

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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

**(Reference: accommodation and support services for homeless men and  
their children)**

**Members:**

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

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**THURSDAY, 11 JULY 2002**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Ms J Henderson (Ph: 62050129)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

**The committee met at 2.07 pm.**

**BILL WOOD,**

**ALAN FRANKLIN,**

**SUE BIRTLES and**

**SARAH KING**

were called.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, thank you very much for sparing some time to come and see us. The inquiry is into accommodation and support services for homeless men and their children. We thank you for the report that ACTCOSS were commissioned to do. It has been particularly helpful.

If you wish, you may make an opening statement, and then we'll ask questions.

I've got this little card here I'm supposed to read, so I'll do it for the benefit of everybody in the room. You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you're protected from certain legal actions such as being sued for defamation for what you say in this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

Could I ask you and your officers to identify yourselves for Hansard and state the area which you represent.

**Mr Wood:** I am Bill Wood, Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services.

**Ms Birtles:** I am Sue Birtles, Executive Director of Children's, Youth and Family Services.

**Mr Franklin:** I am Alan Franklin, Manager, Housing Policy and Planning.

**Mr Wood:** I have a statement. I won't read it in full, because some of the points in it are covered in the ACTCOSS document, but I'll read a good part of it and pass it over to you for your records.

We acknowledge that this is a complex issue. Access to basic necessities such as housing is a critical part of establishing a fair and just society. Homelessness is a complex national issue and a matter of real concern. It's not simply a matter of housing. The issue cannot be divorced from consideration of wider social issues, including mental health, substance abuse, gambling and family connectedness.

It's not an issue that can be addressed easily or in isolation. We will ensure to the best of our ability that the ACT has an integrated and robust strategy to respond to this important social issue. The strategy will be informed by evidence and research and will be aligned to the expectations and needs of the Canberra community.

The government's submission outlines the ACT's current response. However, I want to highlight a number of issues about the government's response to homelessness in general.

The next matter was the difficulty in estimating the size and the extent of the issue, but that's well covered in the ACTCOSS document, as are factors leading people to homelessness, but I think it is important to say what we need to say.

Data from the ongoing national data collection undertaken by the supported accommodation assistance program has identified a range of reasons which may result in an individual becoming homeless. The reasons are as diverse as are the circumstances of the people affected by it. In most cases multiple factors contribute to individual experiences of homelessness.

Forty per cent of people experiencing homelessness have experienced a financial difficulty. Thirty-eight per cent have experienced relationship breakdown. Other factors which affect more than 20 per cent of people who are homeless are loss of usual accommodation, interpersonal conflicts, time out from other situations, domestic violence and abuse, eviction, and drug or alcohol or substance abuse. In addition, 18 per cent of users of homeless services have recently arrived in Canberra with no means of support.

Over 1,000 men accessed ACT SAAP services in 2000-01. Single men over the age of 25 years and unaccompanied by children represented approximately 30 per cent of the ACT SAAP population. The range of SAAP services for men in the ACT includes crisis and medium-term accommodation within men's services and youth services, with a small number of men with children accessing family services.

There is evidence of high unmet need for crisis accommodation for single men in the ACT. Research confirms that single men who have never owned their own home and who have worked in unskilled labour are more likely to become homeless than other people.

Those with mental health issues or drug and alcohol issues and indigenous people are increasingly and disproportionately represented amongst the homeless. Problem gambling is identified by community service providers as a significant causal factor in homelessness among young men.

I come to the importance of working together. Everything we know about homelessness tells us that we need better integration of services and that intervening early in the lives of vulnerable people often alleviates their spiral into the social services system.

An effective service system response must be well aligned to work with our most vulnerable community members to protect their accommodation, income, health and access to education and to provide opportunities for them to participate meaningfully in

the social and political life of this community. This means looking for better ways for government agencies and non-government service providers to share knowledge and understanding and to work in partnership.

What are we doing? For the first time an ACT government is addressing the issues of homelessness in an integrated and holistic way, addressing such issues as housing, support, mental health, and drug and alcohol.

Since coming into government late last year, the government has provided \$2.745 million per annum through supplementary appropriations to support services within my portfolio for those most in need. I don't believe that includes money in the housing budget. We might get elaboration on that later.

Through the current budget process the government was required to redirect a range of resources to meet current service obligations, including the supported accommodation assistance program. The government must now consider the range of funding priorities it faces to address homelessness, especially in view of the ACTCOSS report and your committee.

The recently finalised needs analysis of homelessness is a significant report. You have it all there in front of you. It's clear that we will need to identify further resources to implement some of the recommendations, but first we need to debate the findings of the report so we can prioritise what needs to be done. We are already aware of the need for additional crisis accommodation options for homeless families and single men, for example.

Two key mechanisms to ensure and to work towards a well-integrated and informed response to homelessness are the affordable housing task force and the ACT homelessness advisory group.

The affordable housing task force comprises representatives from a range of key government agencies, service providers, housing providers and business. It's considering options for public and community housing and developing broad-based strategies for increasing housing affordability. These options will help generate more sustainable tenancies and provide more exit points from crisis services. Additional funding of \$3 million was announced in the budget as a start to progress the recommendations of the task force.

The homelessness advisory group also includes representatives from the range of relevant government agencies and the community. This group is responsible for the development and implementation of a homelessness strategy.

The work will complement the directions of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness and the affordable housing task force. These two key advisory bodies will carefully consider the findings and recommendations of the needs analysis and provide advice to government on how to progress those key findings.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. We have some questions which have emanated from the report. Is it appropriate, in your view, that we address those to Mr Stubbs, who is coming along after you?

**Mr Wood:** I would think so. I got that report yesterday or the day before yesterday. I haven't devoured it in great detail, so if you were to direct your questions to Mr Stubbs you might get a more coherent answer.

**THE CHAIR:** We'll do that. One of the points we picked up early on is a definitional issue which I was pleased to see in the report. Primary homelessness is described as sleeping rough.

When we first started looking at this, we got the definitions pertaining to SAAP, and it is missing from those. We felt that the worst end of the stick was having absolutely nowhere to live. Can we have the definitions of SAAP changed to include that?

**Mr Wood:** They come from a broad source. What are the prospects there?

**Ms Birtles:** It would have to be negotiated through the agreement. As you know, the agreement is a Commonwealth/state agreement. There are many working parties that work on a range of issues to do with data, data collection, definition, et cetera. It would have to be taken up through a process. It's not something that would necessarily be easy, but it's not something that wouldn't be worth trying.

**THE CHAIR:** There might be a recommendation in our report that the government take the matter up at the ministerial forums.

One of the issues that came to us when we were talking to people who were providing services for men—CANFaCS, Lone Fathers and people like that—and the people who were providing similar services to women was that there seems to be evidence of elder abuse. We haven't seen it, and we'll ask Mr Stubbs whether he has any, but I'm interested in your view. One member of a couple may be suffering abuse by an offspring, but the couple leave the home. We don't have any crisis accommodation services particularly for older married couples. It appears that these people are accommodated in hotels and motels or they are split up. Do you have any experience of that or any thoughts about that?

**Mr Wood:** When we did the inquiry into elder abuse a couple of years ago, we had anecdotal accounts of such things. It was never quantified, which is difficult to do. The number wasn't great. As to the SAAP program, I'll ask Ms Birtles to detail that. That has come under my wing in the last 11 days. For the detailed advice, I've got an expert here.

**Ms Birtles:** It's something that does get raised from time to time. It's not something that has come up as a very high priority out of the ACTCOSS report. The very high priority needs which have been identified have been more those of families and single men, but over a period of time there have been some concerns about elder abuse and what happens to those people.

Although the report is very detailed and both ACTCOSS and Morgan and Disney put a fair amount of research into it, the next step will be to test the veracity of the findings. They consulted quite extensively, but my expectation would be that the government would be testing some of the findings. If people believe that this issue hasn't been adequately identified, it could be dealt with in the consultation on this document.

**THE CHAIR:** The report says that there are between 1,265 and 1,570 people experiencing homelessness at any one time in the ACT. I'll be asking Mr Stubbs about this as well. How do you work that out? Is it related to the people accepted and turned away by organisations? If so, is that only part of the story? Are there people who never front, and is there a mechanism to count those people?

**Ms Birtles:** Yes and yes. That is true. There has always been a concern about whether we've been able to identify all the people who come into either of those categories—people at risk of homelessness or in some form of homelessness. They're very transitory and often difficult to identify. The recent census was much broader in trying to ascertain where people are living and under what conditions. We understand—it will be interesting when we get the data—that they were quite active in trying to find where people were living. If they were squatting or camping in other people's places, that would have been picked up as a form of homelessness. It is a challenge. Nobody can be quite sure what the numbers are.

With the work that has been done by ACTCOSS and with the census, we should get a much better understanding of what the situation is in the ACT. When this report is consulted on with a range of focus groups, if people who know about these things feel that it hasn't been adequately identified they will come forward, hopefully with some evidence.

We know that there are a number of people on Mount Ainslie. The report on Ainslie Village indicated that. The consultant that did that was very active in her consultations. She went to Mount Ainslie, so she knows that there are a number of people living there. How extensively the census will pick that up we're not sure. It's an issue of concern dealing with the ones that have been identified but not knowing where else some of the people are.

**THE CHAIR:** Indeed. We found that people giving evidence were giving us a fairly significant number of turn-aways. It concerned me that if those turn-aways only represent 40 per cent of the people not getting the service, then we've got a really large number on our hands.

**Ms Birtles:** There may be some double counting. I don't mean that in a negative way. If you go to Samaritan House and get turned away, then you perhaps try somewhere else and you might get turned away. That data has to be considered with a level of sensitivity.

**MS DUNDAS:** When we look at homeless men and their children, I am particularly interested in what happens to their children in crisis accommodation. In particular, what happens with older girls in with their fathers? We know that they're more susceptible to abuse, and living in crisis accommodation is not always ideal. CANFaCS said they had their own policy about that. They don't take daughters over 12. There is open space for families. What is the government's policy on children accompanying homeless men into crisis accommodation?

**Ms Birtles:** We have requirements on general standards about what is expected in privacy and confidentiality. There are requirements about how many families you could have in one situation. I don't think you can ever be absolutely certain that nothing

untoward happens. You can do your best. You can have screenings. You can have the staff there supervising. But at the end of the day, even with quality procedures and screening of staff, I really think you can never be absolutely certain, as you can never be certain of any homes, whether individual homes or foster care homes.

**MS DUNDAS:** Are those sorts of procedures things that you implement when you're negotiating a contract for somebody to take on the service provision?

**Ms Birtles:** Certainly, the expectation that is placed on quality of standard and quality of service and the staff is part of the decision-making about who you engage. If, for example, there was a concern, then it would be notified through the processes that come through Family Services and would be dealt with in that way. If a phone call brought a notification and there was concern from Family Services, that would be investigated.

**MS DUNDAS:** As part of the holistic approach the minister has mentioned, are there government services in place to deal with children whose parents are in crisis accommodation and who might be living in crisis accommodation as well? Are there services to help with their education or with moving into a shelter that might be on the other side of town? How do you monitor their education? It's part of the early intervention. We are hearing a lot of concerns now about generations going into crisis accommodation. What's being done to address that?

**Ms Birtles:** When the funding goes out, whether it's to women's services or CANFaCS, part of the contract is that some case management, counselling and support be given to the adults and the children. I've had detailed discussions with Ara Cresswell about the work that they do with the children, and the support and the education.

When children and families are in the services, you try to give a range of support and guidance as to how they can move on. Part of that is a case management approach that picks up security/safety issues, certainly when it's children for education. I know the concern is that we now have fourth generation children in the women's refuges. It's a serious concern to all of us.

**MS DUNDAS:** So there is no problem with flow of information from Community Services through to Education through to JACS if need be?

**Ms Birtles:** It's on a need-to-know basis. Certainly in Family Services any information is of the highest level of security. But if you are working with a family who is a joint client, the Family Services case workers have the capacity to get a range of information, and they work with the schools. When we place children in foster care, we try to keep them in their network and keep them going to their same school. The foster carers work very hard on that.

It's a similar approach in the refuges. Again I mention Ara. She works very hard on those sorts of things. All the research tells us that the best thing is to try to keep the children and the family in their environment, and particularly to keep children at the same school, where their peers and their friends are.

**THE CHAIR:** Do the conditions of contract with CANFaCS, Lone Fathers or anybody else specifically relate to how the organisation would provide that service? Do you say to them, “Tell us how you’re going to deal with the issue of young girls accompanying their fathers”?

**Ms Birtles:** My understanding would be no, not specifically. But Ms King, who is the contract manager for that contract, is far more conversant with the details than I am.

**Ms King:** I am Sarah King, Assistant Manager in Disability, Housing and Community Services. The CANFaCS contract was based on a tender submission by that organisation. In that submission, they outline the model of support that they would be offering to the people supported through the service.

It was a particularly high-quality submission. The service providers are very experienced. They have a strong background in working with children, and their model articulated an excellent level of support, consideration of the needs of children, an understanding of working with fathers particularly, and also a good capacity to work within the women’s sector to make sure that families get integrated support services. The contract is based on that tender submission. They are required to work in accordance with the model outlined in the tender submission, unless we agree otherwise.

The level of detail that we put into a purchase agreement generally relates to the type of service in a general sense. The organisations are required to comply with, and report against, a standard and a level of output.

CANFaCS support young women up to 18, not over that age, and they work with three families. We will be saying that we want them to work in a case management way, work with the children, work with the fathers, provide outreach support to assist the families to maintain their permanent tenancy after they move on. The families are supported to live independently within the dwelling so that the family functions and their own relationships can be enhanced and supported.

**THE CHAIR:** That’s very useful. Thank you. I was trying to get to whether or not the department puts in its request for tender documents what it wants to achieve or whether you say, “We’ve got this service. We need it. We rely on the quality of submissions that come in to define what we’re going to do”.

**Ms King:** It would depend on the circumstance.

**THE CHAIR:** Can we be specific about homeless men?

**Ms King:** In this particular instance, we were aware that we wanted a service that would provide support to fathers with accompanying children. We had a previous provider which had provided support to fathers with children but also single men.

Our understanding from an evaluation and two years of that service operating is that that model wasn’t successful. The inclusion of single fathers or single men with children was detrimental to the support service that was offered to children. There were safety issues and a range of other concerns.



**THE CHAIR:** We've seen a lot of documents about the bun fight between the two organisations, with the department in the middle, and we've been able to peruse all that. Would it be possible for us to have a copy of the request for tender that went out?

**Ms King:** I think it has been provided but we can certainly do that.

**Ms Birtles:** It outlined the outcomes that were expected of a service provider. The initial service was a pilot. There was an identified need. The government at the time decided to put this in place. The evaluation having been done, it became clear that we needed a different model, but in the tender documents we always outline what the expected outcomes are and what we're seeking. It's not in a great wad, but it's half a dozen or 10 key elements in the tender documents. That was public.

**THE CHAIR:** As Ms Dundas has highlighted, this issue has popped up quite regularly, and I think it's reasonable the committee satisfy itself that what is being asked of people who provide the service addresses the concerns that have come to us. If the wording in the document is fine, then I think it is a big tick for the government. If not, we might recommend putting in something else.

**MS DUNDAS:** Following on from that but on a slightly different tack, you provided in your submission information that CANFaCS provides support for three fathers and their children, yet when they appeared they said that they are accommodating five separate high-need families. Is that because you provide funding for three families and they stretch their resources? Why is there a discrepancy?

**Ms King:** It's not a discrepancy. We wouldn't say three families or five families, because the needs and circumstances of different families will always be different. A father they accommodate might have access to his children on weekends, and they are able to accommodate additional people in that way.

The submission says between three and four families. It can be more. If there was a father with a lot of children, they might be able to accommodate only one family. In the contract we allow the organisation to make decisions, as all the SAAP services do, about who they assist at a given time, given the mix of current people being assisted by the service.

**MS DUNDAS:** The difference in numbers is an interesting point. If we're trying to get an idea of how many spaces are available for anybody who needs a crisis accommodation service in the ACT, and the number can vary depending on need, the number becomes harder to define, so the need becomes harder to define.

**Ms King:** It's a national issue. The SAAP program throughout Australia looks at support periods. There are issues in relation to the number of people going through a service. We can purchase 10 beds, for example, from a service, but throughout the year the service may be able to maintain only a 70 per capacity. So in some circumstances they may have 10 people there. At other times they might have five or six. It will depend on the mix of people at a given time.

Services must have that level of discretion in order to be able to provide a quality service. Otherwise, a lot of people will not get a good quality service and not have any opportunity to move out of that service system. That flexibility is very important.

**THE CHAIR:** This is also a bit of a follow-on from Ms Dundas. We appreciate the difficulty of working out just how many people you're trying to provide services for and the policy difficulty of providing a crappy service for a lot of people or a really good one for a few.

**Ms King:** Yes, indeed.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you seeing any evidence that would support another such service on the south side of the lake?

**Ms King:** For men with children?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms King:** No. The needs analysis report, SAAP data, information from our services and information you have received from community organisations are very supportive of the need for additional crisis accommodation services for single men. We do have a particular issue in relation to single men.

We also have a need for additional crisis accommodation services for families. You mentioned couples. That relates to older people but also younger couples, but particularly families. We have a range of needs across the board.

One of the things that are quite clear from the report is that there is a lot of need, but I don't think the evidence would indicate that the priorities at this point are in relation to fathers with accompanying children.

**THE CHAIR:** If we took all those other ones out of the game, and we weren't going to say that it's a competing priority, are there enough people out there needing the service and not getting it?

**Ms King:** I would say that for any of our services you would be able to provide additional services and still have unmet need.

**MS DUNDAS:** Again I come back to the needs of men who don't have custody of their children and who have weekend visitations. When CANFaCS were here, they were talking about problems with setting up space so that weekend visitations could work but said that it wasn't always possible. It falls into that gap between single men and families. What is the government policy on working with homeless men who only have visitation rights?

**Ms King:** What we said in the purchase agreement with CANFaCS was that they would assist, in the second category of priority, men who had access to their children, as long as that access was eventuating. If the access is on a regular basis, they will provide accommodation to fathers in those circumstances. They would then be considered as part

of the current client group and decisions would be made in relation to new clients coming in on the basis of that current mix.

Where a father doesn't have ongoing access to his children, then he is referred to Samaritan House as a single father. The arrangements to date have been that when and if the access eventuates he can then receive support through CANFaCS.

But the important thing we need to remember is that it is best for families to be supported in their own home, and CANFaCS does have an ability to provide outreach support services, so if the father, for example, is in his own flat and has access from time to time he would also be able to get support services to maintain that living arrangement.

**Ms Birtles:** There are other services which provide support for access. They don't come under the SAAP program. I guess the critical issue Ms King was alluding to is whether they do have access to the children. Sometimes the reality doesn't necessarily match what the person's understanding is, and that can be an issue, whether it's in respect of the SAAP areas or in respect of entitlements to public housing. They need to have access to the children. It's important that they get support, but there are other programs under family support which assist.

**THE CHAIR:** We were reasonably impressed with the approach taken by CANFaCS and others in trying to make sure that people stay in their own homes and that support services come together and try holistically to fix the issue. As the minister pointed out, there is a range of reasons. I don't suppose anybody who is homeless has a single primary issue but a conglomeration of them. In the provision of the funds to CANFaCS are specific funds provided for outreach services?

**Ms King:** Yes. The funds aren't split within the purchase agreement. The functions are identified, and the organisation would make decisions on a day-to-day basis as to how they allocate their funds and their priorities. But we certainly purchase on the basis of accommodation support and outreach and case management.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you think outreach services are an area of unmet need? People might not have approached a service because they still have a roof over their head and they're just getting by but would need a bit of outreach. Is it something that's coming up as a priority?

**Ms King:** A range of services already work with families to support and maintain tenancies. Mr Franklin would be able to speak further about the new programs established by Housing in relation to maintaining housing trust tenancies, but we also have a family support program that works with families who are at risk of a range of factors. It makes sure that those services are getting into the public housing areas to work with families.

**MS DUNDAS:** How are those families identified?

**Ms Birtles:** A range of sources, really.

**Ms King:** Obviously people will self-refer. Through the new housing arrangements the case managers—

**Mr Franklin:** As Sue Birtles said, there are a range of sources. ACT Housing is now employing five special tenancy managers. Other tenancy managers often identify people and refer them to the special housing managers, who then try to link them to the range of services that are provided by a whole range of community and government providers.

**THE CHAIR:** Would they accept referrals from other people? For example, quite a lot of people in public housing blocks complain to me about other people in the blocks. Some of them are just ratbags and disturbing others. The police can deal with that. But other people have lifestyles which are a bit odd. The oddness of their lifestyle is indicative of breakdown and dysfunction. When the police intervene, do they involve your special housing managers in trying to sort things out, and what reception would they get from these people?

**Mr Franklin:** I think there's a whole range of circumstances. There's not just one circumstance that leads to one specific response. In some cases the tenancy managers have been involved, and they will try to link in all the services. We also provide, for example, with the multiunit sites, community development workers. There's one at the Allawah/Bega/Currong complex. She often tries to help people and refer them to the range of services. The range of tenancy managers also try to refer people and link them to services. Ultimately of course if someone doesn't want to be helped it's obviously problematic.

**MS DUNDAS:** Are the specialist housing managers specifically for people who are in ACT public housing?

**Mr Franklin:** Yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** This is where your focus is. Do any of the outreach programs outreach to those who aren't in public housing, who are in private rental or in a house with a mortgage that's about to go into the red? How do you reach those people not already in the system?

**Ms King:** Again, a range of community services are available. We engage the regional community services, for example, to provide a community development program which is about working in areas where we've identified that there might be needs. They provide a range of support skills such as budgeting. We do that by linking them to preschools, schools, community centres or youth centres. It is about finding where you need to be and finding innovative ways of getting the services to those people.

**Ms Birtles:** It is very widespread. There's a number of supports out there. For example, the Schools As Communities program is for outreach workers working with the schools. They identify families and children with a range of needs. There's no special one-fits-all program, but if a family is identified as having a range of needs, those outreach workers then work with the family to try to help resolve whether it's a need related to health, drug and alcohol or support for the children in school.

There are a range of quite specific examples. Whilst it's not a specific response to homelessness per se, the Schools As Communities programs are in a range of sites where range of needs have been identified. We use socioeconomic and a range of other

indicators. Our experience so far has been that there are some quite specific examples where families have had much better outcomes because of outreach workers coming in. They've been connected back into the mental health system or the drug and alcohol system, and the children have been able to participate more fully in school.

That is an example of how complex this issue is. It's not a duplication issue. People get identified and come into the system through a range of sources, and we need to make sure that our collective systems have the capacity to respond.

Whilst we have family support programs and we have funding attached to youth services and regional community services, we also have a range of other very much on-the-ground services at the spots where we see these issues starting to arise.

That's very much part of early prevention and building up resilience very early. If we can start with things that Ara Cresswell talked about as being of great concern to her when you've got the fourth generation in, then hopefully we'll start preventing some of the issues from occurring.

**Mr Franklin:** Many people who come to the applicant services centre to apply for public housing may already have a case manager attached to them from some other service. One of the special tenancy managers is located at the applicant services centre to work with those people at the point of entry into the public housing system.

**MS DUNDAS:** I acknowledge that your submission came in before the administrative changes of 1 July. It talks about a review of men's services to be undertaken by DECS, commencing this month. Is that still going ahead? If so, who is now running it and when do you expect it to be finished?

**Ms King:** The review hasn't commenced.

**Mr Wood:** I don't think I am.

**THE CHAIR:** The question wasn't: what's the population of China and can you name them?

**Mr Wood:** If it was programmed, it would still be there.

**THE CHAIR:** When do you expect it to start up?

**MS DUNDAS:** Who has carriage of it now? Is it under the new Disability, Housing and Community Services, or is it still in education and family youth services?

**Ms King:** My expectation is that it would move to the new portfolio.

**Mr Wood:** It is.

**Ms King:** One of the intentions of that review is to look at the services available to men across the board. Again, it's a holistic, whole-of-government approach, I suppose. We need to scope the existing service provision and get a sense of where the services are falling down in their accessibility to men.

We don't want to create specialist services that are not necessary, so we need to understand where the generic services could be more accessible and, if a specialist model is required, what sort of model is going to be effective for men and in what area of community support services.

**THE CHAIR:** You're suggesting that there will be a holistic look at it. I would assume then that there would be interagency effort.

**Ms King:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Which department would be the driving force?

**Ms Birtles:** It's probably the new department. Because of where it was sitting in the previous administrative arrangements, that part of that responsibility would be moving to the new portfolio. But I want to reiterate very strongly that the men's service and the needs of men are run across a whole range of issues: health, education and the new Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

**MS DUNDAS:** When do you expect that review to commence, and what kind of time frame will it have?

**Ms Birtles:** I think that would be part of what's being considered by the chief executive of the new department.

**THE CHAIR:** Has any preliminary work been done on it?

**Ms King:** An initial scoping paper was prepared under the DECS portfolio, but other than that no work has progressed to date.

**MS DUNDAS:** It is an important inquiry parallel to the one that we're doing, and you could also say it parallels the status of women inquiry. It would be good if we had information on when it's going to start, what it's going to do and how long it's going to take.

**Ms Birtles:** With different people looking at it and a range of changed responsibilities, it may well be scoped slightly differently.

**THE CHAIR:** I'd also like to know which agencies are going to be involved in it. Is it going to be an interagency approach. How high will it be on the priorities of people in the new department? Will the government be responding to the report that ACTCOSS prepared with Morgan and Disney?

**Mr Wood:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** What form will it take and what will the time lines be?

**Mr Wood:** I can't give you the detail of that. It is a very significant report. I think the responses might come over a period. For example, next budget could be one part of the response, but we do need to make a response before that. I would think we'd take it in charge now. We got it the other day. I won't give you a date when there'd be a response on it, but I'd be making some information available to the Assembly at some stage.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for sparing us the time and coming along. It has been very good.

**DANIEL STUBBS** and

**SAMANTHA PAGE**

were called.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Stubbs and Ms Page, for joining us this afternoon. I'm required to read out this card in front of me, so I shall do that now. You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal actions such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

I will throw to you to make an opening statement and then we'll ask a few questions. First, may I congratulate you and Morgan and Disney on the needs analysis report. It is a very detailed report and most helpful. One of the issues that we have found difficult in our quest, particularly with homeless men, is the paucity of information. There is heaps of information about women and their difficulties—and reasonably so. After all, they are the greater number of those in difficulty. Statistical information on homeless men, particularly those with kids, has been an issue. We're very grateful for what you've done, so thank you. I'll throw to you now.

**Mr Stubbs:** I'll do the introductions. I am Daniel Stubbs, Director of the ACT Council of Social Service.

**Ms Page:** I am Sam Page. I am here on behalf of the ACT Council of Social Service.

**Mr Stubbs:** As you've already mentioned, ACTCOSS, as a consultancy to the then Department of Education and Community Services, produced this report. It took us a little longer than we expected, but I think it was well worth the wait. Even though it's a fairly lengthy and detailed report, I'm glad you've been able to get into it.

I will give a bit of an overview, and Sam Page, who had a big role in the production of the report, will talk to some of the detail of it. Then we'll open it up for questions and discussion.

By way of introduction, there are some definitional issues that we need to consider around homelessness. There is a perception in the community that homelessness is about people sleeping on park benches or under fences or whatever. That's not always the case. There are people who have no homes and who are sleeping rough. There are a lot of men in that situation in the ACT. Then there are people who may not be sleeping rough but who don't have stable accommodation. So there are different forms of homelessness.

One of the issues for the ACT is that people haven't really understood homelessness. They feel there's no real homelessness, because they don't see people sleeping rough. Those who are sleeping rough are quite hidden from us. There's a much bigger proportion who are homeless but are finding places to sleep, whether it be in refuges or



on a friend's floor, in accommodation with no tenure or in caravan parks—not long-stay caravan parks. So there are varying sorts of homelessness that we need to consider. That's worth bearing in mind.

We're all trying to get more statistics. In the report we tried to give as much data as we could or as much data as we had available to us, but there is more data coming out. For example, the 2001 ABS statistics, as they come out, will be even more enlightening. The ABS has tried in successive censuses to get a much better handle on the number of homeless in any jurisdiction. I would urge the committee to look out for that data as it becomes available over the course of this year. That's important. You will have seen that we have tried to give some statistics in this report.

Although I recognise that this is an inquiry into men's homelessness, homelessness is an issue per se, and we don't want to make it a gender debate, because there are different issues of homelessness for men and women and there are similarities as well.

There is, I believe, some tension out there about more resourcing going to women who are homeless. There is a range of very good reasons for that. Some of those relate to domestic violence and the involvement of children. But we need to recognise that there are some different issues for men around homelessness. We don't want to get into a gender debate. We just want to recognise that there are different issues and there are overlapping issues, which I'll get into a bit more later.

I want to talk to some of the issues that were raised in the report and then indicate some of the relevant recommendations. One of the issues that came up in the report was people arriving in the ACT expecting opportunities, expecting employment and expecting to set up a lifestyle for themselves. For many of them, finding employment takes a lot longer than they expect, and that can lead to homelessness. So new arrivals in the ACT has been cited as one issue. The causes of homelessness are often compounding issues—not just that but other things that impact on individuals, but that's certainly cited as one of the things that have led to homelessness in the ACT.

Often new arrivals have children. Some of our recommendations go to the issue of men arriving with children and desperately needing somewhere to be accommodated while they find employment.

A lot of people who find themselves homeless are people with quite complex needs. We have people with different sorts of illnesses, people with disabilities, people with children, sometimes people with mental illness. Situations can impact on people in quick succession. In many instances, people with complex needs in the ACT end up being homeless. We have a lot of homelessness services in the ACT trying to provide a roof over people's heads and a bed, but they are not their only needs. They have a compound of a lot of needs. That is certainly the case for homeless men.

One of the needs which won't be too much of a surprise to this committee is around what are commonly referred to as exit points. People are going into homelessness shelters or SAAP services and staying there for a certain period of time, but wanting and needing to get out of those services and get into more stable long-term accommodation. Often that accommodation doesn't exist. I hope that the affordable housing task force can get at this issue. We'll certainly be taking this report, now that it has been publicly released, to the

affordable housing task force for its consideration. I think it's a key to their deliberations. But I think it's worth this committee strongly recognising that it's not just about emergency accommodation but it's about people getting more stable accommodation beyond the immediate emergency.

I will talk briefly about some of the recommendations, particularly those that relate to men's homelessness. We identified the need for some sort of central referral mechanism in the ACT. People in the ACT who find themselves homeless, we believe, often need somewhere more central to go to find out where they can go for a bed that night or that week or for a certain period of time to get them through a difficult period. Having to go round to all the different shelters to find out who has a bed that night is not easy for people who are homeless and have only limited resources.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you think that the new budget initiative of the Lifeline 24-hour service will help address that concern. It was announced in the budget of June last. That's designed to provide a referral service to accommodation services. Is that enough, or are you talking about a one-stop shop for accommodation services but also addressing those other complex needs?

**Mr Stubbs:** That is exactly what I was about to get to, yes. Ideally we'd want to place case management services or assistance that is about more than just accommodation. The refuges do a lot beyond just accommodation, but it's a bit of a burden and some coordination is needed. I know for a fact that a lot of the refuges try to do a lot of coordination, but I think we would benefit from some resourcing of that coordination.

Such a service could provide a much greater insight into what the need is. With a service like that seeing people come to it, we would get a much better handle on which people need this sort of accommodation, which people are finding themselves homeless, what their needs are, what type of people they are —singles, families, young people, people with illness and disability and that kind of thing. We could get a much better handle on what the need is.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you aware of the support link network that Tuggeranong Community Services and Tony Campbell are developing?

**Mr Stubbs:** Yes, absolutely.

**THE CHAIR:** That's the sort of thing you're talking about, is it?

**Mr Stubbs:** That's one model that could work very well. It is slightly different to the model I've identified, but it's definitely one model. That involves a whole lot of different services that come in contact with people who are in difficulty—whether it be the police station or other community services around town. I would have no problem with exploring that model as much as any other. But there does need to be a coordination point to get a better handle on the need.

**THE CHAIR:** We'll talk more later about the numbers in the report, but I'm curious to know how we can find out how many people are in crisis but not knocking on the door. They have either given up or, as you say, are going from house to house. They're okay

for tonight, but they're not okay for tomorrow night. How can we get a handle on the number of those people?

**Mr Stubbs:** Community services know about the need of those people who have put themselves on a notional waiting list or whatever. But there are people out there who have heard by word of mouth or the grapevine, "They've got a waiting list. Don't even bother trying to go to that service." So they don't. Those people aren't ever picked up. Possibly a support link service would have a better chance of picking those people up, because it has a slight outreach component.

**THE CHAIR:** When I was talking to Tony Campbell, he showed me the sheets that no doubt you've seen. The person who comes in contact with the person in crisis initially can tick one of the boxes to show whether or not the person has an accommodation crisis. It seems to me that people like doctors, peers and the odd social worker here and there are completely disconnected from the accommodation and disability services, housing and all that.

It's at that point of contact that we are likely to get a better handle on how many people are out there. We wouldn't have a clue. It appears to me that we base our service on the number of people we're providing services to and turn-aways. Of course, there can be a problem with the turn-away number, because frequently you can double count.

**Mr Stubbs :** That's right.

**THE CHAIR:** We're really seeing a large proportion of the people we're trying to provide a service for, aren't we? We're not seeing the total picture?

**Ms Page:** You are also seeing only people who know about that particular service and put their name on that waiting list, but that might not necessarily be the best service for them. There's no self-informing function in the system at the moment to keep monitoring not only what the need is but what the type of need is, what models appear to be more suitable, what problems exist with people going into existing services and leaving early or not getting the outcomes that might have been expected from that service. It's that function that we saw as quite important.

We originally thought of a central vacancy monitoring mechanism. It could be an internet-based or telephone-based function that monitored vacancies. I think that's the difference between the 24-hour Lifeline notification service and what we were envisioning. The vacancies change through the day, so at 10 o'clock in the morning, at 12 o'clock and at 3 o'clock in the afternoon there are different vacancy levels in the services. That sort of monitoring function is quite important.

As we went through with the project and we did more and more analysis on what was coming out, it started to become clear that that would not be enough; that it was really about better understanding this client group, knowing the breadth of need across the client group and the different types of models that might respond to that need without just relying on the number of requests for existing service models.

**Mr Stubbs:** The report also talks about the need for some new services. We identified the need for services for families. That could be men or women, or couples, with children. There is also a need to look specifically at the needs of children. We also recognise that there is a need for services for men who are homeless in particular. As I said, there is a real need for some work to focus on children. A lot of that is done already in some of the women's SAAP services, because a lot of women go there with children.

When we hear from services, as I would imagine that this committee has heard from services, about second generation homeless coming to services, we need to have a real focus on services if we want to pay more than lip-service to ideas like early intervention. When we're seeing children come to homelessness services, then that's probably an ideal time to do that. The problem is that you often don't see these people for very long. It might be for only a very short period of time. Part of that work needs to be about referring people to other services and providing them with linkages to other ongoing services that exist in the community.

**THE CHAIR:** When we've looked at homelessness, without having a gender bias, I have concentrated on homeless men with children as an issue, or homeless women with kids or people who are suffering elder abuse and leaving home as a couple and not having an accommodation service to cater for them up as a couple and having to go to a motel or split up.

You mentioned families. Is there a feel for how many family units in the ACT have a homelessness problem? Our terms of reference refer to homeless men and their children; they do not refer to homeless men and their children, with no wife. I wonder whether in an old-fashioned family unit where the male is perceived to be the breadwinner the whole family is homeless because of the circumstances of the bloke.

**Mr Stubbs:** I know it does happen. There are minimal services for them. There are some, aren't there?

**Ms Page:** For families?

**Mr Stubbs:** For whole families.

**THE CHAIR:** But that is an issue?

**Mr Stubbs:** Absolutely, yes.

**Ms Page:** When the report talks about families, it includes both couple parents with children and single parents with children, either male or female. There are services specifically for women leaving domestic violence. They are very important gender specific services that offer additional support for dealing with and recovering from domestic violence.

However, the family services can cater for women who may not be escaping violence but who have children and have become homeless for other reasons as well as couple families and men with children. The family services have the greatest diversity, I believe.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you think insufficient attention is given to homeless couple families with kids?

**Ms Page:** We've recommended a substantial increase in the capacity of the family services sector to cater to couple families with children but also to single parents with children.

**Mr Stubbs :** They would cater for both.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you think it's something that has been missed? Do you think our concentration at the government level over the years has been on single-parent families instead of couple-parent families?

**Ms Page:** There's an increasing rate of homelessness amongst couple families with children. Probably that wasn't the case so much 10 years ago. That's probably driving increased attention and need in that area. But there have been services for couples with children for some time. They operate here along with the other service models.

**Mr Stubbs:** We talk about one of the determining factors around homelessness being employment. This committee needs to raise that as a real issue. We talk about it in the report, and I think it needs to be referred to the work the government is doing around economic development. Employment for people is a way out of homelessness and a way to avoid homelessness. That's part of economic development where it links with social planning.

We also talk in the report about the need for client advocacy in the homelessness sector. In putting this report together and talking to people who have used some of the homelessness services, we found that some people weren't happy with the service they received, and we felt there was a need for client advocacy—maybe some sort of community visitor program—for people who had to use refuges to improve the services provided by refuges.

That's my summary of the key issues we want to raise around homelessness in the ACT. Do you want to follow up with anything, Sam?

**Ms Page:** I was just looking at the page about families, and it suggests that usage numbers for the last year were 80 couples and 432 sole parents. That's the rough split between couple families and sole-parent families. The sole-parent families would be largely women with children.

**THE CHAIR:** A 1:5 ratio by the sound of it.

**Ms Page:** The unmet need was in a similar ratio—13 couples with children, 113 sole parents.

**MS DUNDAS:** Kids now coming into crisis have parents who were in crisis and grandparents who were in crisis. A lot of young people whose parents might have been in crisis accommodation are now living in what we would call unsafe situations. What did this report find about young people living in an unsafe relationship so they get

a house? What factors sent these young people to those kinds of scenarios? I have not read the report from cover to cover today. Was it something you identified?

**Ms Page:** We certainly heard some terrible stories about people living in some very unsafe situations. We didn't spend a great deal of time researching the reasons and the causes or the specific circumstances of those young people.

**MS DUNDAS:** In your experience, would the majority of those young people living in unsafe situations be the children of parents who had been in crisis themselves? Is that a valid statement?

**Mr Stubbs :** We have no way of knowing.

**Ms Page:** It would make sense that the family had experienced some sort of trauma or the young person had experienced some sort of trauma, but you couldn't say for sure. It is incredibly difficult to estimate the number of young people living in insecure or unsafe housing arrangements, because there are squats, there are overcrowded units and there is cheap and poor accommodation all over Canberra. There are people living in relationships that are unsafe. It's a very difficult statistic to try to guess. We did a survey of outreach workers, who we thought were the best placed to have some idea of what the numbers were, and the numbers were scary.

**MS DUNDAS:** One of the key concerns is how young women in particular but young children accompanying their fathers into crisis accommodation are coping in that scenario, what procedures are being put in place to look after the children and whether or not they are effective enough. Will that mean that there has been enough effective intervention that in 10 years time these kids will not end up in crisis? In your research, have you found that the children in crisis accommodation with their parents are coping, are getting services they need, are able to continue schooling?

**Mr Stubbs :** There's not the focus on children that is needed. Children come along with a parent or two parents, and there's not a real focus on the fact that we've got some children here who have all these other needs and are at this awful stage in their life that they're homeless, which can be quite different to being an adult.

We've said in the report that there is a need to consider the needs of these children and possibly fund the services accordingly. We have a certain number of adults but we also have a certain number of children. Bear in mind the differences required for children who are homeless.

**Ms Page:** Supporting children in SAAP is an area of much research being conducted nationally and a lot of policy thinking. I don't think anybody has really got it right. The recommendations coming out of things like the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness are that funding systems and planning systems be rethought to try to identify children as clients in their own right, provide support that is tailored to them and work out what that support should look like.

The other thing that I guess we thought about when we were developing this was that it's not just about the support the children get while they're in SAAP services, because they're not in SAAP services for very long. It's really about how you link the support

through the transition back into housing and continue to support the family and support the children and ensure that children are linked into mainstream support and services and attending school and doing the usual things but also have opportunities to deal with whatever trauma they might have experienced that either led to, or was part of, them being home less.

They're programs and activities, but it's not possible to say, "If you participate in this therapy theatre group, you're going to be right in 10 or 15 years." But certainly emerging research is suggesting that you can get big increases in school attendance, in self-esteem and in all of the other indicators that might suggest that that child will be more resilient in the future.

**MS DUNDAS:** Does ACTCOSS have an opinion on what is a safe age for children accompanying their fathers into crisis accommodation? We know that it's more important to keep the family unit together than to separate them. CANFaCS have put on a limit of 12. They won't let fathers be in the house with daughters over the age of 12 if there are other fathers there, just to keep a check on any unsafe situations. Do you have an opinion?

**Ms Page:** Can I put forward an ACTCOSS opinion without discussing it first? I think there were issues in women's services with boys in their late teens as well, and the answer there was to develop diverse models of service that would allow that accommodation. I think the answer would be the same in men's services—develop accommodation options that would allow those families to stay together rather than talk about separating parents and children. The issue is the unsafe environment caused by pushing people into a congregated living environment. So can we look at a dispersed accommodation model or units or—

**MS DUNDAS:** Or even focus on outreach so that you are out before they become homeless.

**Ms Page:** Yes, or motel rooms for a short period of time, rather than separate the family because that's the only option available at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** You point out that ACT SAAP service are less likely to access independent accommodation after support compared with the national averages. You mentioned that some people are not in the SAAP system long enough for it to make a significant difference to them. If we are less than the national average, is there a solution to that? What's the answer? Why are we less than the national average?

**Mr Stubbs :** It's mainly because of the lack of places for them to go.

**THE CHAIR:** It's just physical; there's nothing there?

**Mr Stubbs :** Yes. Affordable housing for people to access once they get out of a SAAP service is less likely to be there than in many other jurisdictions, so people cycle through SAAP services or do a range of other things, but are less likely to go into stable accommodation.

One of the big problems is affordable ongoing stable accommodation. Part of that is obviously affordable housing, but there may be other things. The answer is not to put everyone in boarding houses, but that's a reasonable way forward for some people.

**THE CHAIR:** You say that the chronically homeless rate is much higher than the national average. I want to take you back to something you said before. You said one of the things that you've got to address is employment. Is it fair to suggest that in the government approach to services we have to attach homelessness to it, because it's part of the cycle? You can have people who become homeless, get it sorted for a while, come out the other end, go back into the same cycle again, and away we go. As we talk about sustainability being an overlay on every single thing we look at. Should we be saying the same thing for homelessness?

**Mr Stubbs:** Right up there in the hierarchy of needs is a house to live in, a roof over your head, stable accommodation. If you haven't got that, then it's hard to access employment, education or a whole lot of other things to participate in. That needs to be considered as part of social sustainability. We need to have an ability to house people in a stable way. I guess I'm putting it in the positive rather than the negative of homelessness.

**THE CHAIR:** You are indeed.

**Ms Page:** I think it's true that the primary issue is exit options, but with regard to men's services there is also the issue of staying long enough to gain a benefit from the support. There's a need for crisis accommodation no doubt, but there's also a need for longer term support. Whether you do that in a model of medium to long-term support services or transitional accommodation services, there needs to be more research into that and more consultation.

But I do think that there is an issue of people staying for various reasons for short periods of time, not just in Canberra services but also in services in Queanbeyan, Sydney and Melbourne, and moving through them and moving out of them before they address some of the issues that are causing that continual cycle to happen.

**THE CHAIR:** We just heard from the department that, given their priorities for allocating funds and resources to address homelessness, the numbers of homeless men don't seem to warrant another centre on the south side of the lake, just for the sake of having it nicely divided. The resources given to the centre that CANFaCS runs dictate how long you can be there. That's what's driving it. Is it the wrong emphasis? Maybe we should be saying that we need to have more places because we need people to stay longer in the ones we have. Is that a fair comment?

**Ms Page:** I thought the response to your question was with regard to men with children specifically. I think there is an acknowledgment that there is a need for crisis accommodation for men in general and for families, which include men with children.

I think the issue is whether there is a priority need for a service that caters only to men with children, as opposed to a service that can cater to families, including men with children, women with children and couples with children, and services for single adult men which could relieve some of the pressure on the youth services.



It's complicated if you look at a system. When we got all the data together and did the analysis, we sat down as a team and said, "If you could ease the pressure in two parts of the system, where would it have the most flow-on benefit?" Family services, men's services and some alternative models for youth services stood out. So I think that's the difference.

But when we developed the recommendation for increasing the number of accommodation places for men, we were very clear about increasing that to the point that men could stay longer, that men could stay for three to six months, rather than just increasing the number of crisis beds for short stays of less than two weeks. Men are more likely to be leaving an institution such as jail or a mental health facility. They're also more likely to have just come out rehab.

Although the time frame for assisting them is an important time frame, and there can be some success—and services have demonstrated that—it doesn't seem to compare with the outcomes from other service models where people are staying longer and being assisted much more significantly through the transition into housing.

**THE CHAIR:** You're saying that if we have a longer period for these sorts of things it's going to reduce the chronic homelessness; it's going to be more effective in getting permanent solutions for those people who are doing it, because of the nature of the problems which put them in there in the first place take a long time to fix?

**Ms Page:** That would certainly be the feedback from the men we consulted. When we consulted with men not in services and men in services, a number of key themes kept coming up. One was that they wanted more permanency in accommodation before they would be able to address all that other stuff.

Employment was continually raised as an issue that people felt went hand in hand with their homelessness and their chances of repeating homelessness or capacity to get out it. They were more interested in home ownership and that sort of stable arrangement, as opposed to public or community housing options. There was some talk about people being more likely to stay in permanent housing if they felt they had ownership and reason to stay, employment and stability in their lives in general rather than just a roof over your head.

**THE CHAIR:** We've gone a little bit overtime. Thank you very much for your time.

**Mr Stubbs:** Can I add a couple of things very briefly?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. You've done that at every hearing I've ever been at. I would go through withdrawal if you didn't.

**Mr Stubbs:** Indeed. Can I urge the committee in its final deliberations to bear in mind the existence of a number of reviews, task forces, et cetera which are going on at the moment. To have an integrated response, we need to make sure that those reviews and task forces take on a lot of what's in this report—from the homelessness advisory group to disability reform, to the affordable housing task group, to the development of the economic white paper.

I'd also bring to the committee's attention that last year we believed there was money earmarked to respond to the recommendations of this report. However, that was under the previous government. In the recent budget that was brought down, that money no longer really exists. That, I believe, is a great challenge for the new minister who has just received the portfolio and the report. As far as we can tell, there's not a bit of money available to implement the report straightaway. I think that's a real concern, because I don't think we can wait until the next budget. Some of this stuff needs to roll now.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Daniel. I think you'll find that with Ms Dundas on the committee that little bit will find its way into the report. We will have to review all these reviews and make sure that they're reviewed properly. So thank you very much, ball boys and ball girls.

**The committee adjourned at 3.37 pm.**