

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES AND
SOCIAL EQUITY**

(Reference: budget 2002-2003—service delivery)

Members

**MR J HARGREAVES (The Chair)
MRS H CROSS
MS R DUNDAS**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 28 MARCH 2002

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms J Henderson (Ph: 620 50129)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

The committee met at 2.05 pm.

MARY PORTER was called.

THE CHAIR: Mary, welcome to today's hearing. The committee inquiry is part of the budget consultation process. We're looking at priorities for service delivery. The accent of the committee's hearings is not on the arithmetic of submissions. It's really about priorities for service delivery that we can advise the government on. We're going to examine the evidence before the committee and make recommendations to the government.

I've been emphasising to people coming before the committee that we are not a decision-making instrument. We're not an extension or an arm of the executive. Rather we are an instrument of the Assembly and we make recommendations to the government through the Assembly.

You would know because you've been here so many times before that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives protections and also responsibilities. It means that you're protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation—although that would never be the case—for what you might say to us today. It also means you have a responsibility to tell us the truth. Giving false and misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

The proceedings are being broadcast throughout public service offices and throughout the building. If people so desire, they can seek to have things broadcast live or recorded.

I think the best way to deal with this is for you to make an opening address and then we will ask questions of you. I would ask you, if you wouldn't mind, to address us on two areas. One is your view on the priorities for service delivery as far as Volunteering ACT is concerned. The other is your understanding of the process for funding delivery to Volunteering ACT. From our conversations, I think it's valuable to get your understanding of that process and your understanding of the message that has been given to you recently so that committee members can hear it from you rather than second hand from me.

For the record, state your name and the capacity in which you appear.

Ms Porter: I am Mary Porter. I am the CEO of Volunteering ACT. The reason why I've come before you today is twofold. One reason is to support our application to the government to have Volunteering ACT recognised in the upcoming budget as the people volunteering in the ACT and enabled to continue that work, and the other is to put before you a supplementary paper, which I have sent to you, to outline the kinds of things we're concerned about in the community and we believe need some attention in the upcoming budget.

Budget funding for Volunteering ACT has lapsed. We have been told by officers of the Chief Minister's Department and the health department that we should bring to you a submission to enable the peak funding of this organisation to continue—in other words, for our core role to continue in the ACT.

THE CHAIR: Did you get three-year funding?

Ms Porter: We were never asked to present before. This was a decision, I believe, that was made by cabinet three years ago, under a previous government, to fund us. I wasn't in the cabinet room, but that's what I was given to understand.

It was a cross-portfolio amount of funding. That was the decision at that time. It was quite ground breaking, in that it hadn't been done before. We were very pleased that the government took that very far-sighted approach to recognise that volunteers work right across the whole sector and then to ask each of the departments to contribute. The Chief Minister at that time decided that it would be in line with the numbers of volunteers that generally come from those particular sectors. You have volunteers, obviously, in arts and heritage, sport, environment, science and technology, community health, law, justice and emergency services. You could go on and on. You know where they all are.

The Chief Minister of that day said that each department would put in a share of the funding. Now obviously it is difficult to manage. However, that was the decision and it was then given to Health to manage, because Health had the capacity to manage that contract.

We've been told now that if there is to be future funding it will come through the Chief Minister's Department. They have shifted our current funding to the Chief Minister's Department.

MS DUNDAS: Can I just clarify something, Mary? You had a three-year grant from the government managed by Health. When does that grant expire?

Ms Porter: It has expired, but we weren't told that it had expired, so we had to retrieve that.

MRS CROSS: When did it expire?

Ms Porter: It expired last June.

MS DUNDAS: It expired at the end of last financial year?

Ms Porter: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: Have you been receiving any government funding over the last year?

Ms Porter: We had to retrieve that. I have spent the last few months trying to retrieve that.

MS DUNDAS: Sorry, I don't understand the term "retrieve".

Ms Porter: We weren't told it wasn't coming to us. They had to make some inquiries as to why it wasn't coming, and they explained to us that it had lapsed. Even though they had said they were going to have more discussions with us and they were going to continue the contract, it hadn't continued. Therefore, we had to go to talk to Health and the Chief Minister's Department and ask them what the problem was. Health said it would have been an administrative glitch. Because of the international year, Chief Minister's was managing that. They had thought that that was replacing our other funding, which of course couldn't be true, because we needed the extra \$50,000 to run the year. We couldn't manage the year and do everything else at the same time. The year gave us a lot of problems, in that it increased our day-to-day work a hundredfold.

MS DUNDAS: But were you getting government funding for that year?

THE CHAIR: During the last 12 months?

Ms Porter: Yes, for the international year.

MS DUNDAS: Only?

Ms Porter: Only.

MS DUNDAS: You didn't receive what you would consider a normal grant?

Ms Porter: No.

MS DUNDAS: So over the last financial year you've suffered what you would say is a financial loss?

Ms Porter: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: How did you, as an organisation, continue to run your day-to-day services without government funding?

Ms Porter: With great difficulty, because our staff provisions were run down. The provisions for long service leave, provisions for holiday leave, all of those things, have now been more or less spent. We are waiting. The government has told us that they have agreed that it should be—

MS DUNDAS: Supplemented?

Ms Porter: Supplemented. We should get it back.

MS DUNDAS: So the government has already agreed to this?

Ms Porter: We believe that the Chief Minister has signed that document as of yesterday.

MS DUNDAS: And you expect to get that money starting from when?

Ms Porter: They've been saying for the last month that it'll be any day now.

MS DUNDAS: So you're expecting a deposit in your bank account over the next week?

Ms Porter: We're hoping so.

THE CHAIR: And that will reimburse you for the rundown?

Ms Porter: That will reimburse us. Fortunately, we have a corporate sponsor which has been assisting us over this time in order to—

MRS CROSS: Who's that?

Ms Porter: The Canberra Labor Club, which already gives us a lot of support with regard to the building we're in. That is not a gift of money; it's just an amount that they've loaned to us, I suppose, if you can put it that way, to tide us over.

MRS CROSS: They've lent you money?

Ms Porter: To tide us over.

THE CHAIR: An interest-free loan?

Ms Porter: Yes, to tide us over—an interest-free loan.

MS DUNDAS: And the money that you are expecting any day now is just a back payment?

Ms Porter: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: For the last year?

Ms Porter: No, for the last six months, since July.

THE CHAIR: It has gone out to about eight months now?

Ms Porter: Yes, it has.

MS DUNDAS: You're now trying to negotiate future funding?

Ms Porter: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: And you're two months behind on that?

THE CHAIR: There appear to be two issues. One, which hopefully has been resolved, is the base and core funding that you would normally have expected to receive. Hopefully, that has found resolution. Subject to the size of the cheque, your normal core base funding will be back on target again.

Ms Porter: But it only lasts till June. They've told us that.

THE CHAIR: You're now saying that the submission you've given to us is a request for further base core funding to enable you to continue?

Ms Porter: Yes. What they've said is that it will finish at June. What should have happened probably back in June was a renegotiation of our three years. In fact, that is what the health department had told me was going to happen. I had discussions with Glenys at that time—

THE CHAIR: Is that Glenys Beauchamp?

Ms Porter: Glenys Beauchamp. Glenys said we would have to sit round the table and we would have to renegotiate the outcomes we drew up. She said it was about time we sat down and renegotiated them. We had been agreeing. In fact, we'd had two meetings with her to try to rejig the outputs. We ourselves felt that we needed to move on beyond the old ones. It was her full intention to sit down. I think the international year took over everybody. It was just such an horrific year for everybody.

THE CHAIR: Those things shouldn't happen. Are you currently in negotiation for what the next three-year contract will look like or has negotiation not started yet?

Ms Porter: We had discussions with the Chief Minister's Department and also with the health department about the kinds of things they'd like us to produce. Then we were advised to put those down in writing and send them to this committee, which I have done. That's what this is.

MS DUNDAS: As part of this budget inquiry?

Ms Porter: I beg your pardon.

MS DUNDAS: Somebody told you to write down the outputs that you think you should be asked to give?

Ms Porter: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: And send them to the Community Services and Social Equity Committee as part of their budget inquiry?

Ms Porter: Yes. That happened at a meeting with Therese Gehrig and Peter Brady. That was the meeting I had with those two people. This is where we talked about the scope of the service that Volunteering ACT would continue to provide, and that is the document you have in front of you.

MS DUNDAS: Can I clarify one last point? The round of the three-year funding you received started in July 1998 and expired in June 2001, and then you had to work—

Ms Porter: Yes. We continued to write reports, because we thought the money was coming into the bank.

MS DUNDAS: So you thought you were going to get an extension for a year?

Ms Porter: Yes. We thought we were going to be renegotiating the extra year with Glenys.

MS DUNDAS: So you spent the International Year of the Volunteer without any core funding?

THE CHAIR: Or half of it.

Ms Porter: Only six months of it.

THE CHAIR: Does the new arrangement you're now getting—the retrieval, as you termed it—provide funding between 1 July 2001 and 30 June 2002?

Ms Porter: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Your understanding is that the government has said, “We will continue your core funding for the financial year 2001-02, and so long as everything goes ahead beautifully, there's not a problem”?

Ms Porter: And they will also continue to fund the rest of the international year money. We have \$40,000 that was for the rest of this financial year, from December to the end of this financial year, for finishing off international year matters—older persons research that we're doing and also reporting on the whole of the year.

MRS CROSS: Is that the money you're paying back to the Labor Club? I'm assuming that you've needed to be sustained.

Ms Porter: We have needed to be sustained, and we will pay it back to the Labor Club as soon as we have money in the bank.

MRS CROSS: So whatever money you keep should be retroactive?

Ms Porter: We'll have to pay some back to them, yes.

MS DUNDAS: Have you sent your submission to the Treasurer and to the Chief Minister?

Ms Porter: Yes, I have sent these to the Chief Minister and the Treasurer.

MS DUNDAS: So they have these documents as well?

Ms Porter: Yes, they do.

THE CHAIR: For the committee's benefit, when I spoke to Mary I expressed surprise that an element of the bureaucracy would regard the report from this committee as being a determinant of whether a further grant should be given to the organisation. I expressed concern about that and advised Mary to make sure that the submission went to the Treasurer and to the Chief Minister. She has done that. That's only a recent thing, Mary, isn't it?

Ms Porter: Yes.

MRS CROSS: Mary, when was the three-year funding meant to expire? What was the date?

Ms Porter: Right in the middle of the financial year.

MRS CROSS: This year?

MS DUNDAS: June 30, 2001?

Ms Porter: No, the one behind. The reason why it wasn't picked up by me was that I was in the middle of the international year but also that our finance officer had a heart transplant. He had been chasing it and trying to find out why we weren't—

MRS CROSS: So it was just something that fell through the cracks because of—

Ms Porter: With us.

MRS CROSS: Yes, I understand.

Ms Porter: I also became extremely ill during that period. We were both ill. However, the department did not contact us prior to the contract. Usually we have a meeting every year at which we discuss our outputs for the year. We didn't have a meeting. The department didn't ring us or make any contact with us. In fact, I didn't even know who the new contract manager was. We were still sending stuff to the wrong person in Health, because we hadn't got a record of that. They told us that our reports had been sitting around in different people's filing cabinets and they had to retrieve them from all over the place, because they didn't know where they were.

MS DUNDAS: This is in the department of health?

Ms Porter: Yes. We don't have to send them to Therese anymore, because we believe we'll now be sending them to Chief Minister's Department. But we kept producing the reports.

MS DUNDAS: When you were doing reports for the International Year of the Volunteer, did you have to do reporting on the \$50,000 coming from Chief Minister's ?

Ms Porter: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: Did you send that through to what you thought was your normal contact in Health or did you—

Ms Porter: No, we sent that to Chief Minister's Department.

MS DUNDAS: And do you know whether they've been received there and have you acquitted all the—

Ms Porter: Yes, they've been received and we've had lots of discussions with Chief Minister's Department about the international year outcomes. Yes, it has been very good. Is there anything within this document that you would like some clarity about?

THE CHAIR: Can I, at this point, suggest that—

MS DUNDAS: Express concern about the process?

THE CHAIR: I think we will discuss that when Mary has finished giving her evidence. I sense a commonality of feeling about this, and it's just a matter of our agreeing on the expression thereof. Can I now ask you, Mary, to turn the committee's attention to what you see as priorities the government should be addressing within the context of the budget generally? For example, in the submissions and evidence we've received so far there have been a number of areas which have been common to most. We'd be interested in some sense of priorities, as far as Volunteering ACT is concerned.

Ms Porter: One of our priorities is young people. We really feel that there are a number of barriers for them in accessing voluntary work. As you will know, we have young people at risk in our schools. Particularly we're concerned about indigenous young people. We see volunteering as one of the ways that you can link in to paid work and get experience in networking, confidence and all those things. I'm sure these things I'm saying are not new to you. We see resources being put into helping young people access voluntary work.

Earlier this week we launched this document, which is a report on indigenous volunteering and how it relates to volunteering in the mainstream and the attitudes of indigenous people towards that kind of activity. In it you'll find an indication that if we were to work with young people in a supportive way—and we have a model to do that, working with the corporates, with government and ourselves—we could encourage a lot more young people to be involved in volunteering. I table that.

We also have been fortunate to get a project through the department of education to work with the northside schools with young people at risk. We'd like to evaluate that at the end of that time and maybe implement that across different schools, because we do have a good model to work with.

We're concerned that overall there is a changing pattern with volunteering. More people are volunteering short term but they're working fewer hours. They work perhaps for a short period, say three months, and then they go on to something else. This is placing a huge drain on the not-for-profit sector, as you can imagine.

I highlight bushfire and emergency services, but you can imagine that there are other organisations having similar stresses. For instance, you think of something like Lifeline, where you can't have different people. You've got to have them well trained. You can't have a revolving door of volunteers in something like Lifeline or someone caring for people with disabilities or home visiting the frail aged. You need regular people. Fewer and fewer people are available during the day and fewer and fewer people are available long term.

A lot of the volunteer work force now is also in the paid work force. Older people are doing lots of other things. Hopefully, our older people research will point to what's happening with that. If we don't capitalise on what we know now from the research and work together with this sector, we're going to find huge stresses on our organisations and on the service delivery that you rely on through those organisations.

So we see that we need to work with them, we need to research the impact of short-term volunteering, and we need to assist our organisations to cope with that. We don't want volunteers to miss out on opportunities to work in the community.

I turn to restorative justice. I had an opportunity to go to Thames Valley last year and see their terrific restorative justice project there. We all know that we have a fine program here, but they use that in schools with bullying, they use it in the community to settle community disputes, and they are starting to use it in the police service itself in handling complaints.

We see this as a really good model, and we think it would be good if the ACT government could examine the model in the Thames Valley in the UK and maybe introduce some of those models here, particularly as they're now starting to use volunteers to run conferencing. From discussions with me, they've decided to introduce that idea of having volunteers handling conferencing—obviously well-trained volunteers. I think we could do a lot here in that regard.

I commend the ACT police on their new program. I think it could be part of the growing program of volunteers in policing in the ACT.

THE CHAIR: Do you see that as an expansion to the current police volunteering program?

Ms Porter: Yes, I do. I think it's a good opportunity.

THE CHAIR: You're saying that the government ought to look at it, but presumably the big funding implication for the government would be the training that has to be given to these people.

Ms Porter: The training, yes. But we have access to that training. Thames Valley would be able to provide it. A lot of that training is on video and it's there in a package. I know that we're not the UK. I know that the ACT is the ACT, but these are models that they use right round the Western world.

THE CHAIR: But if they pinched half of it from here, we can pinch the other half back.

Ms Porter: It did start from here. It has been a very fine program, and they have a very low crime rate in the Thames Valley.

THE CHAIR: What about the selection of people to do these things? For police volunteering at the moment, the screening is more on one's record and that sort of thing. The actual activities that people are involved have a technical training perspective.

I assume we're dealing with human services here. We're talking about psychological profiles being appropriate or not appropriate to being involved in conferencing, for example. How extensive was the selection process?

Ms Porter: For the current project? Are you talking about here in the ACT?

THE CHAIR: No, I'm talking about the Thames Valley one.

Ms Porter: They have a very intensive selection process over there. I think they're using retired magistrates. There are a number of magistrates who have now been retired from the bench, because they have a different system over there. I think these are the people they're hoping will be the first volunteers to go into this project.

THE CHAIR: We haven't got a whole heap of retired magistrates, and the ones we do have seem to get themselves into a fair amount of trouble from time to time. As a justice of the peace, I've had approaches from the justices of the peace association to have a greater involvement of justices in activities other than just signing statutory declarations, affidavits and oaths. Given that there have to be a couple of thousand of those about town, could we tap into that process?

Ms Porter: I think that is an excellent idea. They have to go through a fairly vigorous process to become justices of the peace. I think it would be a very good idea if we tapped into that.

THE CHAIR: And of course justices of the peace, by their nature, are volunteers.

Ms Porter: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Because it's illegal to take money for your services as a justice of the peace.

Ms Porter: I think it's something worth looking at. The other issue that has been raised with me is volunteer organisations having to pay for police checks. It's quite an impost on them.

THE CHAIR: What's the price now? Is it still \$25?

Ms Porter: I think it's more like \$30 now. If it's just one or two volunteers, it's not a problem, but it is when you have a huge number of volunteers working with, say, Lifeline, the scouts, children or vulnerable people. By law we must have it for people working with children. But there are other organisations that need it for people who work with the aged or people with disabilities. The police checks are quite an impost on organisations. We should be able to find some way of reducing that cost, I think.

THE CHAIR: For members' benefit, not too long ago if a person applied for a job as a caretaker/janitor with the schools they were required to pay for their own police checks, which was regarded by some as having to buy their job in a sense. The previous government decided that the department of education would pick up that tab. But what was true, though, was that the AFP did not. So there was a budget implication for the

department of education in that sense, and such would be the case here. Have you got any idea of the scale of that?

Ms Porter: No. One of the things we haven't got a handle on is how many volunteers are working where.

THE CHAIR: In those sectors that would require it?

Ms Porter: Yes. There haven't been the funds to be able to do that detailed research. All we've got to rely on is the ABS. We know that we have two-thirds of our population here volunteering, and we all know that they're doing that regularly. But how many of them are where, doing what—

MRS CROSS: You've got no register to monitor them?

Ms Porter: No. Once people come to us, they go out to the organisations. We don't keep a filing cabinet full of them. Often people go directly to an organisation.

THE CHAIR: Do you think it would be helpful if the government did some work on trying to work out how many of those people are in those sectors?

Ms Porter: I think so. I'd like to commend the government on their health summit. I think that that was a very good move. That's fine, but we need to continue the work, with people talking to one another and trying to implement some of those recommendations. They were fairly broad, I know, so maybe that's a bit difficult. Volunteers are critical, particularly in health promotion and health prevention areas. They really have a very good role to play.

Occupational health and safety is a concern for us. I would like to see the work that has already begun continued and volunteers adequately covered under that legislation.

We all know about the community space issue. I don't think I need to speak anymore about that. I'm sure you've had people talking to you about community space. You are well aware of the fact that we do need to do something about the poor conditions under which some of our not-for-profit people are working. Of course, my concern is particularly the volunteers who are working in those conditions. I know that there is an audit going on at the moment. I hope that we're able to implement the recommendations from that.

Volunteering ACT is very concerned about small to medium sized organisations, because a lot of resources go into sometimes reinventing the wheel several times over. Some of these organisations have no paid staff. They have fairly unskilled boards of governors or very tired boards of governors. They really have a lot of struggles, and they come to us and they come to the other peaks, depending on which particular peak they think they belong to. They don't want to join, because they usually can't afford it, but they want to utilise our services.

You never turn them away. You always want to assist them, because you know that most of the time they don't have any money. They have perhaps one paid staff, perhaps only a tiny little shoebox somewhere that they work from. You try to help them and support

them, but it's quite draining on organisations to try to do that. I can see that there would be some savings for everybody if they could work together in some way.

The only thing is that the peaks don't want to be seen to be taking over and telling these organisations how to run themselves or threatening their autonomy. That's the last thing we want. But I think there could be some way of bringing like organisations to the table perhaps to start the conversation. That's what we think would be a good idea. Like the landcare groups, self-help groups, arts and heritage groups, sporting groups—there's lots of them—they need to get together around the table and say, "How can we help each other, and how can a relevant peak help us?" We could start those conversations. But they need resourcing to come to the table. Often they just haven't got the time or the resources to get to the table in the first place.

THE CHAIR: Can I just pick you up on that one? If, for example, the government were to hold a mini-summit on the sort of question that you've highlighted, do I read it that what we're actually talking about is resourcing people even to attend that summit because they can't afford the time away from their job to attend it, so we're running around in a vacuum here?

Ms Porter: Yes, we are, unfortunately.

MRS CROSS: These are volunteers we're talking about?

Ms Porter: A lot of these organisations are run entirely on volunteers. But then there are others that have one paid person, so that one paid person does everything.

MRS CROSS: So who would we be paying—the volunteer or the paid person?

Ms Porter: You could pay the volunteer travel expenses, all those kinds of things, to get to the meeting. If it was a paid person you might be paying for somebody else to be there at that place while they are away.

When we were in the pricing reference group, they did some studies in some of the not-for-profit organisations about pricing for their particular services. They came up with a model of paying some of those people for their time while they were in the study. I'm not suggesting that this is just transportable from that to this, but I am suggesting the need to find some ways of supporting the organisations to come to the table, whatever that is.

THE CHAIR: And to help them find their own solution resourced from within their own resources?

Ms Porter: Yes. I'm not suggesting we should come down like big daddy and say, "We're here to sort you out and tell you how to run your organisations or your lives." But we would say, "What would be most helpful for you? How can we help you?" It seems to me at the moment a lot of people are running around in circles. The insurance issue is a case in point. We're getting phone calls all the time asking, "What can we do about insurance?" They're all ringing us separately, asking, "What can we do about this insurance?" If they were members, getting our newsletter and accessing our information, they'd probably know some of the information already.

THE CHAIR: If the government were to resource an annual conference of smaller groups, or even a conference every two years, these people would come together and create those networks which would enable them to take their concentration off the housekeeping issues and put it on service delivery issues?

Ms Porter: Yes, I think so.

THE CHAIR: The government would support that through imparting knowledge on how one can manage things, but through a collective activity such as a conference of some kind?

Ms Porter: Yes, whatever they wanted. They may not want a conference. Conferences seem to be going out of style, but we need to find a way.

THE CHAIR: Is the old word “conference” now substituted with the word “summit”?

Ms Porter: I think so. I think that’s what they’re calling them now, yes. I think they’re calling them summits—half-day summits.

MRS CROSS: No, it’s not a substitution; it’s something different.

Ms Porter: But certainly the word “conference” is turning people off, and from what I can—

MRS CROSS: I’m old fashioned then, because I’m using it.

Ms Porter: That’s fine, but I just find they’re not for the public sector.

A study was done by ACTCOSS and Volunteering ACT a number of years ago of models of shared accommodation, which could help some of these groups. There are different models throughout Australia. That research was undertaken by Ed Wensing.

I would just hope that we would continue with the compact and the implementation of the compact. I think there’s a lot work to be done. I think it’s terrific that this government has signed on to it and that there has been a bipartisan approach to that from the previous government to this government. That’s really good and I’m hoping that we will continue to be able to implement the things in the compact, and the underpinning codes are really important.

On the funding of peaks, you’ve heard me talk about my own organisation, but I think this is an issue across all the peaks, not just for Volunteering ACT. I think it’s high time we looked at the situation with peaks. Some of them are funded as peaks; some of them are not. At the federal level, there’s been a lot of discussion and a lot of decisions about recognising peaks, recognising their role in the community, and funding them as such, knowing what they are and having people acknowledge that. I think the pricing committee should be looking at what products we want from peaks and what they cost. I think there’s a bit of work to be done there. If we could start that work I think it would be enormous progress, because it’s just not happening at the moment.

I'm really pleased that the Raising of the Standards project is still going on. It's nearing completion, but I would recommend that we look at the volunteer standards, which are the Australian standards for working with volunteers in the not-for-profit sector, and that we look at the way we can get those to our organisations that are working with volunteers. It's not cheap. It costs \$60 a set, if we put the implementation guide with it. We would recommend that somehow we get those to our members or to the not-for-profit sector where volunteers are involved, and that we be enabled to help these organisations benchmark themselves against those standards to see how they're going. If they have problems, we should be able to then help them reach those standards, not say "Go away, you're no good if you can't do it," but "How can you?" They're very realistic standards. They've been scoped right round Australia. I think we should find a way of helping our organisations implement those.

I've talked about pricing. I think we made a lot of progress with insurance matters yesterday, so I'm really pleased about that. I thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: I think Mary has pretty well covered it. Having received evidence from Mary, I think our committee's role is to make some recommendation regarding the ongoing nature of the core funding as a separate issue. Then we need to talk about the priorities of service direction that Mary has talked about in her submission. So there will be a twofold approach. That's roughly the gist of what you've given us evidence on, isn't it, Mary?

Ms Porter: Yes. I do apologise if I was wasting the committee's time with my own submission. I didn't mean to do that.

THE CHAIR: You haven't done that.

Ms Porter: But I was advised to bring it to you.

MRS CROSS: Because I'm relatively new, I'll ask this question as if I haven't been involved in this in the background. With the three-year funding that you were granted from the health department, which expired mid-year last year, was the onus on Volunteering ACT to reapply for funding to be extended, or did you expect that Health would have contacted you and said "By the way, your funding has about to expire, so do you want to reapply?" What was your understanding of the process? Was the process flawed or was there just a communication breakdown between Health and Volunteering ACT, where neither group knew who had to do what?

The reason I'm asking you this is that I don't want there to be any finger pointing as to who should have done what when. If this was an administrative error but also an error on the part of Volunteering ACT and the health department, it's something that we can just rectify. If it's something else, then I'd like to know .

Ms Porter: I think it's part of both of those last things that you said. I think there definitely was the intention by the health department to meet with us, because they had stated that towards the middle of the previous year. I'm talking about the funding round. I'm not talking calendar year; I'm talking financial year. We're talking of November or something like that. There was the intention there to sit down around the table and talk

about it. I had put a phone call through to Glenys to say, “Can I have a meeting?” which she had not returned. I left it with a secretary, but she didn’t get back to me.

MRS CROSS: Because there were things going on in your organisation, and it never came together again? Is that right?

Ms Porter: Yes. She didn’t write to me. She didn’t contact me. We hadn’t assumed that it had to go up through the budget process, because it was a decision that had been made by cabinet.

MRS CROSS: Okay, that’s good. I understand.

Ms Porter: So we didn’t put a submission up.

MRS CROSS: Thank you for explaining.

Ms Porter: And I’m sure it wasn’t a deliberate—

MRS CROSS: No,

THE CHAIR: There are three aspects that we can see coming out of this.

Ms Porter: I would say, though, that Health did find that whole exercise very difficult to manage. They did say that on a number of occasions, because they had to work right across all the different portfolios and all the different departments in order to bring the money to the table every single year. They said that was difficult for them, because it had been a decision by cabinet to do that and the Chief Minister’s Department didn’t have a facility to manage that. It had been difficult for them all the way along to manage that process.

MRS CROSS: So things that come after that will be much easier? So we’ve paved the way for the process to be smooth?

Ms Porter: I think the decision now, as long as it continues, as long as we are able to secure the funding through Chief Minister’s Department, will be excellent, because we will know exactly where it is coming from and we’ll be able to work forward from now. I think what we’ve put before you is a very good plan for the future.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mary.

The committee adjourned at 2.45 pm.