A time for action*, which you may or may not have seen, which is our policy document, so some of the submissions that are incorporated that we will speak about today are in there. I have also got one copy of *Multidisciplinary care for people with chronic heart failure* for you for information, and also our strategic plan is included in that kit.

The Heart Foundation ACT's mission is to reduce death and suffering caused by heart, stroke and blood vessel disease in the ACT. We have been an independent charity for five decades and in that time nationally and locally we have funded world-class research, we have supported health professionals, promoted health in the community and advocated for better prevention management and treatment for people with cardiovascular disease. Heart Foundation in the ACT was established in 1973 and will be 40 years old in 2013.

I know it is late in the afternoon but I want to show some facts around cardiovascular disease. It is a major issue in the ACT community. CVD is a leading cause of death in the ACT at 31 per cent of all deaths; that is from 2008. Heart disease is the leading single cause of death in the ACT, responsible for one in three deaths. It is also the most expensive disease group. National figures will indicate that 11 per cent of the direct healthcare system expenditure in Australia is attributable to cardiovascular disease. The number of chronic heart disease deaths in the ACT has increased by 55 per cent since 1999, and 15 per cent of the ACT population reports some form of CVD lasting six months or more, which is nearly 50,000 Canberrans.

Better quality and access to care will improve health outcomes, reduce costs and ease the pressure on our hospitals. Given these disturbing statistics the Heart Foundation is very pleased that the ACT government and parties that make up the Assembly are so strongly supportive of the work that we do.

We would like to acknowledge our funding from the ACT government for Heart Foundation Walking, Heartmoves, kids at play and active living programs. I would also like to acknowledge the strong support from the Canberra Liberals and also the

ACT Greens in supporting the Heart Foundation with ambassadors and also demonstrating commitment to work together in our community to address our biggest killer.

We have identified three priority areas in our budget submission and I guess we want to highlight those for particular attention today. The first is better outcomes of primary care. The Heart Foundation, the ACT Division of General Practice and the University of Canberra are very pleased for the three-year funding included in the 2011-12 budget. The project will contribute significantly to the understanding of the role of general practice in the prevention of cardiovascular disease. We aim to adopt a comprehensive approach to the prevention of CVD through systematic absolute risk identification and coordinated management of patients found to be at high risk. This is really important work that will save lives and also reduce costs.

The warning signs campaign, which hopefully most have seen, is a key priority of the Heart Foundation in our continuation of this campaign. The aim really is to increase awareness and knowledge of the variability of warning signs of a heart attack but also the importance of responding quickly to calling 000.

Research from our February 2011 heart watch survey on the warning signs campaign has seen over 90 per cent effectiveness of the campaign. On the increase in likelihood and confidence of calling 000, one in seven people in the ACT have seen the ad and have gone to see their GP as a result, and confidence in knowing what to do when confronted with the warning signs of heart attack has increased dramatically.

Understanding the warning signs of heart attack and the importance of getting action quickly is a critical factor in saving lives and ensuring patients have better health outcomes. Patients who are treated within an hour of the onset of symptoms have double the chance of survival. Those patients who survive but whose treatment was delayed often suffer heart muscle damage, the primary cause of chronic heart failure.

The Heart Foundation has committed a significant amount of funds to implementing the strategy throughout Australia. Being a charity organisation, however, the Heart Foundation does not have internal funds to continue the campaign beyond 2011 and has submitted a budget submission and will continue to advocate on this issue.

On chronic heart failure, better services for people with heart failure in Canberra is something that the Heart Foundation is very committed to. This group are often very unwell and do not get broader recognition but they actually have very high needs within the ACT community. It is an ongoing condition in which the heart muscle is weakened and cannot pump as well as it normally does. Every year an estimated 30,000 Australians receive a diagnosis of chronic heart failure. It kills more than 2,700 Australians each year and the cost has been estimated at over \$1 billion per year.

Chronic heart failure patients have high rates of hospitalisation, and in the ACT hospitalisation due to heart failure has increased by 26 per cent in the last two years. These patients have high readmission rates. However, up to two-thirds of chronic heart failure related hospital admissions could be avoided by improving adherence to therapy, adequate access to medical and social support for patients and carers and appropriate responses to deterioration of their condition. Access to multidisciplinary

chronic heart failure care can significantly reduce the risk of hospitalisation, improve quality of life, reduce healthcare costs and prolong survival.

The Heart Foundation is very pleased to hear that there is a new multidisciplinary chronic heart failure care service pilot happening out of TCH. The pilot is a very important start and we look forward to having an ongoing engagement with the pilot rollout and evaluation and to specific budget allocations in future budgets to fully implement a multidisciplinary heart failure service based on the findings of the pilot.

We cannot go without saying that the Heart Foundation is, as always, very committed to prevention. Much activity is occurring in the chronic disease prevention area, with unprecedented funding being provided by the ACT government and also by the commonwealth. The opportunity is to build on this activity and to develop clear strategic directions on fostering the partnerships we already have in the ACT.

We look forward in particular to continuing our work with the government on frameworks for physical activity and nutrition to ensure the outcomes are real and sustainable. We note the investment in the 2011-12 budget of \$21.4 million on public transport, \$1.5 million on new cycle ways and shared paths and also \$3.3 million for Centenary Walk. We look forward to more investment in future budgets in these areas.

In conclusion, we applaud all parties for recognising the importance of tackling chronic disease, particularly CVD. We have flagged the need for even greater efforts to prevent CVD as the population ages and some risk factors, namely overweight and obesity, physical inactivity and poor nutrition, become more prevalent or fail to improve. And we must invest more in key areas such as improving management and care of people with heart failure and improving understanding of the warning signs of heart attack if we are to improve outcomes and reduce CVD disease burden in the years ahead.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I notice that in the survey that you have filled out for the committee at question 5, “Do you think that the budget has addressed the issues raised in your submission?” you have crossed the “No” box and you have outlined some of them. What sort of funding is required to meet the requests that you have just made? For instance, how much would the warning signs campaign cost per annum?

Mr Stubbs: It is in our *A time for action* document. We are saying \$175,000 per annum for 12 months for a social marketing campaign, comprehensive, and we have estimated that it will be around \$700,000 to establish a heart failure service at TCH.

THE CHAIR: Per annum?

Mr Stubbs: Per annum.

THE CHAIR: All right. And the prevention work?

Mr Stubbs: A lot of that is probably not a cost in terms of getting the framework. We need to have a clear picture basically on how we are going to address overweight and obesity, how we are going to coordinate a sustained approach to physical activity and

nutrition. So in the first instance we need a framework—and we are working with the ACT government for that to happen. We look forward to continuing that work for that to happen this year. But that is more about coordination and integration of services, knowing exactly where we want to head and having some targets around that area. Again we work closely with ACT Health and the ACT government and it is estimated that it will come out this year.

THE CHAIR: All right. Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: I would like to talk a bit more about the physical and the prevention work. I am aware that you have done some work around active transport. You have touched on that very briefly from the budget point of view. Would you be able to talk more about the importance of physical activity and the associated active transport issues for the Heart Foundation?

Mr Stubbs: Absolutely. As we have indicated, overweight and obesity, physical inactivity and poor nutrition are heading in the wrong direction. In fact, I think the stats from the ACT show that overweight and obesity have increased from 48 per cent to 57—

Ms Bellis: Fifty-seven per cent. That was the 2007-08 statistics for overweight and obesity.

MS LE COUTEUR: So 57 per cent of us are overweight or obese?

Ms Bellis: Yes, adults.

MR HANSON: It is all right; you are not, Caroline.

Mr Stubbs: And again—

MR HARGREAVES: Don't look up this end of the table, though.

Mr Stubbs: And, as you would appreciate, in our busy lives currently it is very difficult to find physical activity opportunities. Certainly the Heart Foundation has been advocating that what we actually need to do is incorporate physical activity opportunities into our daily life. So we need to find ways, like improving the public transport system so people can walk to the bus station and also walk to work—most times they can fit the 30 minutes of moderate physical activity in that—and obviously having good cycling and walking infrastructure improves the incidental physical activity that people can do. We would certainly advocate that we need to build the infrastructure to support that but also we need to ensure that we promote that; we need to provide resources and support people to encourage them to walk but also support them to cycle.

Ms Bellis: Yes. We talk about hardware and software. You need both sides of the equation; you need the hardware, the infrastructure, but you also need the software, the awareness raising and encouragement of people to participate as well.

MS LE COUTEUR: And what do you think are the best ways to promote a more

active lifestyle?

Mr Stubbs: We want to get a framework together which is part of that strategy so that we cover all the areas that we need to look at, so that is through education and through clinical primary care areas, and we need to have an idea of what sort of things will specifically need to be done in all of those areas. There are obviously different needs—things that we need to promote it within schools and different needs around the infrastructure—so having an overarching plan and identifying the priorities within those areas is very important. I guess having that strategy is a key thing and then prioritising what the activities need to be and then, if required, put in funds against those.

MS LE COUTEUR: And is this something that you can keep on doing with your current funding or is this something that, like the other things you have talked about, could require extra funding?

Mr Stubbs: Yes. The active living project is funded until—

Ms Bellis: The middle of next year.

Mr Stubbs: the middle of next year so we are hoping to negotiate with ACT Health clearly to extend that program. That will be to build on work and for new existing projects. Currently we will not be able to sustain that project beyond that without some additional support.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: With the trends in obesity that we are seeing and the ageing population—I suppose it applies equally to cardiovascular disease—people talk about the tsunami in health. Are we anticipating that what we are doing now is going to cope with that demand or are we going to need to ramp up significantly to deal with that? Have we mapped out that this is the budget for now and it is sort of coping with what we need, bearing in mind that there are a few things that we have not got? Are we saying that in 10 years time, if the trends continue in obesity and if we do age, that is exponentially increasing or not?

Mr Stubbs: What we really want to highlight today is the ageing population. I have some statistics here about it. We know that the Canberra population is ageing. We looked at the increase in heart failure in the last two years; it has jumped dramatically, and that is directly related to the ageing population. We know that in some areas, particularly around physical inactivity, overweight and obesity and nutrition, we are not getting traction in moving forward with that. We bring to the committee that we need to expect that we need to do some more work around our planning and our health planning, particularly in the future, because we think that we will need to ramp that up and we need to meet those expectations. And we need to think about how we are going to do that now.

MR HANSON: And you are doing that working with ACT Health, are you?

Mr Stubbs: Yes. Again, currently around the work with the physical activity and

nutritionist framework, we are working with them and anticipate that it will come out this year. And setting that direction and strategy. Obviously we feel there may be some things that will need to come out of the budget to ensure that that happens. And also working with the ACT government around that health planning. We will continue to do that and make sure that we feel there are enough resources to continue that into the future. Again, it is more about making that sustainable as well.

Ms Bellis: You are absolutely right in terms of this being a major challenge for our community. There has to be a whole-of-community and whole-of-government response to this issue. Partnerships are something we have identified as a key thing. It is not just about health; it is about travel, education and every aspect of how we live. We need to have coordination of those partnerships and the partnerships with the community and bring the community along with us to make those big changes that we need to make if we are going to make a difference over time.

MR HANSON: With the funding you get, obviously you get your charitable money and you get ACT money. Are you getting federal money as well?

Mr Stubbs: We have had some small grants for some projects from the commonwealth at a local level. Nationally the Heart Foundation does receive some commonwealth funding to run our Heartmoves program and also our walking program. But in terms of running them at a jurisdictional level, we only rely on ACT health money currently to do that.

MR HANSON: We have had comment from a couple of committee organisations and charities that have said that they are struggling in this current environment with fundraising. Are you experiencing that there is less money coming into the coffers through fundraising?

Mr Stubbs: Absolutely. Post GFC, we were expecting that fundraising would pick up—in the last 12 months or so. But we have experienced a lot of difficulty. The example is from last year. Across the Heart Foundation, in every jurisdiction, setting aside bequest funding—that is, non-bequest funding, which is donations and everything else—Tasmania was the only jurisdiction that achieved its budget last year in fundraising and non-bequest activities. We have seen that trend within Heart Foundation ACT over a number of years. At this stage, we cannot see that that is going to change. People have probably mentioned it today, but clearly the natural disasters that happened earlier this year—we will wait and see, but we foresee that they will impact.

MR HANSON: People will give their money to Japan or to Queensland and there will be less left over for the Heart Foundation.

Mr Stubbs: Yes. Our forecasting basically is that we can only see that it is going to get tougher.

MR HANSON: And if you do not meet those fundraising targets, what happens? Will you have to reduce services?

Mr Stubbs: We need to live within our budget. If that situation came, we would have

to prioritise which programs we would run. And yes, we may need to cease those or look at other sources of funding to try and continue those. We run a core base of activities through our fundraising. Certainly we would not be able to run the current programs we have in the way we are doing.

MR HANSON: How much are you raising in fundraising?

Mr Stubbs: It is a bit over a million dollars locally.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much. I am probably the most qualified person here to talk about this particular subject. I have been there, done that and got the T-shirt. One of the things about heart attacks is that they have got to be the world's greatest wake-up call for lifestyle et cetera. Am I right in thinking that most people who actually suffer one did not have to? A lot of us, particularly blokes, think they are seven foot tall and bulletproof.

What concerns me, and I would like to know what the foundation is trying to do about it, is this: when you have had a heart attack, as you know, you are booked into the gym at cardiac rehab; you come out of there full of good intentions, with new year's resolution stuff. You do your six weeks and you come out of there; you are not quite bulletproof, but you are getting there. You go to the gym for about a year, by which time you are seven foot tall and bulletproof again. And it drops away. How can we stop people who have had the heart attack from having the second one—realising that they are not bulletproof 12 months after the first one?

Mr Stubbs: In terms of relating to the warning signs of heart attack campaign, again in the first instance we need to make sure that people who are having chest pain recognise it straightaway and go to the hospital or ring 000 straightaway. That is exceptionally important. That is why we see that funding for that campaign to continue is exceptionally important—so that we do capture those people. I think the average is around six hours that people are waiting before they are ringing the ambulance. We know from our figures from the campaign that the awareness is raised from that. And people now go to see their GP and get an understanding of that as well.

The next step is around the cardiac rehab program. We do have great cardiac rehab programs in the ACT, but the infrastructure cannot quite meet the demand, if you like, that we currently have. And chronic heart failure patients now are actually going into cardiac rehab programs, which is making that an issue as well. That is why we need to have a multidisciplinary heart failure service at the hospital, so that we can service people properly with cardiac rehab and also service people with heart failure.

In terms of the question, again what we would like to see is that when we develop particular physical activity and nutrition frameworks which will have an emphasis on what we might do in different sectors, we need to have a very significant social marketing aspect to that. We currently have the “Go for 2&5” and also “Find thirty” campaigns. What we need to do, though, is extend those and have some more funding to promote that. The ACT government has got a “Get healthy” line which can support people. We applaud the government for setting the “Get healthy” line up. I have seen

some advertising.

But again it is really probably about getting a comprehensive social marketing campaign out there, dovetailing with the commonwealth campaign, which is currently happening as well, and really making it saturated so that people get the message through the social marketing campaigns. It is not only through media and print; it is through other programs that people run. It is seeing newspaper advertising; it is when you go to your GP. You are getting those messages as well. So an integrated social marketing campaign is something that in the future we need to investigate and look at. Hopefully it will come out of the framework developments.

Ms Bellis: The better outcomes project, which is a project that has actually been funded in the budget, will also be helpful because there is the role of primary care not only in primary prevention—people who do not know what is going on, who are seven foot and bulletproof until they have a heart attack, which is often the first sign of heart disease—but in that secondary prevention that you are talking about. So you have had a heart attack and it has become a bit of a blur—making sure that your general practice and the broader primary care sector are supporting those needs.

We want systems approaches to that so that it is not hit and miss—so that it is not just that on that day you happened to mention something about your blood pressure, asked when you last had your lipids checked or said, “Gee, I have put a bit more weight on since I had the heart attack.” We want systems in place in general practice to identify and make sure that you have all those checks regularly. Practice nurses are aware of and skilled in doing some of that lifestyle management.

But then also there is making sure general practice connects with the community sector—sources outside health. We would have general practice for things like Heartmoves and walking programs, and these sorts of separate things that often people have to negotiate their way to. When the doctor says, “You have got to exercise more,” often you leave the general practice and you have got to find your own way through that maze of services. What we are trying to do with that program is connect them up—make them referral pathways so that it makes it very easy for you, when you go back to your doctor for that yearly check-up, and you have put a bit of weight on or maybe the blood pressure is popping up again, there is a pathway and they can say, “These are the programs in your area that you can do”—a nutrition program or a walking program. That is so that we do not lose you. I think people often fall through the cracks. It is about trying to make it easy for people to access those services.

MR HARGREAVES: And my last question is—

THE CHAIR: A very quick question.

MR HARGREAVES: Very quick. I know that post heart attack almost 100 per cent of people go through a period of depression. With the right treatment, it is temporary; for some people it is not. Does the Heart Foundation work in partnership with beyondblue to attack that particular after-effect of a heart attack?

Mr Stubbs: We have partnered up nationally in a research project with beyondblue.

We have put in quite a substantial amount of money nationally to partner with beyondblue to really investigate that link between depression and cardiovascular disease. It is not surprising that depression is an independent risk factor for cardiovascular disease. If you are depressed, it is more likely for that to happen. That research is being finalised now, and I guess there will be some recommendations around that.

With the chronic heart failure multidisciplinary service, part of it may involve having a psychologist attached to that. Obviously when people have chronic heart failure you need to manage them from a medical point of view, but you need to manage them as an individual and as a person as well. So it is exercise or a psychologist or other aspects. If you care to read the document about our best practice for multidisciplinary care, to get your best outcomes you need to have a comprehensive approach to managing people with heart failure—and with the cardiac rehab program as well.

THE CHAIR: We might wind up there unless you have got a comment to offer on stress reduction—taking away the stresses that lead to heart failure and whether or not fishing is a worthy way of reducing stress.

MR HARGREAVES: I can recommend it.

THE CHAIR: With that we will say goodbye to the Heart Foundation and invite the Capital Region Fishing Alliance to come and speak to the committee. Thanks very much.

Ms Bellis: Thank you.

Mr Stubbs: Thank you for your time.

THE CHAIR: When the *Hansard* is ready it will be forwarded to you so that you can check it for accuracy.

SAMUELS, MR STEVEN JAMES, Delegate, Capital Region Fishing Alliance

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, Steven, and welcome. Have you read the privilege card on the table and do you understand the implications of the privilege card?

Mr Samuels: Yes I have, and I do understand these.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I think you heard me say that we are recording, broadcasting and webstreaming—all of those things.

Mr Samuels: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Samuels: Yes, I would.

THE CHAIR: Go ahead.

Mr Samuels: The Capital Region Fishing Alliance is structured as an incorporated association in the ACT with the aim of being the recognised voice for recreational anglers in this region. We aim to collaborate with government and cooperate with relevant stakeholders to improve recreational fishing for local anglers. The CRFA is an alliance of the region's fishing clubs and individual anglers.

Since inception the design of Canberra has always included the building of significant waterways as central aesthetical elements to the urban landscape. These waterways continue to grow in number as the ACT expands. Today, these waterways play a number of roles beyond the aesthetic. They provide habitat for various aquatic species, often providing refuge in times of drought; mitigate storm runoff; and provide recreational space unique to any Australian city.

While these waterways have many positive values, they also have some negative values that have remained hidden and are of ecological concern. Nearly all of these waterways hold abundant numbers of carp, redfin and gambusia—all identified as pest species. Nearly all of these waterways are devoid of sustainable numbers of native species. Over the last 20 years angling, which was once a favourite pastime in this region and its waterways, has become less popular. But at the same time, approximately one in six ACT residents, which is about 53,000, hold a New South Wales angling licence, which indicates that angling is a popular activity for ACT residents but not necessarily in their own backyard.

On 12 May 2010 members of the Capital Region Fishing Alliance met with the then Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, and Mr Gary Byles, the Chief Executive of Territory and Municipal Services, and outlined the plan for the stocking of recreational fish species in the ACT waterways and improvements to the aquatic habitat of those waterways. At the conclusion of that meeting, the Chief Minister asked that we meet separately with Mr Byles to develop the concept in more detail.

On 10 June 2010 we again met with Gary Byles, and Mr Gary Rake from the National Capital Authority and Ms Fay Steward from Parks, Conservation and Lands. At the

conclusion of that meeting Mr Byles invited the CRFA to submit a business case to the Chief Minister detailing the immediate and long-term request from government to support the concept of improved recreational fishing and aquatic habitat in the ACT waterways. This business case was developed by the CRFA to advise the Chief Minister.

At various meetings we were led to believe that this business case was used by Parks, Conservation and Lands as part of their budget bid for the 2011-12 financial year. We were also advised that the department would be embarking on a bolder initiative to control carp in urban waterways. Our analysis of the 2011-12 budget, though, indicates that no money has been allocated for fish stocking, environmental works or the carp control study.

I am here today to encourage the ACT government to reconsider its decision not to support the fish stocking part of our plan in our urban ponds, which is the least costly option of our plan but the one with the most potential to bring back the health of our urban waterways.

Carp, redbfin and gambusia have had a free run in the ACT. We have created a habitat that will support desirable recreational species but we have stood by and let these undesirable species take hold, breed and proliferate at will. We feel that this has been allowed to happen because the environment we are seeking to save is an unseen one—hidden in the dark waters, mysterious, out of sight and out of mind.

I ask the committee here today to reflect on what our attitude would be if we let the same thing happen above ground where we could see it. Would we ever build 16 Mulligans Flat reserves and then stand back while rabbits, rats and mice took it over?

Stocking our waterways gives us the best chance of having a biological solution to a problem while at the same time realising the full potential of the ACT's urban lakes. I hope I can add to the committee's insight into this issue here today. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much for that. Let us cut to the heart of it. How much to restock, how much to control pest species and how much to control native fish habitats is required?

Mr Samuels: In the business plan that we put forward we thought that a reasonable starting point for the ACT would be \$50,000 annually for the stocking of fish and another \$150,000 to begin a number of low-level environmental works in relation to helping urban lakes.

In relation to the controlling of carp, we did not approach that in our plan. That was something that the department ordered independently. I am not privy to what they were looking at. They did invite us to a number of meetings and that was a trial over two lakes using a variety of methods to see if any would work.

I am here today primarily to prosecute the case for the CRFA—that is, stocking and some environmental works, to ensure that those fish have the best chance of survival, would be great. That is \$200,000 a year. That was in our business case as probably the

best way to start; we could always use more. But here today we are primarily worrying about the stocking of fish, which would be \$50,000 per year, as a best case.

MR HANSON: For how long? Does the stocking ever end?

Mr Samuels: In our business plan we indicate that with \$50,000 we would probably be right for about five years. Also, part of the other \$150,000 that we were asking for in the business case plan was so that we could study the effects of that through the department. But we think that after about five years we could probably lessen that or we might be able to move it to new waterways that are being built. We do not know what the plan is for Canberra in five years. There might be more urban ponds being built. So that \$50,000 would be spread over more ponds. But because we can build the stock up in some, we would not need to stock as heavily there and we could move on. We think it would be five years and then we could have a review to see how we are going and what we need.

THE CHAIR: Is it possible for the committee to have a copy of the business plan?

Mr Samuels: I have brought a hard copy and also a disk.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is great.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR HANSON: I have a question on the stocking. Do you stock while you have also got these other species like carp?

Mr Samuels: Yes.

MR HANSON: Does that affect the ability of the native species to propagate or do they just grow together? My understanding was that if you have got carp and so on in the waterways—

MR HARGREAVES: You are feeding the carp.

Mr Samuels: We are. Well, we are not so much feeding the carp. Carp are not necessarily predators of small fish. They will eat some but most of their diet is plant based or small insect based. But we have redfin and gambusia, which are a real problem.

That is why we have looked at the figure of \$50,000. We developed these figures in consultation with New South Wales fisheries as to what would be the best based on what we have. And, yes, there will be a very high attrition rate of these fingerlings that we put in for that five years. Our estimate is that probably only 20 per cent will survive. But that 20 per cent that survive past predation, if the number was high enough initially, would give us good seed stock, in the hope that they would then breed and, as well as the stocking rate, it would actually create a biomass of native fish that could compete. Of course, once we start getting large Murray cod, large golden perch, and we have included trout in this because they are a desirable species rather than undesirable, they in turn will start to feed on the smaller carp and the

smaller redfin. So there is a possibility—

MR HANSON: A tipping point.

Mr Samuels: that the tables could be reversed over time.

MR HARGREAVES: Are they the only species that you would be introducing, the golden perch—

Mr Samuels: Golden perch, Murray cod—

MR HARGREAVES: the Murray cod and the trout?

Mr Samuels: and we would be looking at trout where the waterways are suitable.

MR HARGREAVES: Are there any other natives you would put in?

Mr Samuels: No. There would not be any because at this stage they would just become food fodder. They do not grow to a big enough size—

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, they would get eaten, wouldn't they?

Mr Samuels: to protect themselves.

MR HARGREAVES: I was thinking of the two-spined black fish which is—

Mr Samuels: If you put those in they would just remain pretty much prey for the redfin over time because they do not grow much bigger than about 18 to 20 centimetres.

MR DOSZPOT: What is the membership of the alliance?

Mr Samuels: We have five major fishing clubs here in the ACT. Those five major fishing clubs are all members of the alliance. The alliance itself, I guess you could say, has five club members. We have been in existence for just over 12 months and we have about 35 to 40 individual members that have come into the alliance to actually work with us. We are a club-based organisation.

MR DOSZPOT: Have you got an idea of the total number? I know it is—

Mr Samuels: We are probably getting close to about 500 members, I suppose, in the major clubs here in the ACT.

MR DOSZPOT: Are your estimates that you have mentioned based on that number of people participating?

Mr Samuels: No.

MR DOSZPOT: Do you see a growth?

Mr Samuels: Yes. It is very interesting having regard to the people that sat here before me. Fishing is a pastime that gets people out in the environment. Anyone here who would like to come fishing with me up the river for the day should be prepared for a six-kilometre hike as you wander around looking for fishing.

MR HARGREAVES: No, thanks!

Mr Samuels: But it gets people outside.

THE CHAIR: You are a fly fisherman?

Mr Samuels: I am a fly fisherman, yes. These figures are based on about 53,000 people in this region. The majority of them, being in the ACT, hold a New South Wales anglers fishing licence. If you want to see that, nick out to the Monaro Highway or the coast road every weekend and watch the exodus from Canberra. They are not fishing here, but they could be. When I came here in the 1970s Canberra was regarded as a premier destination for fishing, particularly for native fish. Our plan is to get the community involved in this and engaging with the environment and our lakes. Maybe then we can get some interest towards carp and redfin.

MR HARGREAVES: I have a quick question.

THE CHAIR: Bring back Flea Creek in the season. Ms Le Couteur and then Mr Rattenbury.

Mr Samuels: It already is; it is open.

THE CHAIR: Yes, it is fantastic, isn't it?

MS LE COUTEUR: Getting on to carp, earlier this year we were told that Yerrabi Pond now has carp.

Mr Samuels: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you know how that happened? Is that the sort of thing that your \$150,000 of low level works would address? How can we address it?

Mr Samuels: Nobody knows for sure; nobody can say for sure how those carp got in there. There are a range of possibilities. They may have been introduced by anglers. They may have been dumped from aquarium species. We know that eggs will travel through birds. Carp lay their eggs in the shallow weed masses where birds often forage. They pick the eggs up on their feathers and their legs and they can transport them. So it is a range of issues. If we are to get into somewhere like Yerrabi Pond and have a very high stocking rate now, those carp will breed but, if they remain small and we have our native apex predators actually feeding on them, it may help suppress the numbers. Whereas if you go to some of the ponds now like Stranger Pond—lower Stranger Pond and up to Stranger Pond—where there are no native fish, there is a significantly higher biomass of carp there. They are big carp and they flood over and populate the Murrumbidgee River.

MR RATTENBURY: Does your business case differ from the fish stocking plan that the ACT government has, the 2009-14 one? Is there a substantial difference in strategies?

Mr Samuels: There is a substantial difference, yes. Unfortunately, the reason why we have asked for this money for the department is that there is no allocation for fish stocking. The way it works at the moment is the department sees what money it might be able to cobble up at the end of every two years and says, "Well, we think we can buy a few fish and put them in."

The stocking is about every second year. There are only five ponds stocked in the ACT and they are stocked rotationally with different species at different times. So it is not consistent and we get boom and bust. One fishery comes along with big fish and everybody races down there, catches the 50 big fish that have managed to survive there and pulls them out. You are not going to get any more big fish in there for another eight or nine years because of the rotational way they are stocked.

That stocking is supplemented by one of our member clubs that holds the carp bash here annually in the ACT. We raise that money. That money is donated to the department to supplement the stocking. So the stocking happens every two years. It is not best practice. New South Wales fisheries work with us and give us some information. I work a lot with New South Wales fisheries in other areas. The best plan, because of the degraded nature of our waterways, would indicate that it needs to be annual, it needs to be high volume, it needs to be intense and it needs to be monitored.

MR RATTENBURY: You mentioned the degraded state of our waterways. The Assembly has passed a motion on Lake Burley Griffin. Do you see the carp playing a significant role in the degradation of the lake?

Mr Samuels: Absolutely. Carp are a significant factor in the degradation of the lake. There are other factors as well. Googong Dam was no help. Googong Dam was probably one of the biggest issues that destroyed Lake Burley Griffin from what it was in the 1970s. What we have got there now are carp, redfin and gambusia—

MR DOSZPOT: How is that?

Mr Samuels: Prior to Googong Dam being built, any water coming into Lake Burley Griffin from the Molonglo River was filtered by 50 per cent of the water coming from the Queanbeyan, which was a pristine riverine environment. Whilst you had the river from the Molonglo coming down through the tailings and through good quality farming land, which meant that it would get silty in times of flood, any water coming from Queanbeyan came from an alpine, pristine area. So you had this dilution, a watering down effect. Now you get virtually no water from the Queanbeyan River coming down. There is a big dam there. In times of massive flood, small floods hit the Molonglo River and we have got a lot more sediment coming down. I came here in 1974. I could see trout swimming around in Lake Burley Griffin. I used to fish for them. You could see the Murray cod up against the snags. You could actually see them. You could eat the fish. Today—

MR HARGREAVES: They glow in the dark.

Mr Samuels: It is a bit of a worry.

THE CHAIR: You would be brave. With that, we have run out of time. Thank you very much for attending the committee hearing today. A copy of the transcript of the hearing will be provided to you to ensure its accuracy.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks, Steven.

SALTHOUSE, MS SUE, Convenor, Women With Disabilities ACT
O'CALLAGHAN, MS NICOLE, Policy and Administrative Officer, Women With Disabilities ACT

THE CHAIR: I welcome to the committee representatives of Women With Disabilities ACT. Before you on the table is the privilege statement. Have you read the privilege card and do you understand the implications of the privilege statement?

Ms Salthouse: Thank you, yes, I have read the privilege card and do understand the implications thereof.

THE CHAIR: For your information, it is being recorded by Hansard for transcription and it is being webstreamed and broadcast and we are also trialling Committees on Demand, which will allow people to come and look at the hearing later on. With that, are you happy to proceed?

Ms Salthouse: Thank you, yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Salthouse: Yes, thank you very much. Women With Disabilities ACT is an affiliate of the national organisation Women With Disabilities Australia, which is the peak cross-disability organisation for women with disabilities in this country. So on behalf of WWDACT I would like to thank the select committee for giving us this opportunity to give you some feedback about the budget.

But first of all I would like to introduce the policy and administrative officer for WWDACT, my colleague Nicole O'Callaghan. WWDACT did obtain a small amount of temporary funding from ACT Health and Disability ACT in the 2010-11 financial year. This was seeding funding which has enabled us to employ Nicole for 12 hours per week as an advocacy officer. So in 15 years of operation as a full systemic advocacy organisation this is the first operational funding we have ever received. I will hand over now to Nicole to give you a little more fleshing out about WWDACT.

Ms O'Callaghan: Women With Disabilities ACT, as Sue said, is an affiliate of Women With Disabilities Australia, the national peak body for women with all types of disabilities. WWDACT is based upon a human rights philosophy and WWDACT follows the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

WWDACT has been convening since 1995. We have approximately 80 individual members. We work closely with government and non-government organisations. WWDACT is a peer support and systemic advocacy organisation. We believe that self-advocacy is a major contributing component of the social, financial and emotional wellbeing of women with disabilities in the territory.

WWDACT supports and encourages women with disabilities in the ACT to confidently and competently advocate for themselves and partake in the community. To have a disability is to possess a unique quality. It makes a person respectful, resilient and resourceful. WWDACT sees these qualities in women with disability and

supports them and encourages them to become leaders in our community. WWDACT sees women with disability taking an integral role in the holistic future of the ACT community. Now I will pass back to Sue.

Ms Salthouse: Thanks, Nicole. That background is part of what our budget submission was, to go towards achieving equality for women with disabilities. As you probably would be aware, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women this year in their report back to the Australian government highlighted those disparities between non-disabled women and all women, and men with disabilities and women with disabilities. So, despite our aspirations, we are really looking in the budget for some specific measures which will raise the status of women with disabilities in comparison to other sections of the community.

Whilst I congratulate the government on a budget that has got a number of measures for people with disabilities, and that is excellent within our ACT context and we are a leader in aspects of what we do for people with disabilities in the ACT, we are not seeing anything which reassures us that there will be an equitable allocation to women with disabilities. There is nothing within the budget papers that specifically addresses the inequalities that women with disabilities face. That is why when we look at women with disabilities in their parenting roles there is \$14 million in the budget for additional emergency accommodation places as part of that raft of some extra support for school services, Therapy ACT, and what we focus on is additional emergency accommodation. That is where we really need to ensure that women with disabilities get equitable access to that money.

The other place where we are looking for allocations to women is to enhance our participation in the workforce. Our workforce participation is about 10 to 15 percentage points lower than for men; also our unemployment rates are higher than for men. So we are not getting adequate access to that. I think that in that \$14 million there should be some allocation into the lifestyle grants. As you know, women overall are 80 per cent of the carers and do 80 per cent of the parenting. We need within that allocation to earmark money that will help women purchase a microwave, purchase a car, do things that will enable women with disabilities to do their parenting more easily.

In that allocation there was a lot of money into out-of-home care and we are worried that that could potentially discriminate against women with disabilities. The tendency to take children off women with disabilities just because they have a disability is still too high from the stereotypical and prejudicial point of view. So we are concerned about that. We would rather see the money allocated for support services. One of the things with support services which is difficult for women with disabilities is that support services may go to personal care for the woman. But we have had situations in the ACT where the personal carer would wash the woman's clothes but would not put the child's clothes into the washing machine. We need to ensure that whatever money goes into support services supports her holistically in her parenting and caring role.

I did not mention it, but we really welcomed the new strategy for disability employment in the ACT which was launched just recently. That aspiration to double the number of people with disabilities in the ACT public service by 2014 is excellent.

You can see from my cameo there that we want women in those jobs so that they are not dependent on support services, but we have got to make sure that they get those little injections of funding that will enable them to be in the workforce. At an Australian level women educationally do better than men, and that goes to women with disabilities as well. As soon as you translate that into employment, we are 39th in the world.

In the transport system, we are pleased to see that there is money in the budget for the central booking service, for continuation of the transition to a fleet of accessible buses, and allocation to a greater range of accessible bus stops. What I do want to see is that money allocated for reliable accessible services. We had international visitors at the ANU last year and the accessible bus route was just routed out of the ANU. Two people wheelchair reliant from the US could not get around. The money is there. It has been allocated. What we are wanting from you as the Legislative Assembly is to be aware of how we need to logically put that money to better use.

One thing was very unclear in the budget. There was a mention of an increased allocation to the taxi subsidy scheme. We do not know what. At present you get 129 personal vouchers per year. It does not go far over 365 days. After that, you have to start begging. When you go to your doctor and get a medical okay, you can get another 14 per week. For women in the workforce, for anybody in the workforce, what does that do for you—a trip to work and back every day? It does nothing else—no inclusion in the community. So we seek clarification on a logical allocation of extra taxi subsidy vouchers so that people do not have to beg to be included into the community.

It is very welcome to say that there is another injection of money, but we really need the Legislative Assembly again to follow up to make sure that that money enables people to be included. We have a great future directions policy but we have got to get those supports logically there so that people do not have to beg and continually justify it.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, you—

Ms Salthouse: I have run out of time. Okay.

THE CHAIR: I am sure you could keep talking all afternoon.

Ms Salthouse: I can. Yes.

THE CHAIR: I know it is a big issue. But we are going to run out of time in a moment. So if you could wrap up, that would be good.

Ms Salthouse: Yes. Let me hand back over to you then.

THE CHAIR: That is very kind.

Ms Salthouse: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: You said there is a lack of money in the budget to assist parents with

disability. What is required?

Ms Salthouse: We have not got costings. I certainly have not got costings on that. I would say that we would—no, I cannot give you allocations of money on that.

THE CHAIR: That is fine.

Ms Salthouse: We do not yet have a resident economist either.

MS LE COUTEUR: I understand you got one year's funding from the Women's Centre for Health Matters. Do you have any idea whether this is likely to be ongoing funding? And what would the implications be if it was not?

Ms Salthouse: The funding was in fact 50 per cent from ACT Health and 50 per cent from Disability ACT. It was auspiced by the Women's Centre for Health Matters. We have asked for additional funding so that we can move onto a basis as a bona fide systemic advocacy organisation in the ACT. We have been in discussions with Disability ACT about this money and until the time of the budget had not got any—

MS LE COUTEUR: Indication.

Ms Salthouse: indication of what funding would be available to us. We are in discussion with Disability ACT about that. Given the status of women with disabilities in Australia and in the ACT, we do need an assurance of operational funding at a realistic level to enable us to undertake systemic advocacy without volunteers. After 15 years, it is time to move away from a volunteer basis and onto an operationally funded basis.

MS LE COUTEUR: If you were not funded, are there working groups or things you would have to pull out of?

Ms Salthouse: Absolutely. It is not justified for us to be running on a volunteer basis when we know that, at the national and territory levels, we have a long way to go to bring women up to the equivalent status of men with disabilities.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot, quickly.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you for your presentations. I need a couple of clarifications on your reference to People with Disability and how you interact. Is there any association between People with Disability and Women With Disabilities?

Ms Salthouse: Absolutely. It is a collegiate association between our organisations. Women With Disabilities looks at issues that concern women. And the reason that we still need to maintain separate organisations is that we are looking particularly at parenting issues and at issues of violence against women, whereas People with Disability traditionally in Australia, at both national and state levels, have looked at more of the concrete issues. They are looking more at transport and employment. And whilst we are very concerned about those as underpinning the involvement of women with disabilities in the community, there is still a great need to focus on those other aspects of our lives. And men or women with disabilities certainly need to look at

those issues.

MR DOSZPOT: Nicole mentioned, I think, that you have got about 80 members in WWD. Is that right?

Ms Salthouse: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: How many in PWD?

Ms Salthouse: I do not know of the membership of PWD.

Ms O'Callaghan: I think that is around the 300 mark. But that is including organisational members.

MR DOSZPOT: And are women included in that 300?

Ms Salthouse: Yes, certainly. Certainly we have got women in both organisations. And, as I say, they, PWD, have tended to concentrate on the more concrete aspects of disability—accessibility and building access, transport access. And I think that in the situations before Women With Disabilities broke away nationally to a separate level, it was because they were being cut out of leadership roles in those organisations. Until we have greater equity for both non-disabled and women with disabilities, I think we need separate organisations.

You would be aware at a national level how a lot more funding went in the national budget to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency. I think, when you look at the gender blueprint that the Sex Discrimination Commissioner published in 2010, that also focuses on women within Australia, the status of women within Australia, and that is, I think, part of that justification for a focus on women.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you for that. I think I originally met you, Nicole, at PWD about 18 months ago.

Ms Salthouse: Yes.

Ms O'Callaghan: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: I just wanted to clarify that.

Ms Salthouse: Yes. I certainly am a member of PWD as well. Nicole is a board member of PWD. And we do have an organisation, a loose grouping here, of what we call the Disability Advocacy Network. And we work in very closely with the two organisations which do individual advocacy. We tend to talk to you on those systemic things but the people who are affected, the women and men who are affected, by things going wrong go to the individual advocacy organisation. So we all talk together to make sure that we are coordinating to get improvements for all people with disabilities in the ACT.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I am sorry to cut it short—

Ms Salthouse: Thank you very much. No, that is fine.

THE CHAIR: but we have others and time is away.

Ms Salthouse: Thank you very much for your time.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for your presentation. When it is ready, a copy of the transcript of the hearing will be sent to you to ensure accuracy. We thank you for your presentation.

SEMLER, MS HANNAH, Director, Belconnen Arts Centre
McLEOD, MS EVOL, Chair, Belconnen Arts Centre

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the hearing this afternoon. On the table in front of you is the privilege statement. I need to ask whether you have read the privilege card and understand the implications of the privilege statement.

Ms Semler: Yes, we do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. For your information, proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription as well as being webstreamed and broadcast live. We are also trialling Committees on Demand this year. Are you happy to proceed?

Ms Semler: We are.

Ms McLeod: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Semler: We are very pleased to have the opportunity to speak with you further to the budget being placed in front of everyone, noting that back in December we made a submission to Treasury for this current budget period that we are addressing.

Our bid is specifically to ask that some funds be set aside to rescope stage 2 of Belconnen Arts Centre. The reason for this is that there is, as you know, a rapidly expanding community in the west and north-west of Canberra, in the Gungahlin and Molonglo regions, all of which utilise the Belconnen area services, most particularly the town centre. We belong to part of that. The heart of Belconnen is definitely around the lake, Lake Ginninderra. Many of you know, if you have been there recently, that there is an awful lot of change going on. The Arts Centre is a good part of that change.

With it, however, is also the challenge to look ahead and to make sure that the foreshore works are completed; that the community has access all the way around the foreshore; and that the access into the town centre is in some sense coherent. It has been a building site basically since we moved in. The moment we completed the building, Westfield as a building site took over. And now we have Emu inlet being redeveloped. It is very exciting. I took a tour of that yesterday with Anne Breckwoldt, who is the manager for TAMS on that project.

What we see as incredibly important is that with this expanding community there is a changing landscape, a changing demographic. There are more people moving into town, into Belconnen itself, with new units. There is more residential development mooted, planned and approved. There is the outer community, as I have alluded to, with the Molonglo and Gungahlin residential increase that is impacting on our visitation at the Arts Centre and also on the use of Westfield as a major shopping precinct.

With this change of landscape there is also a change in demographic. There are more young people coming in; there are families coming in. They are looking for services.

With the completion of Belconnen Arts Centre to include stage 2, which was planned as a performance space, a cafe and restaurant and additional rehearsal and workshop studio spaces, we will be able to better serve the whole community of the north-west of Canberra in one place. And you have already got stage 1 completed. We have an active program. I hope you all receive our invitations regularly to what is on every week. We are trying to make sure that you realise that it is not a white elephant—that it is actually very well utilised and that the investment has been worthwhile to date.

Looking forward, we need to make sure that this investment is sustainable and that the management of the facility, the growth to include stage 2, is a coherent process. With that, in scoping stage 2, we feel we have an opportunity to work towards the completion, which we would like to see happen by 2016, which is Belconnen's 50th birthday.

Would you like to add anything, Evol? Or are there questions that we can answer for you?

Ms McLeod: I think the only thing I would mention—we have already had some conversation with Vicki Dunne and Clinton when they visited a few days ago—is that that development of Emu inlet and Emu Bank we would love to see happen in rather a holistic way so that we are not going ahead and seeing all of that done and then suddenly finding that we have got stage 2 of the Belconnen Arts Centre to consider. There is no doubt that a performance space is needed; that is very clear. We have done a bit of a scoping study internally, and it is most likely that it will be dance, music and contemporary performance, plus the other things that Hannah has mentioned. That is probably all at this stage, because we would like to maximise the time in terms of your questions.

THE CHAIR: To do that, we will go to the Belconnen members and the arts spokesperson for the Greens and the Liberal Party. We will start with Ms Hunter and work our way through.

MS HUNTER: One of my first questions was around that performance space and the types of groups that would use it. Thank you very much; you have answered that question. The other one I wanted to ask was around funding. You talk about the importance of, at a minimum, receiving CPI on the money that you are receiving. I wanted to have a bit more understanding about the real costs. Is it the case that you are not receiving any indexation on your current grant?

Ms McLeod: That is correct.

MS HUNTER: Is that the way that similar arts organisations are funded? Why on earth, when every other government funding contract and so forth to community organisations does have indexation, does your arts grant not have indexation on it?

Ms McLeod: Can I give a bit of very brief background on that. Several years ago there were four CEOs who represented a lobby group that met with the Chief Minister on just that issue, because it was becoming increasingly difficult to manage not just the operational increases but also, and most importantly, CPI increases for staff. My understanding was that there was movement in terms of granting that. I have to say

that in becoming chair of the organisation last year—Belconnen Arts Centre—that was something that really—

THE CHAIR: We trained you well in Tuggeranong, though.

Ms McLeod: I am a good swimmer, Brendan.

THE CHAIR: Yes, me too.

Ms McLeod: It was really a great surprise to me to find that it was not built in. And it is five-year funding now, too, which makes it an even greater pressure.

MS HUNTER: Of course, you should have that built in each year and it should be the combined CPI and wage price index that is being applied. I find it quite bizarre that all other funding contracts have that attached, but it appears that it is missing from arts. We will need to follow up with some questions for the department.

MS LE COUTEUR: You said in your introductory remarks that you wanted to rescope stage 2. I just wanted to clarify that. Are you wanting to change the plans for stage 2, have stage 2 happen earlier or a bit of both?

Ms Semler: When we first took carriage of the Arts Centre on 1 September last year, immediately after we opened—or rather just before that, before your budget for this year was placed—the understanding was that stage 2 would be starting almost as soon as we completed stage 1. The landscape has changed financially, so we understand that it is not immediate, but we would like to bring that into—not to lose the momentum; let us put it that way.

To rescope it has to do with the changing landscape of the community, learning what we are learning from utilising the centre. Before that it was all notional. It was what the community put up its hand for and said it would like to have. What we are saying is, “What will you actually do here?” And that is actually shaping the program. It is not just what we would like; we all have a wish list. It is “What will you do here? What will you do here to make this viable?” We need to do that with stage 2 as well. We need to be really sure that what you invest in—what we as a whole community invest in—is going to be viable. That is why we need to go back to rescoping a little. And also the sense of ownership of the space as it has evolved means that aspects of stage 2 design as it is right now may not be exactly what we want.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you have an idea of a process for how you would go through this rescoping?

Ms McLeod: Community consultation would have to be a big part of it, and also partnerships. One of the things we are fairly clear about is that on paper at the moment it is a fairly, I might say, conventional performing theatre space. What we are learning is that, with young people in particular, dance is becoming increasingly important—and in the Belconnen region it is huge. We rather feel that, with community consultation, we are going to learn what they would see not really in two years time but probably in five years time.

We would really like to get a feel for what is happening right now with contemporary arts practice, because there has also been a change in neighbouring facilities, whether they are the ANU Arts Centre, Llewellyn Hall or Theatre 3. There are possibilities of course—forming a partnership between arts and education with Hawker theatre for the more traditional little theatre productions. It would be community consultation, but we are pretty clear that there has been a shift and that we are going to need to respond to contemporary arts practice. What is it going to look like in 2015?

MRS DUNNE: Could I ask you to elaborate, Ms Semler and Ms McLeod, on the comments that you made about the development of the lake foreshore—the Belconnen Arts Centre’s role in that, and its position there, and how you would like to see that as a joined up development.

Ms Semler: Thank you. The question is most pertinent. Having been there last week, it comes into focus that the foreshore, as you know, has major sections of carriageable—pathway or bikeway—access and then you get to the commercial area along Emu Bank where you navigate between the cafes, restaurants and takeaways and come back out onto Emu Bank itself. You are on the pathway, which again is shared—even more so—by pedestrians and cyclists. Then you cross an entrance into our car park. Then you go across our open space, thinking you have got the rest of the foreshore to navigate, but you come across a fence or you will fall into the water—either way. So you have to go back out onto the pathway along a bad-quality pathway to once again, about a kilometre down the track, get back onto the pathway that takes you around the lake. Joining the landscaping that is happening right now at Emu inlet and re-landscaping the lakeside aspect of the Arts Centre, which at the moment is just weed-infested frontage and non-accessible, through to the other part of the pathway is the ideal solution. We would see as part of stage 2 that this would be the natural flow.

Ms McLeod: May I add one small thing? We had actually written to the ACT government. We feel very strongly a duty of care in that lake foreshore area immediately in front of the Arts Centre. As Hannah said, there are lots of weeds. There is not a lot of light. And there is no way in the world that you can stop children having a bit of an explore when there are big festivals and events that are happening. We would love to see that area developed properly.

MR COE: What involvement do you have with the foreshore work that has gone on so far in terms of consultation and the planning and scoping of it? It was rescoped umpteen times, and I do not think anyone knew exactly what was happening there because it just seemed to morph into other things.

Ms Semler: There was a bit of a crossover; the foreshore scoping was consulted on before my time there—maybe Evol knows a little more about that—and the Arts Centre was being scoped. The Arts Centre was built. The plans for Emu inlet were completed in about June-July 2008, which was exactly when they started turning the sod and doing the earthworks for the Arts Centre. There is a little bit of a disconnect, but there is also a connection. On the master plan for the Arts Centre, there is a connection to the foreshore of Emu inlet. However, at the time that the design for the Arts Centre was being created Emu inlet was not being designed. So there is a bit of a disconnect. It just so happens that the designers for Emu inlet and the designers for the landscaping of the Arts Centre are the same designers. But because stage 2 has yet

to be designed and completed for the Arts Centre there is still some work to be done there.

MR COE: With regard to parking and general traffic conditions, do you think the difficulties there actually hinder the operation at all?

Ms Semler: Certainly the last 12 months have been extraordinarily challenging and not without some conflict with the public. And still, at times, some of our users come in and say, “How come you do not have all-day parking?” We point to where it is available; mostly it is now pay parking. Certainly the improvements and the completion of some of those works around Westfield have improved it. Having said that, there was all-day parking on the street immediately adjacent to the Arts Centre, and that is only two hours now. We only have two hour parking as well. So there are some issues around that. Most of our users are not in there all day. Those who are facilitators get access to some parking from us; for the others—like anywhere else you go, you have to pay for it, find it or come by bus. There is a bus stop right in front of the Arts Centre.

MRS DUNNE: Do you find that there is adequate adjacent car parking so that people who want to make the Belconnen Arts Centre a destination, when they get there, are actually able to find a car park? You have a very modest car park?

Ms Semler: Twenty-two spots, yes.

MRS DUNNE: And then it is a bit of a packed lunch hike to car parking anywhere else. That is my understanding.

Ms Semler: There is street parking. By making the rest of the street parking adjacent to it two hours there is a bit of a—

MRS DUNNE: A bit of a lottery.

Ms Semler: It is also an equal base. If, as it was, it was all-day parking—the public servants who are working in the nearby adjacent areas took over that parking. Now at least there is some movement; there is some possibility.

Ms McLeod: It has freed it.

Ms Semler: It has freed it. I should say that in the last six weeks it has improved considerably.

MRS DUNNE: Okay.

THE CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

MRS DUNNE: The take-out message is that you would like to see the completion of the Arts Centre as the community’s birthday present to Belconnen?

Ms Semler: I would say that would be a nice way of putting it. Thank you.

Ms McLeod: And possibly Gungahlin, Vicki, because we are drawing on Gungahlin residents.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. A copy of the transcript of the hearing will be provided to ensure accuracy.

NICOLL, MR ROGER, President, Flynn Primary School Parents & Citizens Association, and Member, John Flynn Community Group

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon to the Flynn P&C and John Flynn Community Group. On the table in front of you is the privilege statement. Have you read the privilege card and do you understand the implications?

Mr Nicoll: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Nicoll: Yes. We would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to address you today. We are making this submission on behalf of our many hundreds of members, supporters and residents who are connected with our two groups. And we are going to cover some fairly serious matters arising from the nomination of \$4 million of spending for works at Flynn primary school—and that is to house unidentified tenants, services and facilities in 2011-12—and the related matter of \$4 million spending on a childcare centre at the site.

For reasons that we will outline, this budget proposal must be carefully scrutinised and heavily modified rather than just rubber-stamped. This budget decision, like the childcare decision one year ago, appears to have been made through a non-transparent and improper process, with details again withheld from the community and the Assembly. If this is like the childcare proposal of last year, the brief has been prepared in opposition to a proposal put forward by the community groups and it has been prepared under cabinet-in-confidence.

The Flynn community is still waiting for the government and DHCS to honour its commitment to have the viability of the community proposal negotiated as part of a master plan for the site. That commitment was made following an accepted recommendation of the schools closures inquiry which had tri-party involvement.

If this latest proposal is like the childcare process of last year, if the tenants have already been selected without an open process, if a brief has been prepared and demolition commences, as it did with the childcare centre, without due regard to heritage and without an approved development application, these are serious matters. If this is similar to the school closures and the childcare decision, FOI documents will again, as they come out as evidence, show a campaign of government departments actively working against the best interests of the community and good governance.

Documents that we have now been able to obtain show a series of misdemeanours, including fabrication of meeting dates and minutes, false and misleading advice and evidence to ministers, to the Assembly and to its committees, the serious and undeclared conflict of interest involved and deceptive and dishonest engagement and behaviour contrary to the Public Sector Management Act. Some of these matters are now the subject of two independent investigations, including one with the ACT Ombudsman.

The Flynn primary school has been independently assessed as worthy of heritage listing and it could gain that listing through matters that are currently before the

Supreme Court. While the government have committed and have said over and over that they are committed to protecting heritage and community values, their actions are actually telling a different story. The Burra charter, which sort of guides heritage conservation, actually directs that heritage values should be put first, considered first and a conservation management plan should be prepared before a decision is made about the use.

DHCS's and the government's actions have been contrary to that. They have made two decisions in consecutive years about future use without considering how best to protect the heritage and without an approved conservation management plan. I should note that a draft conservation management strategy has been prepared just for the childcare centre. It is incomplete, it has factual errors and it has not received community feedback to date. The original architect, Enrico Taglietti, has also told us that he has not received a copy of that document and he certainly has not given carte blanche approval to the works, as has been claimed in recent weeks.

If the government was truly interested in protecting heritage, it would have ensured that the Supreme Court had the opportunity to consider matters fairly, it would have ensured that a heritage conservation management plan was finalised and that a consistent use and development application was approved before pushing ahead with this demolition that has been happening in the last weeks.

The government should have also realised that the ACT Heritage Council, as one of the parties to that Supreme Court action, would have a conflict of interest in giving advice at this time on the matter of heritage. The government should have also welcomed news that has come out this week that the Australian Institute of Architects have included the Flynn school on their register of significant 20th century architecture. The absence of Flynn on a list that was produced in 1996 was held up as a main argument by the Heritage Council and ACAT for not listing Flynn on the heritage register.

The government's response in the last day, by the ACT Government Solicitor, to that view was to question the right of the Flynn community groups to exist and they have now demanded that we lodge a \$40,000 security to run ahead with the Supreme Court case. You will remember we were asked to lodge \$50,000 when we were involved in the school closure process. This sort of bullying and intimidation are way outside the model litigant guidelines and they do show the true intentions in regard to heritage in the community at Flynn.

There are important matters in the public interest in the Supreme Court action, including what the definition of community is under the act. The Heritage Council and ACAT have defined community as not including the people of Flynn, the Chief Minister, the Presbyterian Church, the National Trust, Dr Taglietti, the Royal Flying Doctor Service, academics at the University of Canberra, Senator Gary Humphries—sorry, it is a long list—the principal, teachers and students at the school, the 23 people who prepared detailed statements for the ACAT appeal and the almost 700 people who signed a petition in support of heritage. The definition of community does not include those, according to that. So it is a very important concept for heritage in the ACT, and we just think that this is an unacceptable way for government and its agencies to behave and treat communities that have worked long and hard to achieve

good outcomes for everyone.

One of the important reasons why this committee needs to act is the unacceptably poor value for money that this budget proposition offers to the ACT community. The \$4 million for unidentified tenants in 2011-12 is further to \$4 million already allocated just to relocate two childcare centres. That relocation has been very contentious and brought expensive changes to the building and heritage features. So this total of \$8 million now is an additional cost of closing Flynn primary school and the community centre that it was. That \$8 million would have maintained operations of a vibrant and busy school and community centre for 16 years. Closing the school was supposed to save about half a million dollars a year.

Also in this current budget, this 2011-12 budget, a further \$5.6 million is allocated to expand a primary school in a nearby suburb to cater for increased student numbers. So there appears to be no cost-benefit justification for spending \$8 million to keep Flynn primary school from being a school, while at the same time you are spending nearly \$6 million to open up more places in schools in the area when the cost of reopening Flynn as both a school and a community centre has been quoted at just \$2 million. We are talking about \$14 million versus \$2 million, and there is more in a school and community centre than what is proposed.

Finally, based on the above evidence, which we can fully verify through documents, we ask this committee and the Assembly to press for these following five points: the suspension of the current propositions for Flynn school pending a full inquiry; the ACT government to back its commitment to heritage through development of a full conservation management plan in consultation with the community; the Heritage Council to act as a model litigant in the Supreme Court and to base its actions on the merits of the case rather than the suppressive bullying tactics; for the reintroduction of a school and community centre at Flynn to achieve value for money, heritage protection and needed local facilities and services; and, finally, an independent judicial review of the matters identified since the school's closure in 2006, arising from the FOI documents and these independent investigations that are underway. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much for that. You have raised some very serious allegations there. Can you substantiate what you have just told the committee?

Mr Nicoll: Absolutely. As I said, we have a range of evidence through documented papers under FOI, we have things on the public record that verify what we have said, and those matters are also before these independent investigations.

THE CHAIR: Have you collated that material in a document that the committee could have?

Mr Nicoll: There are a series of documents. I would have to check on that, whether that would compromise any of those independent investigations, but there is—

THE CHAIR: Could you? It is very easy to come here and make allegations.

Mr Nicoll: Yes.

THE CHAIR: It is a very serious matter, and I think we ought to take it very seriously. Could you check and work out what it is you could release to the committee. If we are going to take it up with relevant ministers, it is very hard to say “Flynn said so”, without the detail.

Mr Nicoll: Yes. Certainly some of those documents are on the public record. Others have been obtained through FOI. There are certain matters before the Supreme Court that obviously we could not disclose at this stage.

THE CHAIR: If you could look at what it is you could release to the committee, that would be useful. Given the time and the interest of the Belconnen members, I think perhaps we will let them go first, so Meredith, then Vicki.

MS HUNTER: I just want to follow up. You said that there were a couple of independent inquiries. One is with the ACT Ombudsman. Have you got any idea about the timing of that?

Mr Nicoll: Not at this stage. They said they are going to investigate parts of that and I do not think they have given us a time frame.

MS HUNTER: So parts of the issues that you have raised?

Mr Nicoll: Certainly the more serious matters, yes.

MS HUNTER: Okay. And who is conducting the second independent inquiry?

Mr Nicoll: The second independent one is through a departmental internal process or a consultant to the department. There has only just been news about the terms of reference for that.

MS HUNTER: Sorry, and that is DHCS?

Mr Nicoll: DHCS, yes.

MS HUNTER: So that is the department. Could you just explain: did you say some sort of independent consultant? I am just trying to understand if it is independent but it is an internal departmental thing. It sort of does not quite mesh.

Mr Nicoll: We have asked for an explanation of how independent that is and I do not have the information on that at the moment as to whether it is an internal consultant or—

MS HUNTER: Okay. I just wondered—

THE CHAIR: What prompted the internal inquiry? Is it as a result of a complaint made?

Mr Nicoll: Yes. After last year’s estimates we found out more about the process that was involved with the childcare and we put our first formal complaint to the minister

in July last year. We got no satisfactory response to that letter. We still have not had a satisfactory response, and we followed up with the department CEO later in the year, perhaps about October, and at community meetings. So we put in a second complaint to the CEO and then we followed up with another letter which said, "This is a formal complaint." About six weeks later, I think, we got a response to that. The Ombudsman's complaint was put in roughly November last year.

THE CHAIR: Right. Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Nicoll, you said earlier that there is a difference of opinion as to whether the architect, Mr Taglietti, is in agreement with the modifications which have been proposed in relation to the childcare centre. Could you elaborate on that, because I have been to meetings and I have had briefings where I have been told that Mr Taglietti is quite comfortable with the proposed changes.

Mr Nicoll: I have had a number of talks with Mr Taglietti and he has been on tours of the site and talked about possible changes, but one of the very serious things I have asked him was: has he seen this conservation management strategy which talks about the points of value? It is a draft, and he says he has not seen this document. So we cannot see how he could give full approval if he has not seen the documents that inform it.

MRS DUNNE: Are you aware of whether there have been discussions between Mr Taglietti and the architects who have the design brief for the design of the childcare centre, and whether there is collaboration there?

Mr Nicoll: We have been on a couple of tours of the site where Mr Taglietti has attended, so we know that he has had informal discussions with them, yes.

MR COE: Going back to the evidence which Mr Smyth asked about with regard to the falsified documents, can you give us an understanding of what that actually entails?

Mr Nicoll: We have had a range of meetings with the department where minutes have not been provided, or draft minutes have been provided, there has been a to and fro to try and finalise the minutes and in most cases there have been no agreed minutes of any of the meetings that we have had. That is one issue. But the falsified part comes in where there have been meetings, minutes of meetings on days where meetings did not take place, with people that did not attend meetings, and with minutes that did not reflect anything that happened at meetings. So—

MR COE: And to your knowledge or your understanding have those documents been used to support either the government's case in the community in terms of public opinion or in terms of legal avenues or legal—

Mr Nicoll: They have been used in forming the proposals that went to cabinet-in-confidence for the budget, for the childcare and subsequently.

MS LE COUTEUR: You said you had a lot of members. How many paid-up members are there of the John Flynn group and the P&C?

Mr Nicoll: I have not got those numbers with me at the moment but it runs into the hundreds. I have not got the exact list but we have provided it for the ACAT deal and we also tabled those 700 signatures to the petition for heritage.

One thing we have been very careful to do is to bring up information from the community. So we have done a number of door knocks as a whole suburb and we have got community feedback. The positions that we have taken forward have come up from the community rather than the other way around.

THE CHAIR: We are running out of time. Some of the members need to leave.

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, I just want to go back to the costs if I could because what we have seen now confirmed my mental calculations on this, Mr Nicoll, that over the last two budgets the government is proposing to spend \$8 million to relocate some childcare centre places and now to do further work. In addition to that \$8 million do you have any feeling for the other expenditure that the government may have engaged in in relation to Flynn? For instance, you now say that there is an independent consultant doing a review. Do you know what the cost of that review would be?

Mr Nicoll: I have no idea but obviously there would have been costs since the school closure to do with the legal action with the Purdon process and then the GHD process with the school closure inquiry process then with the consultation process that we have had both this year and the previous year with the department. All the work around the childcare centre, obviously, is a cost—so, yes, very significant costs other than that \$8 million and very significant costs on the community as well.

You have to realise that since the schools closed people are driving a lot further. There have been a lot more pressures on families that have had to bear the costs of that closure and also the whole community costs. We talked about raising \$50,000 for the previous legal action, so it runs into hundreds of thousands even from the community side when you consider time and the involvement of a lot of people.

MRS DUNNE: Just to finish up, you said that ACTGSO has asked for surety in the courts. Do the Flynn community groups collectively have the money for that surety?

Mr Nicoll: We will not answer that question. But certainly the government has said it is committed to heritage, it wants to protect heritage. As a model litigant it should be wanting to see action go forward that will have a bearing on heritage because one outcome is that it could get heritage listing from that action. Why should the community pay for the government's participation when heritage is important, when the definition of community is important?

THE CHAIR: Sorry, but we have to finish there. Thank you for your appearance. A copy of the transcript will be provided for you to check for accuracy and get back to the committee. Thank you for your time.

The committee adjourned at 5.44 pm.