

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

(Reference: Appropriation Bill 2003-2004)

Members:

**MR B SMYTH (The Chair)
MRS H CROSS (The Deputy Chair)
MRS V DUNNE
MR J HARGREAVES
MS K MacDONALD**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

MONDAY, 26 MAY 2003

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms Judith Henderson (Ph: 6205 0199)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

The committee met at 9.07 am.

Appearances:

ACT Council of Social Service

Mr D Stubbs, Director

Ms K Nicholson, Senior Policy Officer

Volunteering ACT

Ms M Porter, Chief Executive Officer

Mr T Bourke, Treasurer, Board of Governance

Mr I De Landelles, Customer Service Officer

Council on the Ageing, ACT

Mr J Purcell, Executive Director

Toora Women Inc

Ms J Pearce, Executive Director

Ms K Werner, Deputy Director

New South Wales/ACT Independent Education Union

Mr R Fotheringsham, Organiser

Ms J Groom, Organiser

Catholic Education Office

Mr J Barker, Head of Finance and Planning

THE CHAIR: Thank you for attending this morning, with your horde of supporters. 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 might say at 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.

Ministers, departmental witnesses and community groups, your evidence today is being recorded by Hansard to prepare the committee's transcript of proceedings. It is therefore necessary for you to speak clearly into a microphone when you answer questions. Officers or supporters who are seated at the back of the room should come to the main witness table if called on to respond to questions. Please do not speak from the back of the room.

It would assist the committee staff and departmental officers if witnesses stated clearly when a question is being taken on notice. Daniel and Karen, welcome to the estimates hearing of the year 2003. Daniel, would you like to make an opening statement on behalf of ACTCOSS?

Mr Stubbs: Yes. Do we have up to an hour?

THE CHAIR: You've got 45 minutes.

Mr Stubbs: Great. Thank you for the opportunity to present to the Estimates Committee. I'll make a presentation on some of the key issues, and then we'll be quite keen to have some discussion or answer questions.

This year, ACTCOSS welcomed the government's initiative of paying for SACS award initiatives. However, some clarification still needs to happen. These costs came in from August last calendar year, and this budget puts \$1.5 million towards those costs. We had put up \$2.5 million, which in the whole scheme of things isn't a lot of money, although it sounds a lot of money on its own.

The \$1.5 million would have paid for the SACS award increases, which are biting this year—we're aware of a number of organisations that will be in deficit this year because of the need to pay their workers their legal entitlements. That has been compounded this year by a number of organisations not receiving CPI indexation during this financial year. Although things will be improved next financial year, this financial year there's a problem.

We're still in discussion with the ACT government about the freezing of salaries or wages for the upper levels of the SACS award. Something needs to be done about that because, just as the ACT government competes with the federal government and is losing staff in that direction, the community service sector loses staff hand over fist to the territory and federal governments.

During budget week the Industrial Relations Commission brought down another living wage increase, which will probably come into play in October next year. Although we believe the government should have been aware of these factors, they weren't aware of some of them at the time of making budgetary decisions. We need to seek clarification on those issues to ensure that organisations don't go into deficit for paying their legal entitlements.

I want to talk about community sector viability. We put up issues such as the need for training in the community service sector, assistance in complying with legislation and the range of contracts the community organisations have to deal with, data collection done on behalf of the government, and volunteer management. Those things haven't been addressed in this year's budget, and we hope that during the coming financial year they can be addressed in different ways because they impact heavily on the viability of the sector.

I remind the committee that ACTCOSS generally only talk about the coming financial year; it's the only thing we can really be certain about. We don't always talk about the out years when announcements are made, with the amassing of all the out years payments. In the coming financial year \$250,000 has been put towards sector facilities, and we feel that is an inadequate go at trying to improve some of the major shortcomings in community sector facilities. This compares incredibly poorly with upgrades to shopping centres and a convention centre in the ACT, where we're talking about millions, if not tens of millions.

We're working with community organisations and the ACT government to improve risk management of community organisations in this town. We have it on good advice from the government and from independent sources that it is one of the important ways to do things like reduce insurance costs. When you're occupying the sort of buildings that many community organisations have to occupy and only \$250,000 is going towards improving those, it makes it very difficult to do real risk management in some areas and you're quite hampered.

Some other areas of sector viability are in the childcare sector. We're seeing wage rises in the childcare sector—which haven't been funded in this coming budget—accreditation processes and a range of new arrangements for trainees in the childcare sector, which will all cost money but which we haven't seen anything about in this budget, as far as we can tell.

I hesitate to speak on behalf of the indigenous community in the ACT. Please don't interpret this as me speaking on their behalf; it's more that I am passing on comments from some parts of the indigenous community. Those comments were that it was a bit offensive that the only thing in the budget this year for indigenous people was about ways to keep them in the corrective services system rather than ways to keep them out or rehabilitate them out. \$35,000 for an official visitor for the whole corrective services system—as far as we can tell, that includes indigenous Canberrans who are interstate—means at best a half-time person. In itself it is possibly a good initiative, but it is considered a bit of an affront in the community.

Drug and alcohol saw some increased money, and that was ahead of the recommendations of the alcohol and other drugs task force—I understand the recommendations will be coming out from that task force later this year. In general, we have lauded that approach. Rather than wait till the following budget—or even the budget after that, when a task force or committee might report on new initiatives—setting aside some money in the budget while the issues and the report remain current and the matters are still fresh in people's minds, recognising that there will be new initiatives, is a good way to act.

When discussing revenue and economic development with the revenue commissioner on the day the budget came down, we noticed that the amount of money we bring in using rates—the revenue—is calculated using the rating system that hasn't yet been passed and I believe is still in committee in this Assembly building. We would suggest that pre-empt a little bit the amount of money that will come in. It assumes that that rating system will be able to be used from 1 July 2004; it therefore requires that that legislation be passed in the not too distant future.

We have some concerns about business support in this budget. There are some initiatives for providing business support—for example, the partnerships program—but there is a continuing lack of transparency in this area. ACTCOSS has already made public comments, and comments to these committees, about our concern that any support that goes to business to set up in Canberra needs to be at least as transparent as the money that goes to non-government or community organisations to deliver services and should require the relevant outcomes. We're not convinced that this transparency is available to us in this budget for business support.

There were some issues around microbusiness, like assisting people to start up as single person enterprises. We hoped that at least some of this money would be targeted at people who are unemployed or on low incomes in the ACT. Many people are going to set up as sole traders or on their own in small enterprises anyway, if they have the skills and the requisite capital. But there are some unemployed people who might benefit from this kind of scheme and with a bit of support become economically independent, rather than continuing to be unemployed, particularly long-term unemployed.

ACTCOSS has generally welcomed the range of initiatives for disability services in this budget. Of course, we would always hope for a little more, but the work of the disability reform group following the Gallop report continues to be implemented, which is good. We still, however, have a few things we'd like to clarify.

There appears to be a reduction of in-home respite care in this budget. We haven't been able to follow up the detail of that, but it definitely appears to be the case that in-home respite care is reduced and would be reduced below the current year's level. We wonder where this all fits in with the recent review of respite care. We're not sure what's happened to that review.

Some budget line items talk about the number of service contracts administered. We're not sure what they mean. We require clarification about the budget item that refers to the number of service contracts administered. I would have thought it was the normal business of government to administer contracts. We're wondering why those lines are appearing in the budget.

There's also a description of individual funding to those in crisis. We feel there's a need for more information about people with disabilities in crisis. One of the questions that came to us is: do you have to wait till you're in crisis before you can receive individual funding?

In the area of health we're now seeing the non-government sector move away from the purchaser/provider system across all departments. When the government sector moved away from the purchaser/provider system in the department of health, it was done as a budgetary cost-neutral move. I am fairly certain that it wasn't cost neutral and, now that the non-government sector is moving away from the purchaser/provider system to an improved system—probably—there is no doubt that we need to recognise that it will cost money to make those improvements, with the resources required to better administer that process.

We would have liked to see some resources put towards the increased workload to make the proposed system work between the government and the non-government sector. We're about to start a review of complaints mechanism in the ACT. We would have liked to see some budgetary allocations for the outcomes of that review, given that they won't be cost-neutral outcomes.

There are significantly increased dollars for acute care. Although we welcome this, as a lot of people have to access acute care because of their inability to access GPs in many ways, we remain a little concerned about the ongoing growth and development of the acute care sector with little growth in the non-government health care sector, which in many instances plays an important role in keeping people out of the hospital system.

This budget reports a decrease in the transfer payments between New South Wales and the ACT for New South Wales residents using ACT hospitals. We question that decrease in money coming from New South Wales in the ACT; we believe it should actually be increasing. Increased technologies are being used at the Canberra Hospital, which is a major hub hospital, among other things, which result in greater costs in serving the region.

In the mental health sector, we would like some clarification on how the accommodation outreach program is going to be managed and structured. If in doubt, it goes to the ACT department of health to directly provide that service. We would ask that it be genuinely considered to be a community-based service in a non-government community organisation rather than in the government services.

We see nothing for the implementation of the Health Complaints Commissioner's report into the mental health services system. Our reckoning is that over half the funding increases in the mental health sector are going into government-based services, when there is a strong recognition around this community that funding for non-government mental health services is at a lower level than in any other jurisdiction in Australia.

Some community-based services in the mental health sector need confirmation of ongoing funding. This often isn't the case in budgets, because ongoing funding is just that: ongoing. That is assuming that those services are providing the appropriate quality and quantity of services as agreed. But there are some areas of service in the mental health sector that actually require some confirmation, given the nature of the funding that they were provided with.

With housing, there is \$3 million for community housing, although we need some clarification of whether that \$3 million is just for community housing or for public housing as well. We see no other increase in public housing, and it's important to realise that significant money is going into public housing. That's due to the shortfall in insurance and some upgrades, which we refer to as "general operation and maintenance".

There is no increase for public housing, despite the recommendations of the affordable housing task force, which this organisation put significant resources into last year. We see no increase in support workers to assist ACT public housing tenants. A real need for them has been identified, particularly by some of the tenants with complex needs. This budget talks about a bond scheme from 2005, but we don't see any money for it. So, although we welcome any initiative around a bond scheme for housing, it will obviously need to be financed.

Finally, I would urge this committee, when it meets again with ministers, to put the point that the timing of the payment for initiatives is really important. Each year—and this year is no exception—the actually rolling out of initiatives does not happen till the end of the financial year, so the initiative ends up being almost an announcement in the next budget. We would urge you to encourage the ministers and departments to make sure that the initiatives in this budget are rolled out sooner rather than later.

We note that you're seeing ministers again next week. Can we urge you in future years to take hearings from community organisations and then see ministers and departments? It seems not the best use of our time to see you after you have already seen ministers, which has happened in previous years. I think it's good process that you are seeing ministers next week, after community organisations, rather than the other way around, which has happened in previous years. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Daniel, thank you. Karen, do you want to add anything?

Ms Nicholson: No, I prepared the notes; he read them beautifully. There was a bit of confusion over the figure for the refurbishment of community sector or government buildings. There's some minor new works money, which I think comes to about \$415,000. But the point we'd make is that two days ago the Chief Minister announced that \$850,000 would be spent on Higgins shopping centre to make it look beautiful. That's good because all of our clients still use shopping centres. They need unbroken paving and better access, and it's nice to have pleasant surroundings.

But we are talking about buildings where the heating doesn't work, the cooling doesn't work, it leaks when it rains, it's draughty and the internal fittings and things are not of a standard that we would expect other people to work around. They're government buildings, but government public servants wouldn't be allowed in them. We feel that this is an urgent problem that needs fixing.

THE CHAIR: Daniel, in terms of funding for mental health workers, you make the statement that it should be going into community organisations rather than government. Are there particular programs or schemes there that need additional funding, or is that a general comment across the board?

Mr Stubbs: Of course, there's no doubt that there are programs that would need additional resources, and I don't necessarily want to get into that in this discussion. That particular mental health initiative would significantly augment some existing programs, and community-based services are the right place for this kind of initiative in the budget. They're close to the community and able to be more much flexible and responsive to what's going on for people with mental illness.

Putting it in the government service, which in our opinion is one step slightly closer to a more clinical approach to mental health, isn't what this initiative needs. That might be the plan of government, but it's been our experience that, if there is doubt, the money has often gone to funding government workers rather than funding community-based workers in this area.

THE CHAIR: You mention difficulties of confirmation of ongoing funding for the mental health sector. What effect is that having on the delivery of the programs?

Mr Stubbs: Some programs, as far as their workers know, are planned to stop in the very near future. They haven't got confirmation, and they expected to see it in this year's budget. I'm not at liberty to tell you the names of those programs, but those programs need to provide advice to their workers around four weeks out to the end of the financial year.

THE CHAIR: You spoke about the viability of the community sector across the board. How seriously concerned are you about the viability of the sector?

Mr Stubbs: Treasury has advised that indexation this year will be 2.5 per cent. That's been a government undertaking—

Ms Nicholson: I will confer with my director here.

Mr Stubbs: Where federal funding is flowing, it's still a matter of discussion and advice from federal departments. ACT funded community organisations will be receiving the indexation that is most commonly used—2.5 per cent is the estimate. That's a welcome increase and a bit of a stabiliser, but at the same time we recognise that those two things are minimum requirements in any other government contract. It is a basic need. Any other government contract will have rise and fall provisions for awards and will have indexation provisions. The community sector finds itself being very thankful for things that in any other contract might be seen as day-to-day requirements.

Ms Nicholson: And this is at a time when increasing requirements are being made of community sectors. We're currently talking about the introduction of standards into all contracts and all services that provide contracts to government. As we said, there are the risk management issues and increasing insurance costs. All of these other costs are becoming fairly important. Ten years ago they were not considered essential in community services because community services weren't held up to a standard.

We're quite enthusiastic about holding them up to standards and making sure that they get the best for themselves, that they develop their skills within the workplace and that these things are seen as common to business, to the public sector and to the community sector. But these things come at a cost, and that is all part of the viability issue in the end.

Mr Stubbs: Organisations will go back to government and say they've got increasing costs, which might be any one of a range of insurances. Public liability isn't the only insurance that's going up, as many of you may be aware. It might be around OH&S and risk management and the need to invest in the organisation. Whatever the different issues are, when a community organisation goes to government and says it is experiencing increased costs, the first response is usually, "We'd better look at decreasing your outputs." That's very difficult when you've already got a waiting list or you've got a full chart of work.

We'd like to see a bit more flexibility and recognition that many of these organisations provide essential services for some of the most vulnerable people in our community. We'd like to hear them saying, "Yes, there has been a sevenfold increase in your insurance costs, and we need to talk about how that can be funded. It's clearly not about you being inefficient."

MRS CROSS: Can I touch on the standards that you mentioned, Karen? The insurance issue is a separate issue. On the standards issue you mentioned the training of staff. Could you elaborate a little bit more on the expectations on your sector and what standards have to be addressed, so we can have some understanding of the financial impost on you?

Ms Nicholson: A lot of services already have existing standards. There are standards in all the federal contracts on mental health service provision, health service provision, community care, childcare and all those things. The raising the standard project is about a generic set of standards for organisations, and it's in the developmental phase. The raising the standards pack has been developed, and we're in partnership with the government to promote that through the sector and get organisations to take on quality standards within their organisation.

It goes to governance; it goes to everything they do. It looks at the standards they set themselves in delivering their services. The training that goes on for skills-based training and accreditation training is all governed by standards that sit outside of that. These are standards that will bring up the performance of these organisations—

MRS CROSS: This is additional training that industries have?

Ms Nicholson: All staff will have to become familiar with standards and learn to accept that quality standards in delivering their service is now a part of the framework that we all operate in, as far as contracted.

MRS CROSS: Given that those standards have been around for a little while, how have you met the need for those standards to be met?

Ms Nicholson: It's still very much in the development phase. We're just introducing community services to them. Some community service organisations, particularly the large ones, operate under their own quality standards—is it AS901?

Mr Stubbs: Yes, some of them use that.

Ms Nicholson: I can't remember what the relevant Australian standards are. Some of them use the relevant Australian generic standard to govern their service provision. Raising the standard is about helping smaller organisations that haven't approached standards and quality standards.

MRS CROSS: When community organisations put submissions forward, do they include a section in their submissions to allow for the cost of that?

Mr Stubbs: They don't.

Ms Nicholson: That's how new they are. It's a new concept.

MRS CROSS: I assume you'll be doing that next year.

Ms Nicholson: It's ongoing and it's rolling out, but really it's only been 12 to 18 months in development, and these things take a while.

MRS CROSS: In addition to your bringing it to our attention, I suppose it's important that you get the message out to all your community organisations.

Mr Stubbs: It's definitely part of the training we provide to organisations. We say, "When you apply for funding or when you tender, you've got to incorporate this in there." It's absolutely true.

Ms Nicholson: It's now constantly part of our dialogue with the community sector.

THE CHAIR: We'll go to John Hargreaves, then Vicki Dunne.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks, Mr Chair. I'll ask both of my questions, and they can get knocked over fairly easily. Daniel and Karen, what effect are the changes to the purchaser/provider approach having on the sector? I also have a question on the budget consultation process. Picking up on the point you made about seeing the community groups before we see ministers, in the past we had the standing committees receive submissions from community groups, and then they were processed through the government as well. We didn't do that this year.

What are your feelings about the process? Did you have meaningful dialogue with the government prior to the budget being produced? What is your feeling about that? Do you think that we should go back to having the standing committees receive submissions from community groups? How does that affect ACTCOSS?

Mr Stubbs: On purchaser/provider first, Mr Hargreaves: 12 months ago the government foreshadowed a review of purchaser/provider. The review has only started to happen in the last few weeks, and we've already raised publicly—and directly with the government many times—our concerns about the timing of that process, given that 12 months ago contracts were rolled over with a view to a new system for the coming financial year. That won't be in place. We're currently in the process of reviewing purchaser/provider.

Indications in general look quite good. Unfortunately, it's been a bit of a truncated consultation process, but the draft policy directions paper the government has put out in general—we have a few small concerns about things like tendering—looks quite good. ACTCOSS have put a lot of work into our response, and we're happy to provide that to anyone interested. I believe the consultant will be advising the government of the result of the consultations next month.

We've learnt a lot from the previous, purchaser/provider system, which brought us a long way forward. It was timely to move into a new system, which keeps some of the good bits of the old, purchaser/provider system—some of the bits that provide clarity and accountability—but also recognises that we don't have to have all the same things that govern purchasing contracts in the private sector.

The risks are different; the issues are different. We must still have transparency and accountability in the process, but that doesn't mean we have to have all the same systems that we have when money flows to the private sector. I think that's starting to be recognised. There is an important element of a relationship with the government that can't always be captured in a financial contract that, hopefully, will be better captured in this new developing policy.

MR HARGREAVES: Daniel, are you expecting this new policy to be so streamlined that the moneys that were wasted on administration, as it were, will now be able to be applied to service delivery more appropriately?

Mr Stubbs: Some of the money that may have been wasted in administration could be better spent on some features of a good service funding process—it's going to be called "service funding". Some of those features might be about better relations between the community sector and government, as it's the strength of that relationship that more easily allows flexibility. When the needs out there change, the community sector often

knows about it. A good relationship means that the community sector can easily tell government, and the sort of service response can change much more easily.

There are a whole lot of different dynamics there and, yes, there will be some streamlining, which will improve things. At the same time, some resources will have to go into data collection so that the government can better know what they're purchasing for and what is being done out there. That goes back to transparency and accountability, which we are committed to as well.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks very much for that. And the consultation process? I'm interested in knowing whether the standing committees ought to talk to community groups prior to the budget process. One of the issues for us was that it might have been a duplication of effort, particularly on the part of the community groups. They'll be talking to government about the issue, and they'll be talking to standing committees about exactly the same thing, saying exactly the same thing twice. It didn't happen this year, but it was a bit of a test case. I'd be interested in feedback.

Mr Stubbs: Suffice to say, Mr Hargreaves, there is no consensus of opinion in the community about this process, as there's no consensus of opinion in government or, I suggest, even in the Assembly. There was, however, a sense of less involvement in and less understanding of what was going on in the process for this budget than for previous budgets. In general, there was a sense that there was a bit of a step back. However, there has also been a slightly excessive workload in other years, when there seems to have been a doubling up of the process.

If the government itself was to run its own open budget consultation process, that would not be unwelcome, let's say. If that was a genuinely open process with an interest in what is going on in the community, it would be worth trying.

MRS CROSS: Can I ask something supplementary to that, John? Daniel, you said that you'd welcome the government engaging you in more consultation. Doesn't that already happen when you put submissions in for things that each organisation needs? Don't you quite often come and meet with the relevant ministers and sit down and discuss your needs? Aside from those meetings, what type of consultation would you recommend would be ideal for you?

Mr Stubbs: It's probably important to recognise, Mrs Cross, that ACTCOSS is in a somewhat privileged position, in the sense that we draw a lot of information from our sector, and it's our business to take that to government. However, it would be useful to open up the actual budgetary process a bit to allow not just ACTCOSS but the many other players to provide input on some of the key priorities. It would also be useful to streamline the process of past years, where government and committees were running consultations. To fit the many submissions and issues raised with ministers and departments into a budgetary structure would be quite useful.

Ms Nicholson: The timing is something we find extremely hard. When an organisation like ours closes for the Christmas break and comes back in the first week of January, we usually face a backlog. If we are not right into our budget process then, we are nowhere near ready by March, and it's a last minute dash to the line to get it through. It would be better if we could start negotiations or talks with departmental officials, in the first

instance almost now—we are talking about starting the process in August instead of getting an invitation in March.

It is a big workload for us and, without having somebody who's specifically dedicated to the task of doing budgetary work for six months of the year, it becomes a huge drain on resources. We try to consult with our community groups, but we're in the same bind as the committees were this year: there just wasn't enough time to get out to them.

We draw on the work we do for the 12 months before we put in our budget submission, but it's very hard to focus the community sector on the budget that late in the process. We haven't had time yet to do our budget debrief, where we talk about how we might do it next year, but—

MRS CROSS: Is this the same process that's been used for many years?

Ms Nicholson: No, we usually respond to the governmental process. I have a small anecdote. When I got there, I thought I was doing a really poor job because I was only churning out something like 20 submissions a year, until I looked back and saw how many of the previous years' submissions were pre-budget, then estimates, then budget. There was one for each committee and one for each portfolio. Ten or 15 submissions from an organisation the size of ours and the staff that we had at those times, which was around six to ten staff, was a huge load.

The process having been abandoned, we've streamlined it down to one pre-budget submission, an analysis and our appearance before estimates, which in terms of our time is fairly efficient. But I still think that, if we started the process at the beginning of the financial year for the next financial year, it would work much better.

THE CHAIR: If the government was to finalise and get its budget passed in June—there would be the July break, but then perhaps they could have their budget parameters for discussion in August—so that committee groups and others could start thinking about it, that would be better timing.

Mr Stubbs: That would certainly be a more genuine approach to consultation, as the departments are putting together their first round of budget bids at that time.

MRS DUNNE: I'd like to go back to refurbishment. You made a valid point, Karen, that, while refurbishment is necessary in a whole range of areas, there is a crying need for it in community facilities. A couple of times last week, Mrs Cross touched on large amounts of money set aside for the refurbishment of government offices, to which the minister said, "You can't expect our staff to work in substandard conditions." That twigged with me that you are actually saying that staff in your organisations or your affiliated organisations are doing that.

This might be too big an ask for now, but in the course of the week could you get back to us with a list of the ten most urgent areas of refurbishment—where there are leaks and that sort of thing? Could you indicate to the committee now where some of those places might be, but perhaps come up with a list later?

Mr Stubbs: Issues have come up, and we can certainly provide a list of them. I'm not sure if I could be so bold as to prioritise them.

MRS DUNNE: I mean the really big ones. Most of the places where community organisations work are probably much less palatial than where we work. I mean the ones that are crying out.

Ms Nicholson: Oh, goody. We get to take one on notice.

Mr Stubbs: Yes, I will take it on notice, Mrs Dunne. Thank you. Even in the last year or two youth centres have flooded, or whatever. So we probably could put together an indication of those which are truly outstanding, due to a crisis—not by the standards of January's fires but certainly by the standards of a small community organisation.

MRS DUNNE: And a crisis, as Karen said, by the standards of where public servants work and members of the Legislative Assembly work. I wanted to touch on another issue. You said that implementation of the review of disability services was ongoing, but then you touched on the fact that in Housing nothing came out of the recommendations of the affordable housing review and that your organisation and others had put a lot of work into that in the last year or so.

Are there things that you would have expected to see in the budget that came out of the affordable housing task force? Secondly, are there other areas where organisations like ACTCOSS have put in substantial resources over time in terms of consultation, like the poverty task force, which you see are not being followed through into budget allocations?

Mr Stubbs: I may have misled a little on the affordable housing task force, because one of the measures in the budget is \$3 million for community housing.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, but you said that other than that there was nothing else out of the affordable housing task force.

Mr Stubbs: That's right—so just to make sure. We're still seeking clarification on exactly what that \$3 million might be used for because we've heard conflicting reports. As some of you may know, the affordable housing task force has provided quite a long list of recommendations. We believe some of the key areas of recommendations are improved public housing. There are quite detailed recommendations, which I don't want to get into the detail of, but public housing is a key issue in this town.

People see public housing in this town and see it being a higher proportion than in other jurisdictions. The fact is that, if you look at the broader definition of what social housing is in other jurisdictions, Canberra isn't very well served. Public housing is the majority of our social housing provision. We need to look at the type of public housing, the accessibility of it and the services around it for people with complex needs. We believe that's really important because ACT Housing is the landlord of last resort. If people with complex needs end up being kicked out, they are homeless, so we need to be very mindful of that fact. That's at the worst end of it.

There are other affordable housing task force recommendations on private developments, including our being required to build community and public housing. There are a whole lot of policies that would help greater provision of housing in the ACT that need to be progressed and are not being progressed either. They aren't part of budget, but they are not being progressed, which is a frustration.

MRS DUNNE: I don't want to appear to lead, but the sense I have—and feel free to disagree—is that the government has produced a very large report and that's their contribution to the discussion on affordable housing. Is that the sense you have?

Mr Stubbs: I haven't been driven to that level of cynicism yet.

MRS CROSS: That's a very diplomatic answer.

MRS DUNNE: But on other issues—in the past there have been extensive consultations and inquiries, as with the poverty inquiry—do you feel that there is enough follow-through in the budget in those recommendations being implemented, so that the work of people involved in those inquiries isn't wasted?

Mr Stubbs: We're still waiting for some work on concessions, which was a recommendation of the poverty task force. That's been in train for over 18 months.

MRS DUNNE: Sorry?

Mr Stubbs: Concessions are largely discounts or the waiving of costs around government fees. That review has been happening for a long time now, but we haven't seen it.

THE CHAIR: It must be almost two years now because it started under the previous government.

Mr Stubbs: Yup.

MR HARGREAVES: Never let a chance go by.

Mr Stubbs: We're uncertain of where that's up to. We need to acknowledge the resourcing that's gone into homelessness in this budget, which comes out of some significant work by ACTCOSS and other organisations. That's a positive that is worth acknowledging.

We have mentioned a number of other reviews—for example, the inquiry by the Health Complaints Commissioner, to which many people in the community sector and the consumer area in mental health significantly contributed. We're still waiting for that. We mention a couple of others in our submission. There are some where progress is being made, but there are some where we're feeling quite frustrated because there are clearly measures that need financing.

THE CHAIR: Daniel, as a peak body, does ACTCOSS receive its funding guaranteed on a three-year rolling timetable?

Mr Stubbs: As a peak body, we receive some of our funding as peak body funding. We used to have a three-year contract, but with the current review our contract has to be renewed every 12 months until we have this new funding policy.

MRS DUNNE: Is this the purchaser/provider review?

Mr Stubbs: Yes.

THE CHAIR: But from your perspective, having it on a firm, at least three-year, funding cycle is preferable?

Mr Stubbs: Yes, for us and for all organisations. Unless organisations aren't providing the quality or quantity of services that they're required to, we would see them having ongoing funding. There needs to be a real look at quality to make sure organisations that are providing what we would call essential services are doing that, but continuity is really important.

THE CHAIR: The fourth thing you mentioned under community sector viability was volunteer management. Have you got anything further to say on that? I should warn you that the volunteers are sitting behind you now. You've got an audience.

Mr Stubbs: Part of the process of reviewing service purchasing is a proposal, which seems to be generally supported by the sector, to develop things called "funding plans" for subsectors. You might see a funding plan for the Home and Community Care sector, a funding plan for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program and a funding plan for disability service providers, et cetera.

There's also support for a funding plan for peak bodies. ACTCOSS and the other peak bodies would support that. When I say "other peak bodies", for the information of some people, I am talking about organisations that you know about, like the Youth Coalition, ACROD and, indeed, Volunteering ACT. There's a range of others.

Such a funding plan may set out the reasons why funds go to peak bodies, the need being met there, the type of work that peak bodies are funded by government to do—the outputs, if you like—and maybe funding structures for peak bodies.

We believe that the changing funding arrangements for Volunteering ACT was at least premature, given that we're in a review of service funding and we possibly need to have done that in the context of creating a funding plan for peak bodies in the ACT. The outcome of that, for all we know, may support the decision made by government, but it may not.

THE CHAIR: Speaking for ACTCOSS, you see Volunteering ACT as a peak body. Given what you said earlier about the need for volunteer management to lead to the continuing viability of the sector, would you urge the government to continue to provide the level of funding that has been provided in the past?

Mr Stubbs: ACTCOSS convenes a group called the Peaks Forum, made up of peak bodies in the ACT. Volunteering ACT is one of those, and there is no doubt that Volunteering ACT does quite a lot of peak body work, which we describe as representative work and sector development work.

Ms Nicholson: It's analogous to what was happening with work placements for kids. Nobody accepts that they go somewhere and just hang around until somebody has time to show them what the job is about. Volunteers need to be trained; they have to be brought to an office; their skills need to be managed within an office. They don't just exist. There hasn't been recognition of that before. Volunteers have been seen as valueless in the system. They're not, and their management shouldn't be either.

MRS BURKE: Daniel, given that you've just said that the decision was premature regarding Volunteering ACT funding and, considering that you are ever the diplomat, practically, what do you think will be the financial impost on ACTCOSS with the advent of the 50 per cent cut in funding to Volunteering ACT? How much of that are you considering? You've obviously had time to think about it, so do you have any idea of the pressures that will place on ACTCOSS?

Mr Stubbs: To be honest, it will only be a small increase in the cost to ACTCOSS; indeed, some of the other activities may be spread around to some other organisations. The cost we will see is (1) in the quality of services to volunteers in the ACT—that's what I see as likely—and (2) in the representation of those issues to the community and to government.

Unfortunately, when funding is short, organisations, whether it be Volunteering ACT or any other organisation, often find ways of doing a lot of the work anyway—maybe not all of it, but a lot of the work anyway. A lot of it goes to more pressure on volunteers, including volunteer boards and that kind of thing. I expect that Volunteering ACT will manage it a bit better than that—so that it doesn't wear out its volunteers. Nevertheless, that's often what happens to ensure that the issues these organisations are very dedicated to are kept up.

MRS BURKE: On SAAP services, and particularly the response to homelessness within the budget, we see \$2.4 million in the first year, increasing in the out years. Does ACTCOSS believe that needs have been adequately met in terms of step-up or exit points or step-out facilities? In your opinion, has that met it, is it starting to meet it or has it fallen short?

Mr Stubbs: It goes a significant way and we welcome it almost unreservedly. The only reservation we have is the detail. We're discussing with government, along with other organisations, the type of client and that kind of thing. We'll welcome this, and we'll see how it goes. It does some work around medium-term accommodation, so it's not just the crisis accommodation which we need exit points out of, as you say. We don't see the permanent long-term accommodation like public and community housing as the real exit points. We're still looking for more initiatives in that direction for the exit points.

Ms Nicholson: Can I mention Gunyah House?

Mr Stubbs: Yes.

Ms Nicholson: We put in a supplementary to our budget submission. When we found out that they had defunded the only post-release option for people on parole returning to the ACT from custody, the group that I was on, which was the steering committee for the establishment of it, started calling it Gunyah House. I'm not quite sure why that name didn't stick, but it's not known as that within government circles. It's the corrections supported accommodation facility.

It was only closed a few months ago, but it is one of the ones we would love to see refunded because, for a very cost-effective half a million dollars a year, or whatever, it was stopping people. The point of it was to allow people who would otherwise be sent back to the Belconnen Remand Centre, or who would be kept in prison, to live in the community, and we felt that was really important. We saw it as a first step service, not as a service that would only last six months and then be closed down.

THE CHAIR: We're running late, and there's a gap in the questions, so I'm going to take this opportunity to thank Daniel and Karen for appearing before the committee and for their suggestions, particularly about hearing from the community groups first. I think that's something the committee will take up.

Ms Nicholson: In parting, can I say that the budget lock-up for the community sector was extremely welcome, and we will be putting in our suggestions on how to make it a more fulfilling day next year.

THE CHAIR: Sure. The committee now calls Volunteering ACT. The committee welcomes Volunteering ACT to the year 2003-04 estimates hearing.

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 you are protected from certain legal action such as being sued for defamation for what you say at 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.

Witnesses appearing today, your evidence is being recorded by Hansard to prepare the committee's transcript of proceedings. It is therefore necessary for you to speak clearly into a microphone when you answer questions. Officers who are seated at the back of the room should come to the witness table if called on to respond to questions. Please do not speak from the back of the room.

It would also assist the committee's staff and departmental officers if witnesses stated clearly when a question is being taken on notice, if they do so. It would also greatly assist in the preparation of the transcript if witnesses stated their full name and the capacity in which they are appearing on the first occasion that they give evidence. Mary Porter, would you like to give a short opening address?

Ms Porter: Thank you for affording us this opportunity this morning. I now introduce Mr Tim Bourke, who is the treasurer of our board of governance, and Mr Ian De Landelles, who is the customer service manager. Ian looks after the referral area, our

marketing area, which is the promotion of volunteering, the membership services and our media.

The reason we're here today is that, as was discussed just previously, there has been a 50 per cent cut from previous years in funding arrangements through the ACT government to Volunteering ACT, as the peak body for volunteers and organisations that work with volunteers. My concern is that we will have to cut services to this sector.

It is a very large sector. It is a third of the population over the age of 18—we're not counting the younger persons—who are volunteering in large numbers to the large number of sectors that volunteers work in and for the huge number of services that they deliver. That covers 10 sectors in its entirety. That's my concern. I am here today so that we can address these issues.

THE CHAIR: Mary, on page 3 of your submission, you say that in 2001 you expected the grants would continue. Can you tell us why you had that expectation?

Ms Porter: Yes. When it was originally negotiated with us by the then Carnell government, we were informed that we would be on a three-year rolling fund grant, as we discussed before. When you fund a peak body, you fund it for three years. When you fund any organisation, one would hope you'd fund it for three years if you felt that it was a viable organisation that did work that you wanted it to do. The agreement was that it would be funded for the three-year period. We previously had a one-off grant, and then it was agreed that we would then go forward onto the three-year one.

THE CHAIR: Given the commitment by the government in 2001, what did you think you would be doing with that money?

Ms Porter: We had discussions with ACT government representatives in Health, which was the area that was administering the funds at that time, about working and doing a lot of capacity building with the smaller groups, bringing those together. One of the concerns of Health, and a number of the other agencies, was that there is a plethora of small groups in the ACT that are often without any paid staff, trying to manage on very low resources, and they're all doing that at once.

The health department thought that for the following three years, 2001 onwards, they wanted us to do a lot more work with those small groups because they saw that a lot of groups were working with volunteer staff and no paid staff. There was a lot of repetition, and there were a lot of wasted resources. However, I gave advice that it would be a very bad idea for us to go in and almost be saying that we knew how to run their organisations.

Instead, we needed to go in, bring those groups together and see how they could work together in a more effective way to help each other so that people weren't reinventing the wheel. One of the reasons we exist as a peak body is to help organisations not reinvent the wheel. People are doing that all the time. These are self-help groups, land care groups, small health groups and small community groups. That was one of the things that they wanted us to do in the following three-year period—and continue the other peak role as well, of course.

THE CHAIR: Unfortunately, your workload this year has blown out exponentially, given what happened on 18 January. Can you give the committee a quick overview of the extra work that has been placed upon Volunteering ACT since 18 January?

Ms Porter: It has mainly been in the area of managing spontaneous volunteers. These are volunteers that emerge just at the time of a disaster or an emergency, and this is quite typical of a pattern that happens right round the world. I've been doing some research on it since January 18. We had an avalanche of these volunteers. Across the whole of the ACT about a thousand of these people came forward. Not all of them came directly to Volunteering ACT; numbers of them went to the evacuation centres, to the emergency centres and places like that.

This pointed to the fact that in our disaster plan there is no way of managing the spontaneous volunteers. So we set up a database, and to manage that we created an online facility for organisations to register that they needed more volunteers and also for volunteers to register. After that point, we continued to work with organisations to try to place these volunteers, who were coming forward in good faith. But not all of them could be placed, because there was no system to handle this phenomenon, and we had to put that into place at the time.

Post that, I've been working with the charity subcommittee of the task force on another problematic area: donations of goods. There was no knowledge of how to handle that either. I was able to bring some research from America to the table, and we used that data to help us manage the donation of goods. At the same time, we'd been organising teams of people to go out and help in the bushfire recovery—and also in Belconnen prior to the weekend, when Belconnen was under threat as well. We coordinated a body of work around that.

Insurance was a huge issue. Some of these things are just not well understood, and we had to take a lot of information to the table, where we could, so that people could understand what risks were involved. The McLeod inquiry actually recommended that Volunteering ACT be part of any new disaster plan that we have input into. That will be new work for us because, obviously, it was not in any work we'd done before.

MRS CROSS: I'm a bit gobsmacked that there's been a 50 per cent cut to your funding. I've got a question that's broken up into three parts. Why do you think that cut has occurred? Was the government unhappy with any of the outcomes of Volunteering ACT, and were you consulted about the outcomes that warranted the 50 per cent cut?

Ms Porter: No, at the last meeting I had with my contract manager, he said that he was more than happy with what the organisation was producing. I asked him to indicate to me if there was anything wrong with the outputs in any way, shape or form. He said no. I had sent the material to him prior to the meeting, so he could read through the material and make sure that he was happy with it.

MRS CROSS: This was sent to whom?

Ms Porter: Our contract manager, Peter Brady.

MRS CROSS: Whom does he report to?

Ms Porter: To Nic Manikis.

MRS CROSS: Right, okay.

Ms Porter: There was no indication at our meeting that there were any problems with our outputs at all. So no, there was no discussion and no warning, either to me or to the Board of Governance that there were any problems or that we should be expecting any cut. We didn't expect any. We were asked to put forward a submission to the budget process because of the confusion that had arisen in the previous three years. They wanted to make sure that it was properly allocated. However, we were given no indication that it would be 50 per cent less.

MRS CROSS: Why do you think your funds have been cut?

Ms Porter: I don't know, and my Board of Governance don't know. We have asked and we haven't been told. We have asked a number of times: "Is there something wrong with what we've been doing? Are you unsatisfied with what we've been doing?" It might be a lack of understanding of what we actually do. I'm not quite sure that people understand what Volunteering ACT is actually doing. I can't come to any other conclusion.

MRS DUNNE: Could you give a brief exposition of the history of the funding? That seems to be a stumbling block.

Ms Porter: My organisation, the Board of Governance, would like to go forward from that point. I'm happy to do that, Vicki, but they really do want us to sit down with the government and be able to sort this out once and for all so that we don't keep going back over this history.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, but that might be part of the stumbling block. You were at some stage promised three-year rolling funding, but it's never actually happened.

Ms Porter: We got as far as the end of the three years. I had a meeting with the person I was then working with in Health who said to me, "We need to sit down shortly, Mary, and negotiate the new outcomes for the next three years because I want to put some changes in." These were the changes I mentioned before about working a lot more with the smaller groups. She was concerned about that. So we had that meeting—

MRS DUNNE: When was that?

Ms Porter: My memory is a bit poor on this; it was in about May of 2001. She didn't contact me to set up the meeting; I rang her office and left messages. This was bang in the middle of the International Year of Volunteering, when I was really busy and we were all flat out. She didn't contact me. I rang to make appointments and left messages for her, and they weren't returned.

I think Health was going through a bad time then as well. It was a cross-portfolio amount of money; it was hard for them to manage. It was across each portfolio area, and each portfolio area put in a small amount of money. That meant the contract was difficult to

manage. There was a change of staff at that level, and I was given a new contract manager. I wasn't informed that I had a new contract manager.

MRS CROSS: This is the health department, not CMD?

Ms Porter: Yes, this is still with Health. For some reason they decided to give it over to CMD, without my knowledge. It was given over to CMD, but CMD understood that what they were handling was the international year money—the \$50,000 for this year and \$50,000 for the year after—which was a totally different amount of money. That's what they thought they were managing, and the \$100,000 was just not renewed. When I rang up the office and said it had not been renewed, they said "No, you haven't got a contract." I said, "You can't not renew a three-year rolling contract without letting me know that (a) you're unhappy with what we've been producing or (b) it's not going to be renewed for X reasons.

THE CHAIR: But this is the discussion you had when the money didn't appear in last year's budget.

Ms Porter: No, this is 2001, and I actually did come and I was asked then, the following year, to put forward a submission to the ACT government's budget process for the next \$100,000. I did talk to that then, and I was asked why this was happening: "Why are you coming to the table? This should be three-year rolling funding. Why are you having to come asking for this?" I said it was because I'd been told that was the only way Volunteering ACT would get any money—that was the process.

MR HARGREAVES: I think I'm the only person here that was there when this issue blew up. I remember that, in the transfer of the responsibility from Health to Chief Minister's Department, there seemed to be confusion about your ongoing funding as a peak body versus the amount for the International Year of Volunteers. From what I can gather here, it doesn't appear as though that's ever been resolved. In fact, you went into battle royal to get the \$100,000 last time. You won that battle, and the three-year rolling program is there at a rate of \$50,000, but the real issue is that that amount is insufficient and not that there is a rolling program.

Ms Porter: Yes it's \$50,000, as opposed to \$100,000.

MR HARGREAVES: The issue is the amount of money.

Ms Porter: Exactly.

MR HARGREAVES: I'm looking at the chart that you've supplied for your submission, and I'm trying to find the \$100,000 for the International Year of Volunteers.

Ms Porter: It was \$50,000.

MR HARGREAVES: Was it just \$50,000? I notice you've got \$70,000 there. Was it a total of \$100,00 all up?

Mr De Landelles: It was over two years, John. It was the year before and the year off.

MR HARGREAVES: Was there another 50 grand for 2002-03, which made \$100,000 over two years?

Ms Porter: That's right.

MR HARGREAVES: So there's a line here. You've indicated in this chart, for the years 1997-98 to 2001-02, \$60,000 in the first year and then \$100,000 every year for the rest of them.

Ms Porter: That's right.

MR HARGREAVES: What happened in 2002-03?

Ms Porter: We got \$100,000.

MR HARGREAVES: \$100,000 for the peak.

Ms Porter: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: So, all up, you got \$150,000.

Ms Porter: We got \$140,000. For the IYV, there was \$10,000 we got the year before. We were given some in the years coming up to it. Then we were given \$50,000, and then we were given the remainder this year.

MR HARGREAVES: That is \$30,000, by the look of it.

Ms Porter: Yes, the remainder this year.

MR HARGREAVES: So you got a hundred and something thousand dollars because you were funded for both activities last financial year.

Ms Porter: Yes. They held back the money from us that was left over. They were supposed to give it to us during the international year, but they held it back.

MRS DUNNE: Why?

Ms Porter: I went to the government and suggested that it might be a nice idea—this was in August, during the international year. I raised with the government that I thought it would be a good idea to have a policy on volunteering and that many of the other states and territories had one. This is a whole-of-government policy and a whole-of-community policy. They thought it was a nice idea but that they'd rather have something like the framework. They decided that Volunteering ACT should take on the job of creating the framework. I've brought some extra copies for you in case they got lost in the paper war in your offices.

MR HARGREAVES: One of the volunteers nicked it.

Ms Porter: We held a summit and then we widely consulted with the whole of the community—government and business, because we included all sectors in that— about what the important principles of a strategic plan for volunteering should be from 2003 to 2007. That’s what we did with that money. They held the money back because they said that they wanted us to.

Mr De Landelles: They added to the contract.

Ms Porter: Yes, they added to the contract that we already had with them.

THE CHAIR: That was \$40,000?

Ms Porter: Yes

Mr De Landelles: But it was out of the \$100,000; it was not an additional \$40,000; it was added to the contract that already existed. They said, “That’s a really good idea. You can do that for the same money.”

MRS DUNNE: Out of existing funds, rather than out of additional funds.

Mr De Landelles: Yes, out of the \$100,000 of the international year.

MRS DUNNE: That was in 2001?

Mr De Landelles: Yes

MR HARGREAVES: The issue is that a three-card trick has been perpetrated as far as the International Year of Volunteering funding goes, but that has been and gone.

Ms Porter: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: That’s a dead issue for the purposes of this one.

Ms Porter: It’s very good work, I think that you would agree—

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, I’m not denigrating it at all; I think it was fabulous stuff. But in terms of where we are at the moment and the problems facing Volunteering ACT, I’m trying to take some of the dust and cloud away. The three-year rolling program is in place. Whether or not the fourth year contains any money may very well be due to an election cycle or a budgetary cycle—it could be anything. The question is whether or not it appears again with nothing in it. That will flag it.

In fact, there is a three-year provision of \$50,000. There are two main issues: firstly, you weren’t consulted or advised about this occurring and, secondly, even if that had happened, 50 grand is too little. Those are the two issues, aren’t they?

Ms Porter: That’s right. We have done our forward budget for the following year, and it’s \$58,000 short.

MR HARGREAVES: So what will be the impact in real terms, if you have to continue with 50 grand less?

Ms Porter: Our organisation hasn't been able to spend a lot of time reviewing what we can cut out of the budget. The board met the other night and decided that it would need to have a whole session on looking at the different outputs and deciding which of those outputs needed to be cut. In round terms, it's a staff person, and a number of outputs will need to be cut.

It's very difficult to decide what things to cut out of a budget, particularly when we already have demands that stretch us beyond what we're physically able to do on the current budget. We only have four paid staff, and we all work overtime without pay anyway to achieve what we do achieve.

That document you have in your hand will be seriously affected. We had the summit on the first day of National Volunteer Week to decide what from that document needed to be urgently implemented. A lot of it is new work in any case, over and above the work that we were doing, and the secretariat—the working party—will not be able to be brought together for us to be able to start to implement the work. My input into the bushfire disaster plan is obviously new work, and I'm unsure how that is going to be achieved.

MR HARGREAVES: What percentage of your total budget does that \$50,000 represent?

MRS DUNNE: About 20 per cent?

Ms Porter: Yes, about 20 per cent.

MR HARGREAVES: So, in round figures, one in every five activities that you've been doing runs the risks of getting canned.

Ms Porter: Yes, there's a suggestion that one in every five phone calls would be directed elsewhere.

MR HARGREAVES: There'll be an answering machine on the end of every fifth call.

Ms Porter: No, I think it might be directed elsewhere. We've written to the Chief Minister, and we haven't had a reply as yet.

THE CHAIR: I want to ask two things. First, you've done a lot of work with the insurance crisis and how that affects volunteer groups and their risk management. Could you give us a brief summary of that? Second, there are a couple of questions we need to look at on the forward plan. You've done something like 20 seminars for small groups.

Ms Porter: Yes. Initially, we ran three very large seminars to inform groups about what the ACT government was trying to do in bringing the insurance matters together and designing a website. We worked with Treasury on designing that website, we worked

with them on the legislation, making sure that the wording in the legislation around volunteering was correct.

After all the work was finished and the ACT government was successful in bringing together that package, we worked with Tom McDonald, Kevin Wenman and Brook Thorpe to bring together the seminars that Brook Thorpe is running in our premises. At each seminar we do a small session on volunteer management explaining the benefits to the participants of the workshop: that if they incorporated the six steps of volunteer management into their practices, the risk assessment plan that they had drawn up at the workshop would then be able to be implemented. This is one of the things that we've been doing. It has been additional work that we've been doing with Treasury.

THE CHAIR: You did three major seminars and a number of in-house presentations. How many in-house presentations did you do?

Ms Porter: Brook Thorpe's running the in-house presentations. He's been contracted by the ACT government, through Treasury. We're providing the premises for them to run them in and inputting into those workshops.

THE CHAIR: But that was extra work this financial year for no extra funding?

Ms Porter: That's right. There are two workshops a week.

Mr De Landelles: There are 30 of those seminars, one of which is going on as we speak.

THE CHAIR: Was that unexpected when you got your money for this financial year?

Ms Porter: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Did you get Treasury funding for that?

Ms Porter: No.

MRS DUNNE: You're doing that out of your current budget?

Ms Porter: Yes. Treasury is paying for the room and the food, so it's not as though there isn't any contribution coming in.

MRS DUNNE: But you're putting in the work?

Ms Porter: We're putting the effort in.

THE CHAIR: That leads on to the document you've produced, which I think is very valuable. We started some of the work on getting that forward agenda when we were in office. You said earlier that the government insisted on the work on this being included in your \$100,000, rather than extra money being given to put together such a document. So, in the year 2003 you've had to absorb \$40,000 for the agenda for volunteering, you've had to run all the public liability seminars—30 small ones and three major ones—you've contributed significantly since 18 January on the bushfires and they cut your money by half.

Ms Porter: Yes—although the \$40,000 for that work on the agenda was money that they kept over from the international year money. It was \$40,000 that came into our budget in this budgeted period.

Mr De Landelles: But it wasn't included in the initial \$100,000 contract for the international year. It was money held back.

Ms Porter: It was money held back.

THE CHAIR: In the foreword to the document, the Chief Minister writes about the future. He says:

I commend Volunteering ACT for facilitating the development of this strategic framework ... and look forward to the implementation of the specific actions that will breathe life into this important community initiative.

When he gave you that foreword, and launched the document, had he at that time told you he was cutting your money by half?

Ms Porter: No.

THE CHAIR: Did you have an expectation, given the amount of work and the things required to be implemented in this document, that you might even receive extra money?

Ms Porter: I would have hoped we would have had some additional money to be able to achieve those outcomes.

MRS CROSS: In the foreword by the Chief Minister, another statement I found valuable is:

It is vital therefore that we plan for the future to ensure we have sufficient people who are appropriately trained and resourced to follow in the footsteps of our current volunteer workforce. We need to encourage new volunteers and nurture existing volunteers.

Were you sent an explanation of how that was going to be achieved with your existing funding at the time? Now, given it's been cut by half, was it explained to you how you could achieve those objectives?

Ms Porter: No.

MRS DUNNE: Slightly off to one side, Volunteering ACT occupies premises in what used to be the Norths Rugby Club in Belconnen. Do you pay rent for that, or is it funded from somewhere else?

Ms Porter: No, it's a donation by the Canberra Labor Club. On paper it looks as though we're paying rent because of the way they need to do it for their own accounting purposes. We pay rent and they donate it immediately back to us, so we don't pay anything for those premises.

THE CHAIR: Did you get to keep the poker machines?

Ms Porter: No. We could have one in the foyer, and we would earn a lot of money because a lot of people come in the wrong door.

MR HARGREAVES: Helen would legislate against it.

MRS CROSS: Don't speak on my behalf, Mr Hargreaves.

Ms Porter: I'm sure we could make up the shortfall very quickly if the people that come through the door by accident were to put some money into a poker machine.

MRS CROSS: I am happy for the money from poker machines to go to all community organisations for which it was intended.

Ms Porter: It's interesting: they have a lottery system in Western Australia. A lot of the work done by the peak over there—the same as us—and the premises they are in are funded through that lottery.

Mr De Landelles: It's called Lotteries House.

THE CHAIR: Unfortunately, ACT Lotteries didn't have a very successful run, as it were.

Ms Porter: About those insurance seminars, I want to make it clear that we aren't actually delivering them.

THE CHAIR: Understood.

Mr De Landelles: But you are participating because you go in and do a brief. I would point out that, arising out of that, 75 groups who have been involved in those insurance seminars have asked that they be involved in volunteer management workshops. That's how important those people now realise it is to have proper management practices in place. Having done the risk assessment seminars, they realise that if they have good management and good job descriptions they'll be able to lower their insurance premiums—purely by having better management practices. They hadn't even realised that. You don't know what you don't know—and they didn't know.

MRS DUNNE: Seeing that you and Mrs Cross have read the last two paragraphs of the foreword, it would be worth reading the first two paragraphs so that you've got the whole of it on the record. This is the foreword.

THE CHAIR: Read the lot, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: This is the foreword by the Chief Minister, dated December 2002:

Volunteers make a vital contribution to the prosperity of the ACT, with many thousands of Canberrans investing their time and effort to improve the community's quality of life.

My Government recognizes that without the support of volunteers, Canberra could not deliver a whole range of essential community services nor staff major national and international events.

It is vital therefore that we plan for the future to ensure that we have sufficient people who are appropriately trained and resourced to follow in the footsteps of our current volunteer workforce. We need to encourage new volunteers and nurture existing volunteers.

I commend Volunteering ACT for facilitating the development of this strategic framework, together with those who participated in its making—the business sector, the community sector and ACT Government agencies—and look forward to the implementation of the specific actions that will breathe life into this important community initiative.

Jon Stanhope
Chief Minister

Just for the record.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Cross has another question.

MRS CROSS: Ms Porter, do you have a good working relationship with the current ACT government?

Ms Porter: We hope so. I base my relationship on the compact, a document that Volunteering ACT initiated along with ACTCOSS. We saw the necessity for us to work more in partnership and be more consultative. I'm hopeful that, because we have that document and built up quite good relationships in the actual writing of that document, we actually have good relationships with the ACT government.

I have a lot of contact with a lot of the agencies' directors because of the work that we undertake with the joint community government reference group, as well as the development of the compact. At all times I thought that my relationship with all the different department heads, department staff and members of the Legislative Assembly that I come in contact with has been positive. I've always thought that.

MRS CROSS: Do you think the reason your funding has been cut by such a significant amount of money is simply the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing and it is just a bureaucratic bungle somewhere?

Ms Porter: I think that in the beginning it was a bureaucratic bungle. I'm not quite sure why now. What happened in 2001 was just someone not knowing what somebody else was doing and not understanding. I don't know why now at all. I'm at a loss.

MRS CROSS: So it's just a stuff-up that could be corrected. The ACT government is now listening—we're on live—so it's good that you've confirmed you've had a good relationship with them and that all along it's gone smoothly and it's probably the left hand, right hand stuff-up. Good.

THE CHAIR: Mary, would you like to make any closing comments before we break?

Ms Porter: One of the things that I asked to do quite some time ago—in fact, during the international year—was to sit down with each of those agency heads and talk to them about the kind of experience they have in managing programs where volunteers are delivering services within their areas. These are areas such as the environment, sport and recreation and education. We could go through the whole list, but I won't take up your time.

I wanted to sit down with those departmental people and ask them. “What would you like to do in the international year to recognise your volunteers and be able to raise the issues you want to concerning volunteers in your particular areas?” I asked the Chief Minister's Department to organise that for me. It didn't happen, because of pressure at work I'm sure.

However, after that, when we were having the difficulties with the \$100,000, I again asked, “Could we sit down and discuss with each area their particular issues and their particular needs?” I wanted to understand what each of the departments wanted us to do in order to be able to support their work in organisations that are funded through them that deliver services on the ground—for instance, the Canberra Hospital.

We're not just talking about not-for-profit organisations or non-government organisations. We are talking about the Canberra Hospital, volunteers in policing, PCYC, and volunteers working in the mental health areas, et cetera. I wanted to sit down with each of those people—maybe in a group situation, not to take too much time—and try to find out what they wanted to achieve.

The agenda goes some way towards that, but it still doesn't get down to the nitty-gritty of what each department is experiencing in trying to support its volunteers. I would like an opportunity to do that because, if we were able to, we would see that there is far more than \$100,000 worth of work out there that they want to achieve. I haven't been afforded the opportunity to sit down with them, and I would like to be able to as soon as possible.

MRS CROSS: They haven't paid a million dollars for the idea. That might be the problem.

THE CHAIR: We thank Volunteering ACT for appearing before the committee.

Short adjournment

THE CHAIR: The next group to appear before the committee is COTA. You should understand that these hearings, which are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, are protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but it also places on you certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. The Assembly will treat as a serious matter the giving of false or misleading evidence.

Your evidence today is being recorded by Hansard staff, who will prepare the committee's transcript of proceedings. It is therefore necessary for you to speak clearly into a microphone when you answer questions. Any officers seated at the back of the room should come to the main witness table if they are called upon. It would also help if

witnesses clearly state whether a question is being taken on notice. It would greatly assist in the preparation of the transcript if witnesses state their full names and the capacity in which they are appearing on the first occasion that they give evidence. Mr Purcell, would you like to make an opening statement in support of your submission?

Mr Purcell: Thank you, Mr Smyth. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee this morning. I want to raise a number of issues that have been presented in our submission but before going into more detail in relation to those issues I want to remind the committee of what COTA is and what it does. COTA, which is part of a national group, is a membership-based organisation that represents all older Australians. COTA is funded from a variety of sources—from its membership efforts and from sponsorship—and it receives some government funding.

In the ACT we receive government funding for our information service, our seniors card management and our Housing Options Advisory Service. We also receive funds from a number of other organisations. For instance, from time to time we have been funded by Healthpact and by the NRMA/ACT Road Safety Trust to undertake specific projects. So we get funding from a variety of places. In the ACT we undertake systemic advocacy on behalf of all older people. We undertake policy development and analysis and we provide a comprehensive information-based service to older Canberrans. We receive about 10,000 telephone calls a year on our seniors information line.

We also manage the seniors card for the ACT government. There are about 36,000 seniors card holders in the ACT. We manage Seniors Week in the ACT, which is a festival of growing importance for older Canberrans, but we are not supported financially by anybody for that week. We get some in-kind support from various organisations. We manage the community liaison advisory safety project, or CLASP. We have an excellent relationship with our emergency services group, which provides personnel for that service in the form of ambulance officers, police officers and fire officers.

We produce a directory of services for the ageing. Our latest directory is the eighteenth edition. We have just completed a series of older driver refresher courses and we have completed work for motorised scooter users in the ACT. Our housing options advisory service is a significantly growing area of concern for older people in the ACT. We are also participating in the digital divide program. That is what COTA is all about. If you have had an opportunity to read our submission you will see that we have included some statistical information. Generally, we do that so that the bureaucracy and people in the Legislative Assembly understand Canberra's changing demographics. If you read our submission you will see that that is significant.

The major issues that we have talked about in our submission relate to the ageing work force and to the problems being experienced by older people in retaining or gaining jobs. I will refer later to that important issue. We refer also in our submission to the emerging accommodation and housing needs of an ageing population. I will refer also to that important issue later. The third point that we raise in our submission relates to residential care and supported accommodation needs. We have suggested in our submission that the government should ensure that sufficient land is available to meet future demand. It might be necessary, therefore, to create a land bank and to identify suitable land in established urban areas for future residential care facilities.

We are working with PALM, which is doing some work in that area. One thing that concerns me about this issue is that we all know there is pressure on residential care facilities. A number of people who are in hospital ought not to be there; they ought to be in residential care. Currently, 200 approved beds are not operational in the ACT. Those beds, which have been approved by the Commonwealth but which are not operational, were meant to be operational two years after the date on which they were approved. That two-year period expires in September but one organisation has not yet turned a sod. So we have a real problem.

That organisation is negotiating for land on which to build this facility—a major problem that has to be overcome. The best way to do that is by pre-approving places so that land is made available and buildings get underway. As soon as those beds are available they can be made operational almost immediately. We need to address that major problem. I know that the Commonwealth and ACT governments are trying to address those issues, but it is a problem at present. If those 200 beds were in place it would overcome many of our current problems.

MRS DUNNE: In order to ensure that we are not talking at cross-purposes, Mr Chairman, when we are talking about beds that expire in September, are we talking about Calvary?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Purcell: I believe that those beds will not be taken away from them.

MRS CROSS: Is that the 200 beds that you referred to?

THE CHAIR: Mr Purcell should be permitted to finish his submission.

Mr Purcell: I will come back to that issue. We refer in our submission to the anxiety being experienced by older Canberrans when accessing health and community services. One of the issues that we raised was the provision of a more responsive public dental service. We were pleased to see that the government made available extra funding in the public dental health area. We welcome that initiative. We also raised the issue of addressing the problem of the availability of GPs and their willingness to bulk bill. We recognise that that is not just an ACT government problem; it is a problem that is occurring right across Australia. A number of issues need to be dealt with in that area. It is a concern for COTA because many of our constituents can no longer find a GP who is prepared to bulk bill. That causes problems for their health and for the health of the community generally.

We are also concerned about the home and community care program. We have suggested that the government should be active in negotiating with the Commonwealth on the implementation of a multi-tiered structure for community care. I am pleased that that is happening. We refer also in our submission to supporting programs for older Canberrans. We talk also about the need for funding programs such as CLASP. Currently, we are negotiating on that issue.

As I said earlier, there are 36,000 seniors card holders. The problem in relation to that issue is that funding is CPI indexed but, unfortunately, the growth in the number of people is not CPI indexed and those numbers keep growing rather rapidly. We have a problem in maintaining our capacity to deal effectively with that program. The seniors information line tends to work well.

COTA is in the same position as organisations such as ACTCOSS. There is an increasing expectation about what COTA does. You probably would be aware that, at present, a review is being undertaken of the role of peak bodies. We are talking about funding arrangements for peak bodies and so on. I hope that something comes out of the review that provides certainty for peak funding organisations.

In that context there is some concern within the sector about ensuring that we remain viable and that we have the capacity to meet emerging and ever-growing demands. It relates to a range of things such as compliance issues. Compliance is not just ACT government-based. Federal legislation and all those sorts of things have caused some concern. There are issues concerning the provision of good accommodation and the recognition of the sector as a vital part of the community.

Those are the things that I wanted to touch on broadly. However, I want to come back to two important issues about which people will want to ask a number of questions. One issue relates to the problems that are being experienced by older workers who lose a job and who are not able, or who are finding it difficult, to be re-employed. We all know that a number of people, such as the head of federal Treasury, have had something to say about this. Just last week he said that he had a solution to this problem and that if older workers lose their jobs or find themselves out of a job they should get some training.

That is fine. We can train people until the cows come home. It does not matter how much training we provide; there have to be jobs available for them and people must be prepared to employ them. I have had a look at some statistics. If committee members indulge me for just a moment I will give an example of the emerging problem. In 2001, a little over 49,000 people were in the 50-year-old to 64-year-old age group. In 2021, we will have about 69,700 people in that age group, which is an increase of about 20,000 to 20,500 people over that period. The number of people in the 15-year-old to 29-year-old age group will increase from 77,600 to 85,100, an increase of only 7,500 people over that period. The main bulk of the work force—those in the 30-year-old to 50-year-old age group—will increase from 97,700 to 113,200, which is an increase of 15,500 people.

That represents a total increase in the potential work force of 43,500 people, but nearly 50 per cent of them are in that 50-year-old to 64-year-old age group. We, as a community, cannot afford to lose that part of our work force, which is what is occurring now. We are putting people in their fifties and early sixties on the work force scrap heap, which is a major problem. One of the major contributors to that is the way the current superannuation system works for Commonwealth public servants and ACT-based public servants, in that when they turn 55 it is financially better for them to retire rather than to continue working. The ACT government must have a look at its nursing and teaching work force, which is ageing and which is causing us some concern. It must ensure that it has a viable work force for older people.

One of the solutions is not necessarily training, although training is a part of it; one of the solutions is changing the attitude and culture of current employers. A number of myths surround older workers. A couple of years ago a survey was conducted of Australia's top 500 companies. Not one recruitment manager would indicate that he or she was prepared to hire people over the age of 50. Not one of them was prepared to do that. Some reasonable things have happened lately. For instance, some of the banks have decided to hire older people because they recognise that a large percentage of their constituency comprises older people. One or two other organisations are looking at maintaining older workers.

Some work has been done on this in the ACT, but I do not think it is enough. We need to put some effort into establishing partnerships with people like the Business Council of Australia, chambers of commerce and so on to see what we can do to educate employers and recruiters about the benefits of maintaining a balanced work force that includes young people and older people, rather than letting older people go. That is one of the concerns that I have.

The other concern that I want to raise now relates to accommodation for older people. We all know that the price of houses in Canberra has gone through the roof. That is causing a lot of older people a great deal of concern. COTA believes that a comprehensive review should be undertaken to establish older people's housing and accommodation needs in the ACT.

Housing and accommodation are a bit haphazard at present, though there is no doubt about the fact that some good things are happening. ACT Housing is doing an excellent job of ensuring, when building older persons units, that they are appropriately sited, accessible, adaptable and so on. However, we need more of those units. ACT Housing's constituency is ageing rapidly, so there would be a greater demand for those sorts of houses. We all know that older people generally want to remain in their neighbourhood—not necessarily in the same street, but in the suburb or in the neighbourhood.

Most people who want to change their accommodation now cannot afford to stay in their neighbourhoods, particularly if they are in older, more established parts of Canberra, which is a cause for concern as well. We are not saying that the government must do certain things now; we are saying that we need a strategic plan to ensure that we know what we ought to be doing over the next eight or 10 years in relation to older persons housing.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Purcell. Is the government doing enough to plan for the future? You just said that we needed a strategic plan for the next 20 or 30 years. Are we approaching those next 20 or 30 years haphazardly, or are you confident that we have in place a strategic initiative that will enable us to manage it properly?

Mr Purcell: A three-year forward plan for older people was developed in 2000. That plan ran from 2000 to 2003. Some work is being done on a new plan at present. However, I am concerned about the fact that some of the issues I have just mentioned need considerable priority. We ought to be doing something about those issues now.

People are ageing all over the world; that situation is not unique to the ACT. But the unique thing about the ACT is that we are starting from a low base. About 7.5 per cent or 8.5 per cent of the population in the ACT is aged over 65. On average, about 12.5 per cent of the population in the rest of Australia is aged over 65. Over the next few years we will catch up to the Australian average. Basically, we are saying that the population in Canberra is ageing faster than the population in the rest of Australia. That does not mean that we are all getting older quicker; I am just giving you the averages.

MR HARGREAVES: Speak for yourself.

Mr Purcell: Yes, I had black hair when I came into this committee room a minute ago.

THE CHAIR: Let the *Hansard* show that Mr Purcell's hair is no longer black.

Mr Purcell: We have a unique position in the ACT; our population is growing older rapidly. That issue is being addressed in a number of ways but we must ensure that we approach it more strategically than we are doing at present.

THE CHAIR: The statistics reflected in the third paragraph of your submission show that by 2051 an additional 100,000 people will be over the age of 50. I do not think the committee secretary likes that as a benchmark.

Mr Purcell: I will be over 50 by then.

THE CHAIR: The ACT is in a unique position in that it can actually forward plan now and get ahead of the rush, rather than attempt to catch up, as happens in many other jurisdictions. We might not need a three-year strategic plan for Canberra's future aged population. Perhaps we should be talking about a 25-year plan?

Mr Purcell: Yes, Mr Chairman. The value of a three-year plan is that a number of issues need to be addressed now. That is fine, but we need to take a strategic long-term approach. One of the things that we know—this is certain—is that the population is ageing. We have a reasonable idea about where it is heading. The statistics that I am quoting are from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which does a number of low, middle and high projections.

We presume that this projection, which is basically a middle projection, is the nearest accurate projection. We know that, over the next 50 years—and you do not need such a long-term horizon, you could have a 5-year, 10-year or 15-year horizon—no matter which way we look at it there will be a greater number of older people in the ACT. We have a unique opportunity to address those sorts of issues.

The problem that we face is the sort of thing that has happened over the past few years. Housing prices have gone through the roof. Generally, when older people retire they are on a fixed income. However, that income might change as a result of CPI increases. Each year over the past few years housing prices went up by 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 20 per cent, so the opportunity for them to maintain their lifestyle has been severely eroded.

Those sorts of hiccups, which come along from time to time, prevent us from being as strategic as we would like to be. But we can still do things. We can make sure that we plan for the future and that land banks are available to provide accommodation, et cetera, for older people. It is not a difficult science but it is one that can be disrupted when certain things happen along the way.

THE CHAIR: From memory, the previous government put 12 sites out for comment to start this process. The Calvary site was included among them. What is the problem in relation to the 200 beds that were approved? Is it simply that the planning process is too hard?

Mr Purcell: Some of those 200 beds were fairly recent approvals, so we did not expect them to come on line straight away. The federal government looks at the statistics and allocates about 100 beds per 1,000 people over the age of 70. Not all those people are in residential care; some of them are in community housing and so on. But the general rule of thumb is 100 beds per 1,000 people over the age of 70. The federal government looks at current statistical data and bases its calculations on today's numbers. It then makes approvals and call for expressions of interest to provide those beds. So it entails quite a lengthy process.

No organisation will build a facility in anticipation of getting licences for those beds. That would be plain silly. If you did not get the beds you would go broke very quickly. The process commences with the allocation of the beds. Then we go through the tendering process. The organisation that wins the tender then has to negotiate with the ACT government to obtain land to build that facility. If any problems occur the two-year timeframe could well blow out, as happened with Calvary which was negotiating in relation to various blocks of land and so on. So it is not difficult to go beyond that two-year period.

We need to ensure that we obtain pre-approval. This relates to Commonwealth policy; it does not relate only to ACT policy. The Commonwealth could approve beds for, say, a particular provider and state, "We will guarantee you beds if you build a facility right now." We know what the statistics will be in two years or three years. All that statistical data is available. Alternatively, we must ensure that the land is available and that it is clearly identified in the ACT. When a provider wins a tender to provide more beds he or she can go to the ACT government and say, "We want that block of land that has already been identified as being available." Providers can then get on with it without going through a whole lot of planning processes that will slow down the process.

MRS CROSS: I do not understand the answer you gave to a question that was asked earlier by Mr Smyth. Why are the 200 approved beds not operational at Calvary? Would the nursing situation have anything to do with it?

Mr Purcell: No. All those beds are not at Calvary. There are about 65 beds at Calvary.

MRS CROSS: So they are across the ACT hospital sector?

Mr Purcell: Yes, there are 200 beds, but it is for residential care. It has nothing to do with nurses or anything else; it is a residential care issue. It involves the building of residential care facilities to provide those 200 beds.

MRS CROSS: In your opening address you referred to the availability of GPs. Could you expand on that?

Mr Purcell: Yes. In the ACT we do not have, on average and on a per capita basis, the number of GPs that are available in the rest of Australia. That causes many problems for older people, particularly those who are looking for a bulk-billing GP. They are few and far between in the ACT. Another major problem is that if an older person comes to Canberra—and we get quite a few people coming to Canberra—it is difficult for them to find GPs who will open their books and take them on. That major problem is raised with us on a regular basis. People cannot find GPs who will open their books and take them on.

MRS CROSS: You referred earlier to interesting statistics that showed that, in the next 20 years, half our population would be over 50. What feedback are you getting from those members of the community with whom you are liaising in relation to the rate system that is proposed by the federal government?

Mr Purcell: There has been a mixed reaction. People who are in their own homes do not see it as affecting them. As long-term owners they will be subject to CPI increases rather than having to pay increased amounts for the unimproved capital value of their land. We know, for instance, that many older people assume they will stay in their houses forever. We also know that most moves are not planned but are forced as a result of some event in a person's life, such as the death of a spouse or an unexpected injury or illness that precludes the person from living in a house.

So the move to something more suitable is forced. If that happens and those who move to more suitable accommodation are not treated on the same basis as others who reside in their homes and they are subjected to paying for the unimproved capital value of their land, a number of problems will arise. We will be appearing before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to talk about a submission that we put to that committee. It is a mixed bag.

MR HARGREAVES: I refer to the Burrangiri crisis centre that is located in Rivett. For the benefit of those members who do not know it, that centre is not for older people who have gone into crisis; it is available for their carers who have gone into crisis. As I understand it, that is the only facility of its kind. If somebody were to build another facility like that in town, would he or she require federal government approval for the beds that were provided at that centre?

Mr Purcell: No, not if the ACT government funds the project.

MR HARGREAVES: So it is not like nursing home beds where you have to get federal government approval. This facility is providing respite care.

Mr Purcell: That is right.

MR HARGREAVES: There are not many beds at Burrangiri.

Mr Purcell: No.

MR HARGREAVES: Is there a need for a similar sort of facility on the north side of Canberra?

Mr Purcell: A number of things are needed on the north side and on the south side. It does not matter where it is. The government allocated \$5.2 million in this year's budget for capital works associated with the development of a facility that will provide transitional care, respite care, psychogeriatric care and rehabilitation services. That facility, which is being planned now, will alleviate some of the problems. You may recall that COTA agitated for a long time for a convalescent facility.

The convalescent facility, which was established at Calvary Hospital and which is working well, has relieved some of the problems that hospitals and patients were experiencing as a result of patients being inappropriately discharged early from hospital. On the respite care side, there is always a tremendous need for respite care. Some respite care is provided in residential care facilities, but that is planned respite. You have to book in 12 months in advance because all those facilities are full. Crisis respite is the major problem. If another facility like Burrangiri were established to provide crisis respite, I guarantee that it would be full the minute it opened.

MR HARGREAVES: I remember when the justification for that facility was established in 1991. People would go into crisis. The mother or father was admitted to hospital and he or she would spend a week or two in the geriatric ward when basically there was nothing wrong with them. All that was needed was a bit of medication and supervision. Those beds were created as a result. The Salvation Army was then given permission to run that facility.

Was that facility established on the south side because a block of land was available and it was convenient to establish it there? People like to be accommodated in their own area. We are talking about crisis accommodation, so instinctively I am thinking about the provision of such a facility in the Belconnen area. Is there scope for the government or the private sector to provide such a facility?

Mr Purcell: I think the private sector would struggle with something like that. Because of funding arrangements and so on it would be difficult for organisations in the private sector to do it. Buckets of funding are available from various sources and from the federal government to provide respite places, but not many facilities are available. Any private organisation proposing to provide such a facility would need to charge the people who were using it a fee in order to recoup their costs, which can be quite high.

MRS DUNNE: Although there is a perception in the community that COTA is a peak body, under current funding arrangements you do not get peak body funding.

Mr Purcell: No. I do not know anyone who gets peak body funding as such. We get funding for specific purposes but the government recognises that we are the peak body. The funding that we get is for what is euphemistically called an information service. But part of our contract states that we should provide advice and guidance to government on issues relating to older persons. So our contract recognises that peak body-type role without stating specifically that we are a peak body. That is why I think there is a real need for some sort of funding arrangement to be put in place for peak bodies in the ACT.

MRS DUNNE: I refer to the employment of older people. One of the things that struck me—I suppose because I am nearing that age group, although I have not hit 50—is the fact that we will all be facing unemployment in October next year. I have noticed lately, when dealing with Commonwealth officers, that I rarely see a person with grey hair over the age of 50. I almost comment on it when I see someone over the age of 50. We have an anomaly in the Commonwealth superannuation scheme in that you are better off retiring at the age of 54 and 11 months. That is happening across the public service. However, because there is such a concentration of public servants in Canberra, do we need to do something to change the CSS so there is no incentive for people to retire?

Mr Purcell: Something must be put in place to encourage workers to continue working. I do not know what it should be. Because of the way in which the CSS is structured at present, you are better off financially if you retire at the age of 54 and 11 months. I think you would have to stay on five or six years more before you catch up to the same sort of benefit that you would have received if you had retired at 55 or 60. Most people choose not to do that; they choose to retire at 54 and 11 months.

A silly anomaly is that those people retire but a number of them come back into the public service and are employed on a consultancy basis. A lot of people are retiring from the paid work force altogether, which causes a number of problems. If you retire at the age of 55, on average you would probably have a 25-year retirement in front of you. Even if you retire on a reasonable salary, after 10 or 15 years it can be eroded pretty significantly, so it can cause problems.

MRS DUNNE: You might think you are retiring on something pretty big but in 15 years time it is looking pretty ordinary.

Mr Purcell: That is right. One thing that worries me is the importance that some people place on the financial aspects of retirement. Some people do not think about retirement lifestyle issues. We need to address that anomaly but I do not know how we will do that. Superannuation schemes other than the CSS do not provide for that sort of thing. Most people would continue to work if they had that option. What we need to look at is the transition from work to retirement. How do we retire people?

At present you will find that people retire on Friday and on Monday they have nothing to do. We must look at other options and enable people to make that transition over a period of, say, four or five years. We could gradually reduce the hours that they work so that when they retire they have a range of other lifestyle things in place and they are able to manage much better than they might have done if they had retired suddenly. It would also provide them with an opportunity to contribute to superannuation schemes and to put a bit more money aside for their retirement.

MRS DUNNE: The most extreme case would be people who retire from a university on a Friday and who come back to work on the Monday as an emeritus. They would then stay at the university for 25 years turning out books because they are given an office, they get paid for it and everyone benefits from it. Mr Hargreaves said that we could not do anything about it.

MR HARGREAVES: They killed off the scheme when they realised exactly what was happening.

THE CHAIR: They killed off the scheme because it was costing too much.

MRS DUNNE: There are thousands of people in that scheme. We will have an increasing problem when people want to retire at the age of 54 and 11 months.

THE CHAIR: It will continue for another 15 years.

MR CORNWELL: You state on page 5 of your submission that you believe a scheme to waive or reduce stamp duty in certain circumstances should be implemented. How significant is this stamp duty issue?

Mr Purcell: It is reasonably significant. People moving house often have a perception that it is an unrealistic cost to them. They will make decisions based on that rather than on other issues, such as whether the house is more appropriate, whether it is adaptable, whether it is accessible and all of those sorts of things. They will maintain a house that is inappropriate because they do not want to pay an additional \$6,000, \$8,000 or \$10,000 in stamp duty.

In promoting something like this we are not saying that it ought to be universally available to every older person. We would need to provide some sort of a means test and that would have to be worked out. When a person is moving for health reasons or for some other appropriate reason we should look at either reducing the stamp duty or providing some sort of rates honeymoon.

MR CORNWELL: So you would have the same view in relation to the fire levy. However, you are saying that elsewhere it should not apply simply across the board. Some consideration should be given to people's capacity to pay.

Mr Purcell: Yes. We have had no feedback from our constituency on the government's scheme. I think you will find that many older people would be prepared to pay that because they see it as a community effort. They are prepared to contribute to that community effort, whereas they see as an unfair impost the cost of stamp duty when they are moving house.

MR CORNWELL: Even though the fire levy is predicated on suburbs rather than on an individual's capacity to pay?

Mr Purcell: That is right.

THE CHAIR: You state on page 3 of your submission that a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of Health First is needed. Is Health First not meeting the needs of aged Canberrans?

Mr Purcell: We do not know. That is why we asked for that review. It was a significant investment by the government. We would like to get some idea of how effective it has been. We know that in some respects it has been very effective, particularly for young

mothers with babies who are utilising it. But we do not know how effective it has been for older people. We would like to know that.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves' question prompts me to ask whether there is much use of aged care facilities by other sectors of the community that have nowhere else to go. I am aware of a woman with multiple sclerosis. The only place in which she could receive care was in a geriatric facility. I know also of some acquired brain injury cases. Again the only place that they can go for a suitable level of care is into an aged facility. That is not a bad thing but the aim of those facilities is to look after the aged. Is there a need for other facilities? Is there much clog in the system?

Mr Purcell: Yes, there is. We are not looking at a large number of people who are inappropriately housed in residential aged care facilities. As you said, there are people with acquired brain injury and people with things such as multiple sclerosis and so on. There is not a large number. Basically, it is unfair to the system, it is unfair to the older people involved and it is unfair to the younger people involved. If there were a purpose-built facility for younger people who required nursing home-type care it would do a number of things. It would provide a quality establishment for those people and it would take some pressure off residential care places for older people.

THE CHAIR: Do you have any idea of the numbers?

Mr Purcell: No, I do not. I have in mind that it is about 20 or 30, but that is just my recollection. It might not be accurate.

THE CHAIR: Has much work been done in relation to the future of the land bank? I remember making a statement in either July 2000 or July 2001 when I listed a number of sites and initiatives such as transport, libraries and many different things. Has the land bank issue been followed up to your satisfaction? I think the ACT planning committee changed the classification of community land to enable facilities to go ahead without the hostel recommendation. Has that helped, or do we need to make other specific changes to the land act?

Mr Purcell: That is helping. Currently, we are talking to PALM about those issues. It certainly has helped, but until it is clarified not a lot can happen at present. We welcome the work that is still being done. It is not just community facility land that must be identified, although we welcome that step. Other land must be identified and must be made available for older persons housing. A number of proposals are in the air. I am aware of at least half a dozen proposals in which people are negotiating for the release of land. Some of that land is on what has been identified as community facility land. Other proposals relate to land that is currently being used for other purposes, or to vacant land.

THE CHAIR: Is COTA aware of the number of beds, units or buildings that are required at present?

Mr Purcell: The number of beds in residential care?

THE CHAIR: In residential care.

Mr Purcell: No. The provision of residential care places is based on a fixed formula. We cannot change that formula. We have suggested to the government on a number of occasions that that formula ought to be changed, but it will not be changed because it would have to be changed for Australia generally. The ACT is in a unique position; it is an island in the middle of New South Wales. A number of people come across the border and use facilities in the ACT.

The Commonwealth government recognises that that happens. Every year people from interstate are occupying about 60 beds. If there were some recognition of that fact we would have been provided with an additional 60 beds in the ACT, which would have gone some way towards alleviating some of the problems that we have.

THE CHAIR: Have you seen the work of Tony Campbell from the Tuggeranong Community Service? People in Tuggeranong are still suffering as a result of the work that he has done. There is an interstate movement into what used to be called nappy valley. It is now a somewhat older valley. In an ideal world we could get rid of the federal formula. Has any work been done to establish what percentage of people would end up in these facilities? Do you use a rule of thumb in the ACT?

Mr Purcell: No. About 6 per cent or 7 per cent of the population aged over 70 are in residential care. Work has been done on the likelihood of people requiring residential care. The percentage is much higher for women than it is for men.

MR HARGREAVES: We are doomed to an early grave.

Mr Purcell: I cannot remember what the statistics are, but it is likely that females would require some sort of residential care at some stage of their lives. I think the percentages are 30 per cent for women and about 10 or 12 per cent for men, or something like that. Only about 6 per cent or 7 per cent of the population over the age of 70 is ever in residential care. Those statistics are about right.

I do not think we should be placing an emphasis on the provision of additional residential care; we should be placing an emphasis on keeping people fit and healthy, out of residential care, out of hospitals and out of respite care and all those sorts of facilities. There will always be a need for residential care but the emphasis should be placed on maintaining people's health.

THE CHAIR: Has the pre-approval scheme been raised with the Commonwealth?

Mr Purcell: Yes, it has. It is looking at opportunities to do something but, as you would know, the Commonwealth does not always move with lightning speed in relation to some of these issues.

THE CHAIR: It might be prompted to do so as a result of a recommendation of this estimates committee.

MR HARGREAVES: That is because decisions are made by people under the age of 50.

Mr Purcell: Many decisions are made by people under the age of 50.

THE CHAIR: Do you have any closing remarks to make on behalf of COTA?

Mr Purcell: No. I just thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your time and for your submission. We will now hear evidence from representatives of Toora Women Inc.

You should understand that these hearings, which are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, are protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but it also places on you certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. The Assembly will treat as a serious matter the giving of false or misleading evidence.

Your evidence today is being recorded by Hansard staff who will prepare the committee's transcript of proceedings. It is therefore necessary for you to speak clearly into a microphone when you answer questions. It would assist committee staff and departmental officers if witnesses clearly state when a question is being taken on notice. Would you like to make an opening statement on behalf of Toora Women Inc?

Ms Pearce: Thank you. We have three main points to make today. The first point is that the budgetary allocations for women's services were disappointing. From my analysis of the budget no funding appears to be directed towards services for women of any kind. Given my understanding of Labor's commitment to women, that is extremely disappointing. We would like to talk specifically about services for women with mental health issues. We would like to talk also about homelessness initiatives that we hope will ensure that some money will end up going to single homeless women who are not targeted at this point.

I refer, first, to services for women with mental health issues. The budget papers reveal that there is some funding for supported accommodation. However, it was clearly identified in a number of reports that were issued prior to the budget that there was a need for prevention and early intervention in the mental health area. Specifically, there is a need for outreach services—a cost-effective way of delivering services to a large number of people. Prior to the budget a motion was passed in the Assembly that lent support to outreach workers. I understand that Assembly members unanimously supported that motion. So there was support across the board for such a service. The budget papers refer to this initiative in the following terms:

This initiative provides for support to clients living in their own accommodation, whether it is a private dwelling, rooming house, supported residential service or Government housing.

The program will provide support by workers in clients' own accommodation so that those people most at risk are protected and supported to maintain a life with safety and dignity in the community.

We have a couple of points to make in relation to that initiative. As I said earlier, this initiative has not been directed at women. In all the pre-budget lobbying that we did we identified that an amount of about \$250,000 would be required. It is interesting to note that \$240,000 was allocated in the budget for this initiative. Since the budget was brought down we have had a meeting with representatives of Mental Health ACT. Their understanding of this initiative is different. The initiative, as it is currently worded, does not provide the sorts of services that we would have been interested in seeing. The department is talking about providing a range of different initiatives, for example, at Ainslie Village, which would include more beds and meet the step-down facility needs of people exiting the PSU and so on.

We would like the wording of this initiative to be clarified so we know what the money will be spent on. We raised that issue and other issues in our submission and in another document that we will provide to you. We require an analysis and breakdown of current accommodation services for people in the ACT with mental health issues. Whilst a number of services are provided to men and to women—we did some anecdotal research in this area last week—it appears that there are a few restricting factors.

Because of need, some of those services are provided primarily to men, even though they are offered to men and to women. A number of those services have quite specific entry criteria. For instance, entry into Hennessy House requires a referral by a psychiatrist. Anyone seeking entry into a mental health house is required by Mental Health ACT to establish a relationship with a case manager in mental health services, similarly with SAILS.

We identified much broader services than that. Those things may exist but there were no defining criteria. Someone had to meet a set of criteria before he or she could access support. That was included specifically to ensure that women did not lose their housing and go back to using beds in the PSU, which were costly, or crisis accommodation beds, which were less costly than the PSU but certainly more costly than obtaining support from an outreach worker.

Our major concern is that this initiative should include women. Currently, about \$1 million goes towards providing accommodation services for men and about \$190,000 goes towards providing accommodation services for women. A number of services are provided for both men and women, but it is difficult to determine to whom those services are directed at this point.

THE CHAIR: A lot of people were quite surprised at the lack in the budget of specific initiatives for women. On Friday we asked the Minister for Women why that was so. She said that no budget cabinet bids were made for specific women's services. One would have to question why we have a Select Committee on the Status of Women when it appears that it has no intention of doing anything. You referred earlier to a budgetary allocation of \$240,000. Ms Gallagher said on Friday that she thought your discussions with Bill Wood's department would have resolved those issues. Are you saying that those issues have not been resolved and that it does not state clearly in the budget to what use that money will be put?

Ms Pearce: Bill Wood's office thought that the money was going to women, but that is not the understanding of the health department.

THE CHAIR: Ministers can direct.

Ms Pearce: There seems to be some confusion about the allocation of that money.

MRS CROSS: I asked that question because I recall that you and I had conversations about this matter. During the week when I asked the minister about this matter the answer that I received was that the problem was now being corrected and that there no longer was a problem. When I did a bit of research after questioning the minister I discovered that the problem had not been resolved. I then added, "Are you sure that you are not referring to money in health that should be going to the outreach worker?" I was told, "No, that has been fixed." The matter was just brushed aside.

You are now saying to this committee that that matter has not been resolved. You have not been advised whether there is specific money in the budget to cater to your request for an additional one or two outreach workers, is that correct?

Ms Werner: Immediately after the budget there seemed to be a considerable degree of confusion within the government about what that \$240,000 supported accommodation initiative would be used for. Staff in the office of Minister Wood said that they thought it had been allocated to fund the outreach worker proposal for which Toora Women Inc had lobbied prior to the budget. The health department was quite clear that that was not the case. Initially, Mental Health ACT indicated that it would use it to increase its capacity to provide outreach services for people post-discharge.

There was a degree of criticism about that proposal. Since then the government appears to have gone away and it has done some rethinking. It came back with a new proposal that seems to indicate that those funds will now go to community-based providers rather than to Mental Health ACT. However, it is still proposing to allocate the bulk of that funding to services for men. It is talking about allocating \$70,000 of that \$240,000 for one outreach worker for women. But it is proposing to allocate the bulk of that funding to services used entirely by men, such as the Richmond Fellowship and the lodge at Ainslie Village. That is our understanding of where things are at the moment.

MRS CROSS: I know that you made submissions before the budget was brought down requesting, as I recall it, an additional two outreach workers, is that right?

Ms Pearce: Three outreach workers.

MRS CROSS: Did you receive confirmation in writing, or did you receive verbal confirmation that the government would provide you with one outreach worker?

Ms Pearce: We said that we were unhappy with that proposal and that we would discuss the issue at the Estimates Committee and take some other action. So it has been proposed that funding be allocated for one outreach worker. That is not something that we have agreed to. It is in the discussion phase.

MRS CROSS: So even that has not been confirmed and it is open to further discussion?

Ms Pearce: Yes, that is right.

MRS CROSS: When you put in your submission for additional funding was there any consultation between you and the government about your needs? In other words, did the government follow up your submission and state, “We would like to sit down with you and discuss your needs and requirements?” If there was a follow up, did you discuss the inequity between the funding for men’s initiatives as opposed to the funding for women’s initiatives?

Ms Pearce: We did that in broad terms. Only last week we carried out a really clear analysis, or as clear as we could get, given that we could not access many statistics relating to the users of services. In the past week we carried out a much more comprehensive analysis. In broad terms we spoke to the government about the small number of mental health services that are funded for women and the large number of mental health services that are funded for men.

MRS CROSS: Did those conversations occur before the budget was brought down?

Ms Pearce: Yes.

MRS CROSS: Did you communicate with the Office for Women on your needs and requirements? Did you liaise with the Office for Women? What feedback did you get from that office?

Ms Pearce: We certainly liased with that office and we talked to the Minister for Women. People were interested in and could understand what we were saying. There was a comprehension about the issues, but nobody necessarily said, “These projects will definitely be funded.” However, you would not expect that prior to the budget.

MRS CROSS: Given that the government made a commitment to address women’s issues and to set up the Select Committee on the Status of Women, which made about 83 recommendations in its report, are you surprised to learn that the Office for Women made no submissions for specific women’s initiatives in the budget?

Ms Pearce: Yes.

MRS CROSS: That is no reflection on the minister as she has held that portfolio for only a short time.

Ms Pearce: One of the issues involved an issue of timing—waiting for a response to the select committee’s report, which came out on the same day as the budget. There is a commitment to a women’s action plan and to a process for furthering women’s issues, of which we are wholly supportive. While a number of those issues are articulated in the report of the select committee, they are issues that have been around for a long time.

MRS DUNNE: One thing that becomes clear in your submission and that has become clear to me in my discussions with organisations like Toora Women Inc is that there is an increasing demand on the sorts of services that are provided by Toora. In your discussions with the government has there been any recognition of the blowout in the average length of stay in assisted accommodation and things like that? Has there been any recognition by the government of the bottleneck that that creates in the system? Even

if no funding has been provided, have there been any fruitful discussions about the way ahead?

Ms Pearce: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Or is it the case that you are not even getting to first base?

Ms Pearce: That is the understanding. We have been talking with government and departmental representatives for some time now about the number of people who are being turned away from crisis housing accommodation. We are starting to put forward some proposals about transitional accommodation—issues that were also identified in the homelessness needs report, in the report of the Select Committee on the Status of Women and in a number of other documents. Some of that work is also being done by the Homelessness Advisory Group, which is developing a homelessness strategy for the ACT. So there is certainly discussion about and a comprehension of the issues.

That brings me to the next point that we made in our submission. An amount of \$2.4 million was allocated in the budget for homelessness, which is fantastic. That really great move by the government clearly indicates some support for this crisis and recognition of the fact that there is a crisis. None of that money has been specifically allocated to single women. Given that crisis houses are currently turning away 600 to 700 women each year, it is unfortunate that there is no recognition of that fact.

The whole idea of having mental health outreach workers is to prevent a number of women using crisis beds when they could be better supported in their own homes. This is all about freeing up crisis beds and securing some exit points so that people can move on and so that we can reduce the average length of stay, which is increasing significantly because of the lack of any transitional housing, the lack of outreach workers and the shortage of places for people to go post-crisis accommodation.

MRS CROSS: Last week, one of the issues that I pursued with ministers and with departmental staff was that of empire building. I asked the minister some questions about women's initiatives. The minister, who has been in the job for only a short while, has a strong commitment to women's issues because she chaired the committee of which I was a member. I was concerned that no senior executive officers were running the Office for Women. The staff that were present at the Estimates Committee meeting said that they reported through Mr Manikis to Mr Tonkin. It was my impression that they had been directed not to put in any submissions, given the budget constraints and given the fact that we had just had the bushfires.

MRS DUNNE: That was the feeling I got too.

MRS CROSS: Thank you, Mrs Dunne. Present company excluded, it is difficult for some men in positions of power to understand the needs of women unless they have had a look at what is being done at a number of these facilities and they are aware of the severity of women's problems. It is difficult for some men in this empire building process to make decisions about the allocation of money. The inequity in the disbursement of funds confirms the assumption that Mrs Dunne and I had when questioning some of these people. If the government truly wants to show its commitment to women's issues, it should appoint a woman to the senior executive service who is able

to report to the Chief Minister and thus address the severity of women's issues in this community.

Ms Pearce: I am not sure whether I can comment on that. The Office for Women is a small office with a small staff. The government should have some sort of on-the-ground commitment to these issues. Having an Office for Women is fantastic, and that is something that has occurred recently. That indicates a commitment by the government to these issues, which we have not had in the past. Toora, which is supportive of those changes, was pleased to see government support for those issues. However, I think it needs to be noted that the Office for Women, which is a small office, is asked to do many things.

THE CHAIR: The chart on page 6 of your submission reflects that \$6.7 million was spent on services for men but that only \$666,000 was spent on services for women. What percentage of women and men are in mental health care? Is it a ratio of 50:50, or are there more men in the system?

Ms Pearce: There are some statistics, but I do not know them off the top of my head. Some work has been done on the new mental health strategy. Whilst there is a real lack of gender analysis or a breakdown of usage statistics, they do exist. In some areas women are much more highly represented. There are a number of areas, for example, depression and borderline personality disorders, in which women predominate as service users. Another critical issue that has been researched over the last few years involves a number of women with mental health issues who are isolated in the ACT community.

It is difficult to gain access and obtain the numbers relating to those women. We have an attachment to our submission that reflects a slightly more detailed breakdown of those services. It also breaks down the number of people who are using different services. A number of services are allocated on demand. If a man is using a service a woman cannot access that service for safety and security reasons. So some of those sorts of issues exist but it is difficult to document them.

THE CHAIR: You said that it is difficult to gain access to a number of women in the community. Why is that?

Ms Werner: Some women are extremely isolated in the community for a number of reasons. That might be because they have a disability or they come from a cultural or religious background that results in isolation. It might be because of poverty or because a young mother who is at home with her children has no transport. There are a number of reasons for that. Some work has been done in the ACT to identify those extremely isolated and marginalised women.

MS MacDONALD: The Office for Women is a fairly new organisation in the Chief Minister's Department, is it not?

Ms Pearce: It is, yes.

MS MacDONALD: When was it established?

Ms Pearce: I cannot remember. It might have been a couple of years ago.

Ms Werner: I am not sure. Prior to that there might have been a women's advisory position.

MS MacDONALD: Do you know whether it was established under the previous government or under this government?

Ms Pearce: I cannot recall.

Ms Werner: No.

MRS DUNNE: I am pretty sure it was established under this government.

MS MacDONALD: Prior to the establishment of the Office for Women, how did Toora Women Inc and other women's organisations go about lobbying on behalf of women?

Ms Pearce: We went about it in the same way we do now.

MS MacDONALD: But did you specifically target the women's adviser?

Ms Pearce: No. We have a connection with the Office for Women, given that it has departmental representatives. From our perspective it is much more important to talk to members of the Legislative Assembly. When we are raising the sorts of issues that we are raising we normally direct our energy much more towards Assembly members. We keep departmental members informed of what we are doing rather than specifically targeting them.

MS MacDONALD: So you target members of the Legislative Assembly but obviously, from time to time, you need to speak directly to departmental representatives? Have there been any changes to the way in which you have handled lobbying since the establishment of the Office for Women, or has it remained pretty much the same?

Ms Pearce: I am not sure. Toora has a close relationship with that office, which is critically important. I am not sure whether it has made a huge difference to the issue that you are raising. It has made a huge difference to us in having an office that we can ring, in being able to discuss particular issues and in being able to have an input into certain issues. It is probably a broader issue than the issue to which you are referring.

MRS CROSS: I agree; I think it is a great initiative. But is there any point in having an initiative such as that if it is a little like a paper tiger? In other words, it exists but it does not go anywhere. It is there but it is not used or it cannot be used. I asked departmental officers whether they had the power to initiate change or to make effective changes and, for the next 10 minutes, the conversation was taken over by a male who was responsible for that area. I asked why it was that none of the women who were present at that hearing contributed to that conversation.

It is good to have an Office for Women. I congratulate whoever came up with such a good initiative. However, there is no point in having such a section or such a department if, like a paper tiger, it is not effective. You said it is a small office but, irrespective of its size, I would like to know whether you could go to people in that office, ask them for something, and achieve results? Have you been able to go to them

and say, “I really need this”, and they, believing that they have the power or the authority, have said to you, “You have got it”? Has that happened?

Ms Pearce: Given that the Office for Women exists, I hope that is something that we can build upon. It is important to expand that office and to build on what already exists. From our perspective, we are concerned about the fact that mental health outreach workers for women have not been funded in the budget. No initiatives for single women were included under the homelessness strategy. From my perspective and from the perspective of Toora that is a real concern. We are turning women away. We are accepting referrals for women who have managed to secure housing and who have then lost that housing because there was no support for them when they had some sort of mental health crisis.

MRS CROSS: Mrs Dunne referred earlier to the fact that you were turning away 600 to 700 women every year. It speaks volumes that the funding for men is \$929,000 as opposed to \$190,000 for women.

Ms Pearce: Yes, we think so.

MR HARGREAVES: If that is right.

Ms Werner: We asked the department directly—I think we also asked the government this question—“Why should the entire amount of \$240,000 for the supported accommodation initiative that was announced in the budget not go to women?” Even if that were the case and the entire amount for that new initiative went to women, the vast proportion of money would still go to men.

THE CHAIR: You said earlier that women secure housing but then lose it because of additional problems. When you said that women were securing housing, is that in ACT Housing, in the private housing sector, or both?

Ms Pearce: It would be primarily in ACT Housing, or moving in with friends and all those sorts of things. Whilst the private rental market is accessed by a percentage of women who come through crisis accommodation it is certainly not an exit point that is available to many women.

THE CHAIR: If they secure housing with ACT Housing why would they then lose that accommodation? What sorts of circumstances might lead to that?

Ms Pearce: One of the things about a mental health crisis is the lack of capacity to manage the rest of your life. You might not be paying your rent any more. You might not be opening your mail to find that you are in arrears and that you are about to be taken before the Residential Tenancies Tribunal. These people do not have the capacity to function in the world. They need someone who can call on them, give them some sort of support and ask, “How are you going? How is your medication? Do you want the phone number for mental health?” Someone might even say, “How would you feel if I had a look at this letter from housing? It looks like you have a big pile of mail that has not been opened for the last two weeks. Do you know that you are just about to be evicted?” If people have lost their ability to function in the world many of those things would just go by the wayside.

MRS DUNNE: This morning I asked another organisation a question relating to a body of work—a question that I think bears repeating. The government and various committees produce a number of bodies of work. At the end of the day smug legislators and public servants say, “We have a body of work.” However, you are saying that you are not actually seeing any results in the way of funding. Are you as cynical as I am that these bodies of work are sufficient for a number of people who believe that that is all they need to do? Are you sufficiently cynical as to believe that these people are prepared to do all that work but that no funding is allocated as a result?

Ms Werner: It is enormously frustrating to us that, over recent years, different governments have invested significant resources in a number of consultations that have all pointed to one clear need—that is, mental health outreach workers for women. But that need has again been overlooked. As a community agency that is called upon to be involved in these quite extensive consultation processes, we begin to wonder what is the point of it. The government is getting clear messages about the need but it does not seem to listen at the funding stage.

MRS DUNNE: This is a subjective question. When a motion was passed unanimously in the Assembly that we should fund this venture, did you sit back and think, “That is fine. We are home and hosed”, as that was in the run-up to the budget? You are aware that there was no budget submission from the Office for Women. You said you were surprised but were you disappointed?

Ms Pearce: Whilst the motion that went through the Assembly was encouraging, I do not think we said, “Good, it is in the bag.” I just do not think that you would ever do that. As the Office for Women is important there is a need for some possible changes and that office needs to be strengthened. I do not want to make a comment here that might put it in jeopardy in any way. We align ourselves with that important office in many ways because it is working towards the same sorts of objectives that we are working towards. It is important to acknowledge our support for that office. I am not sure why that office did not put in a submission. I do not feel that I can comment on that. I do not know whether Kim wants to add anything.

MRS CROSS: Our comments are not a negative reflection on the office. We support the women who run that office. We think that they are doing a fine job. We believe that the powers that be above them might be the problem.

MR HARGREAVES: Not all of us happen to have the same view. That is an issue that can be determined at the deliberative stage of the meeting.

THE CHAIR: Do either of you wish to make a closing statement on behalf of Toora Women Inc?

Ms Pearce: No. Thank you for your time. It was good to be able to present issues of concern to us.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your participation. The committee will hear next from representatives from the New South Wales/ACT Independent Education Union.

You should understand that these hearings, which are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, are protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but it also places on you certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. The Assembly will treat as a serious matter the giving of false or misleading evidence.

Your evidence today is being recorded by Hansard staff, who will prepare the committee's transcript of proceedings. It is therefore necessary for you to speak clearly into a microphone when you answer questions. It would assist committee staff and departmental officers if witnesses clearly state when a question is being taken on notice. I welcome representatives from the New South Wales/ACT Independent Education Union. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr Fotheringham: I do not.

THE CHAIR: Ms Groom, would you like to make a statement?

Ms Groom: No.

THE CHAIR: I am not sure whether I have seen a submission from the New South Wales/ACT Independent Education Union. Are there any dilemmas in the budget that are of concern to the union?

Mr Fotheringham: In general terms we believe that the budget could have been more helpful to the independent school sector; in particular, the Catholic diocesan sector and the Christian school area. Some schools in the ACT are fairly adequately resourced but a lot of schools are in some difficulty. We believe that more assistance could have been given to those schools.

THE CHAIR: On what would that monetary assistance have been spent?

Mr Fotheringham: There are three areas about which we have concerns. Our first concern relates to class sizes in the K to 3 area. I am not sure what the figures are for the ACT but I know that a recent survey in New South Wales has shown that about 15 per cent of diocesan sector schools have over 30 students. That would be reflected more in the ACT than it would be in New South Wales generally. Considerable assistance has been given to the public sector to reduce class sizes. However, we are not convinced that equitable assistance has been given to the more needy schools in the independent sector.

The upshot of that is that Catholic diocesan schools got about \$300,000 this year from the budget which was to be directed to K to 3 classes. We believe that that budget allocation could have been directed more urgently towards the reduction of class sizes. However, we are concerned about the fact that, at the moment, it has not been dedicated to reducing the size of K to 3 classes. That group has not been targeted. Our second area of concern relates to the abolition of the interest rate subsidy.

The union's view is that, while we find it difficult to justify the extent to which interest rate subsidies have been given to certain schools in the ACT—I think four schools will benefit to the extent of about \$12 million over the period to 2018—if we look at the more needy schools we see that they have really received the rough end of the deal. I think the Catholic diocesan system has about \$2.7 million, which covers the entire network of 26 schools in the ACT. We have a significant problem with that.

The third area of concern relates to the funding formula. I do not wish to go into a great deal of detail on the funding formula because I do not pretend to have a detailed understanding of it. But my understanding is that about 17 per cent of school costs are met in the ACT, as opposed to 25 per cent by the New South Wales government. The current government just continued with the formulas that were put in place by the previous government. Those are the three broad areas of concern.

THE CHAIR: Is New South Wales meeting 25 per cent of school costs?

Mr Fotheringham: I think the figure is close to if not precisely 25 per cent. As I said earlier, I do not particularly want to go into great detail in that area because I am not across that detail. However, I signal it as a concern. I do not wish to put it higher than that.

THE CHAIR: On Friday we put it to the minister that, rather than cancelling the interest subsidy scheme, consideration should be given to making the scheme more appropriate for schools that have lesser funding and that are less well off. Do you think that is a good idea, or should the scheme be open to all those who are able to access it?

Mr Fotheringham: No. Basically, that is what we have put to the government and to commerce. As I said at the outset, just a brief examination of the figures shows that one school will benefit almost twice as much as the entire Catholic diocesan system. We have a range of subsidies from \$5.038 million down to \$32,000 in the case of one Catholic congregational school.

THE CHAIR: So it is unfair to cancel the whole scheme simply because of this bias.

Mr Fotheringham: That is the view that we have put. As I said earlier, we find it difficult to justify the nature of the scheme as it is operated, but there are merits in this scheme. The Catholic diocesan system will still need to build classrooms and schools. If we look down the track a little at the logic of a reduction in class sizes we see that we not only need more teachers; we also need more classrooms. You need the bricks and mortar to support the reduction.

THE CHAIR: That is something that the ACT government system can support, given the excess capacity in the system. Given the size of classes in the non-government sector already, it might flow over into a need for the construction of additional classrooms.

Mr Fotheringham: That is right. We think we are pushing the limits on good education for our children, given that we have a large number of class sizes, in particular, in the growing areas. For example, there are well over 30 in the diocesan system.

THE CHAIR: The two areas that are of concern to me relate to information technology funding and disability funding. When both issues we raised in the lead-up to the last election certain commitments were made. Do you believe that your sector is getting fair access to funds for both issues?

Mr Fotheringham: I think we are getting access to more funding, but I am not sure whether we will ever be satisfied with the amount that we are getting. The need is actually increasing. Ms Groom and I recently visited Canberra Girls Grammar School and it is interesting that I am using Canberra Girls Grammar School in a slightly different context. Recently that school had to meet certain expenses just to put in wheelchair access to classrooms because the school is built on the side of a hill.

I think Radford College has done similar things. If governments are going to shift their responsibility for children with difficulties into schools, there has to be a concomitant recognition that funding is required to meet that additional cost. I think that has been done by governments for six or seven years but I do not think that recognition has necessarily been carried with it.

Ms Groom: I do not think that funding for students with disabilities should be different from funding for students who access other education facilities. As we pointed out when we spoke to Lyndsay Connors, if governments state that students with disabilities can go to schools of their choice, it is incumbent on those governments to provide funding for those students wherever they go.

MRS DUNNE: Two issues are involved. Recurrent funding and capital expenditure make it possible for a child to attend school. You spoke earlier about Radford College and about Canberra Girls Grammar School but I—and I am sure Mr Smyth—am aware of the money that has been spent at St Clares College to put in lifts and things like that. Schools have to meet substantial costs because a new body of case law states that you can no longer use as an excuse the fact that you do not have facilities in place. It is not just recurrent funding that is high; there also has to be capital assistance.

Mr Fotheringham: Yes, we would agree with that. We believe that it was an exercise of aggregate shifting and responsibility shifting. That has been the case for some time. The point that you made is quite accurate. If you are to have responsibility for the children concerned, you need requisite recurrent funding for teaching support. You also need initial capital funding for whatever you have to do to the buildings, or to the grounds for that matter, to make them student ready. I think the chair asked another question about information technology?

THE CHAIR: Yes. Mr Hargreaves has a follow-up question, so I will deal later with information technology.

MR HARGREAVES: I understand and appreciate the difficulties that are being experienced by an old school such as Canberra Girls Grammar School, which was built on a side of a hill at a time when wheelchairs were not used as frequently as they are today. However, I suggest that Radford College, which was built only recently, should not be putting forward the same sort of excuse. Kids with physical disabilities have not just suddenly appeared; we have known about them for quite some time. It is an exercise in choice. When schools determine their refurbishment and capital works programs for

the next four to five years they will have to take into account many things, in particular, the emerging increase in the number of disabled children.

I express a lack of sympathy for those schools that have a significant amount of money but, as Mr Smyth would know, I have a lot of sympathy for Catholic schools such as St Clare of Assisi parish primary school, which I know is struggling. That school, which does not have much money, organises working bees about which other schools can only dream. I have yet to be convinced that those disabled kids suddenly appeared in the non-government sector. I do not think they did.

Mr Fotheringham: I used Radford College as an example because I have been to that college and I have seen the work that it is doing. It is for Radford College to explain to the committee why it did not do 15 years ago what it is doing it now. I do not see myself as an apologist for Canberra Girls Grammar School or for Radford College; I gave those schools as examples. You could go to virtually any school and find that there are problems in relation to its structure. Schools were not built to cope with the needs of disabled children. Radford College, which is relatively a new school, was built before these pressures were evident.

THE CHAIR: Is Radford College about 15 years old?

Mr Fotheringham: It is about 15 or 16 years old.

THE CHAIR: Did that body of case law and black letter law emerge in the past five or six years?

Mr Fotheringham: It emerged subsequently. I take Mr Hargreaves' point. These changes have not happened suddenly; they have been progressive. As I indicated earlier, I think there has been a progressive shift of financial responsibility. That is fine. I do not have a problem with it if there is a concomitant shift of financial funding. We do not believe that there has been.

MR HARGREAVES: One issue that I have not completely come to grips with is the notion of a loading for kids with specific needs, whatever they might be, for example, English as a second language, cultural differences or disabilities. There is a notion that a loading should follow those kids to whatever school they go and there are the obvious management headaches that that would bring with it. I am struggling with that notion and with the notion of equity because I think they are intertwined. In my view, that will be difficult to manage. You referred earlier to the interest subsidy scheme, so you might give me your views in relation to this notion.

I gained the distinct impression that, under the former regime, the beneficiaries of this scheme were those schools with a history of collateral behind them that could embark on building projects and that could soak up a lot of the money that was available from the interest subsidy scheme. Smaller schools, for example, Montessori schools, St Clare of Assisi parish primary school and other schools along those lines that did not have huge assets behind them and that were not able to say, "We want to build an extra classroom or do this, that or the other", actually got very little from that interest subsidy scheme.

If that scheme is wiped out and the money is distributed equitably across all schools, the choice would rest with the schools as to whether or not to apply that funding to further capital works, minor new works, or whatever they believed to be the most appropriate project. Do you want to comment on that? That appears to me to be a more equitable way of doing it.

Mr Fotheringham: We started from the proposition that we found it difficult to justify the way in which a number of schools had benefited with the way in which a number of schools had not benefited. We noted the government's undertaking to redirect savings from this scheme back into the independent education sector. We hope that that is the case. We would hate to see the money dissipated into other areas. An immediate area into which we believe it could well be redirected would be a reduction in K to 3 class sizes, in the same way that government schools are reducing their class sizes.

One thing gives us cause for concern. When the school bus scheme was abolished the impression that we had—and we know that impressions can be misleading—was that the \$27 million would be equitably redirected between the public and independent sectors. We had no difficulty with that, but I think the wash-up reflected that the independent sector got in the vicinity of \$1 million, or a little over \$1 million of that \$27 million. We are not absolutely sure where the other \$25 or \$26 million went. We suspect that most of it went back into the public sector rather than into the independent sector.

MR HARGREAVES: That is another issue. That is the background against which all these other decisions were taken.

Mr Fotheringham: We noted that the government said the money would be redirected back into independent education. We would be pleased to see any savings.

MR HARGREAVES: Believe it when you see it.

Mr Fotheringham: But we want to see it on the ground.

MR HARGREAVES: That is a fair comment.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Fotheringham, would you be surprised to learn that at least \$250,000 per year is allocated to cleaning and to providing toilet paper in preschools?

Mr Fotheringham: I am not aware of that.

MRS DUNNE: Would you be surprised to learn that that is the case?

Mr Fotheringham: I can only state that I am not aware of it. I do not know whether it is a question of being surprised. I do not know whether or not it is appropriate. I could not comment on that.

THE CHAIR: One of the big pushes in the lead-up to the election was better information technology funding for the non-government sector. I know that some funding has gone from the government to information technology in the Catholic systemic system. Do independent schools believe that they have received a fair share?

Mr Fotheringham: Bus money was redirected into the independent sector largely as a result of the information technology grant made to the Catholic Education Office. We see that as a positive step forward, but we are not sure where that leaves disadvantaged Christian schools in the sector. It is unclear to me exactly how much they got. I think the diocesan system got virtually all the funding. I am not criticising the diocesan system. It put in a request, it lobbied and it got the money.

MR HARGREAVES: If you do not ask, you do not get.

Mr Fotheringham: That is fine. When looking at the overall introduction of information technology into the non-government sector we gained the impression that a lot more could be done for both students and staff who are working in that sector. It is one thing to provide computers, but it is another thing to provide training and to get people up to speed on how to use equipment. We think there is an urgent need for more equipment. We think there is an even greater need to train staff to use that equipment.

MR HARGREAVES: I do not mean to detract from what you are saying because it is quite right. However, information technology is one of those sorts of bottomless pits. There will never be enough money to address education information technology needs, as it is a fast-emerging and expensive requirement. It would be almost impossible for any government to satisfy those needs.

Mr Fotheringham: That is certainly one view.

MR HARGREAVES: I am not suggesting for a moment that one should not try or be reasonable about it. Against that background it will be an expensive component of education in the future.

Mr Fotheringham: I would agree with that view. I am certainly not minimising the cost. A lot of teachers in independent schools have to wait in line to access computers. Most secondary schools in the diocesan system moved across to computerised reporting. A large number of people are not trained in how to do their computerised reports. It might sound ridiculous that they can do their reports at home but they are not quite sure how to download them into the reporting system that is used in the schools. So they have to wait in line to do them on the school computers. That means that the sixth or eighth person waiting to use the computers largely would be doing it in his or her own time and at night. I agree with you. Not everybody's needs would be met. By the time you had met everybody's needs you would need to do it all again. At the moment we are not even at the threshold.

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, it is a big issue.

THE CHAIR: Do you believe that your sector has been adequately heard by the Connors inquiry? Have your needs been accurately represented in the report? Did the government respond after having listened to your needs?

Mr Fotheringham: In relation to Connors I think we were looking for some improvement in the percentage of funding that was met by the ACT government. The government did not meet its percentage of funding because it chose not to change the formulas. I think Connors also had some views about changing the formulas and the

dangers related to that, as the ACT is moving independently of the national MCEETYA forum. We understand that there are some difficulties there.

The main point that we put to Connors was that she should not approach the independent sector as having five-star hotels. You might have one five-star hotel in the ACT but you would also have a lot of bed and breakfasts. You have to go through the doors of the bed and breakfasts, get beyond the foyer and have a look at what is being provided in the classrooms. We believe Connors took that into account.

Ms Groom: We also hope that the government takes note of point 8 in our submission to the Connors inquiry. We believe that greater transparency is needed in relation to the real cost of education. Some mechanism should be put in place to enable funding to be allocated to the areas of greatest need. I refer to what Mr Fotheringham said earlier. We were disappointed that there was no increase in the amount of funding provided by this government for students in the non-government sector.

Mr Fotheringham: Connors's fifth recommendation was that the ACT government should give priority in future ACT budgets to additional expenditure on government schooling in a number of areas, first, continued reductions in class sizes in early primary years. We have taken on board the fact that money has been allocated to K to 3 classes, but that money has not been targeted at reducing class sizes as such. In other words, schools get the money and, as long as they devote that money to K to 3, class sizes do not have to change. We believe there should be a lot more accountability.

THE CHAIR: In the government sector or in the non-government sector?

Mr Fotheringham: In the non-government sector. We believe there should be a lot more accountability from the non-government sector. The thing that the non-government sector hates the most is the thought of parliaments looking over its shoulder to establish what it is doing. We would like to see more accountability. I think there is more accountability in the public sector. We would like that accountability reflected in the independent sector.

MR HARGREAVES: I wish to clarify a question that was asked earlier by Mr Smyth. As I understand it, he was looking for a twofold response. You were asked whether you believed that the advice you had given had been accepted and picked up by the government. Clearly, the answer to that question is no. I do not think anyone has any doubts in relation to that issue. When you were putting forward your case did you feel as though you had a fair hearing? Did you have an opportunity to put forward your case, accepting the fact that the government did not pick up what you wanted it to pick up?

Mr Fotheringham: It did not pick up all of what we wanted it to pick up.

MR HARGREAVES Did all those who are experts in their field have an opportunity to put forward their case without prejudice?

Mr Fotheringham: There is no question that we had a fair opportunity to put our case to the Connors inquiry. We did that on a number of occasions and in a number of ways. Connors gave us feedback along the way before the report was finalised. We, and a number of other organisations, had an opportunity to make follow-up and clarifying

submissions where that was necessary. We had an opportunity to speak to the government after the report was issued. So we have no difficulties with the consultation side of the exercise.

MRS DUNNE: The government just did not just listen to you.

Mr Fotheringham: Let me be clear about this. The government did not meet every request that we made of it. It does not mean that it did not meet a number of requests; it just means that it did not meet every request. We made some key requests on which we would have liked more detail and in some areas we would have liked more money from the government. The K to 3 request is a good example. We asked for additional resources and additional resources were given to us. We could argue subsequently about the amount of those resources and the targeting of them.

MR HARGREAVES: So the government did listen. It just did not agree with you, which is the way it works.

Mr Fotheringham: Governments rarely agree on everything that unions ask for.

MR HARGREAVES: Indeed, in particular, Labor governments.

Mr Fotheringham: I would not say that.

MRS DUNNE: The K to 3 initiative in the budget for non-government schools is \$370,000 but the K to 2 initiative in the 2001 budget was \$2.5 million for the government school sector. Last year another \$1 million was allocated to extend that to year 3. So you are looking at about \$3.5 million for K to 3 in the government school sector and \$370,000—about one-tenth—for 30 per cent of kids in the non-government school sector. That equates to about 30 per cent of kids in non-government primary schools and about 60 per cent, or two-thirds, of kids in government schools.

Mr Fotheringham: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Quantum funding is just not there. Non-government schools do not get that amount. They get one-tenth of the money.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for your attendance.

Mr Fotheringham: I just make one apology. Normally our representative at these hearings is Mr Christopher Watt. Mr Watt, who is ill today, was unable to attend. I hope we have done him justice.

Short adjournment

THE CHAIR: The committee now welcomes the Catholic Education Commission to the table in the form of Mr John Barker.

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 action,

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.

Today your evidence is being recorded by Hansard to prepare the committee's transcript of proceedings. It is therefore necessary for you to speak clearly into a microphone when you answer questions. It would assist the committee's staff and departmental officers if witnesses would also state clearly when a question is being taken on notice.

It would also greatly assist in the preparation of the transcript if witnesses would state their full names and the capacities in which they are appearing on the first occasion they give evidence. John, would you like to give an introduction on behalf of the Catholic Education Commission?

Mr Barker: I would, thank you. First of all, thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation today and, second, I wish to apologise for Mr Geoff Joy, who is unable to be here today.

The commission has presented a formal submission to the committee. I will just talk to that and perhaps add to it or answer any questions. Prior to the budget, the Catholic Education Commission sought funding support in five key areas. It sought funding for students with disabilities, a progressive increase in general per capita grants equal to 25 per cent of the ACT government's per student costs, a more equitable allocation of funding for early childhood initiatives, additional funding support for information and communications technologies and the retention of the interest subsidy scheme with the distribution of the funding from that scheme made on a needs basis.

First, the commission appreciates the additional funding support in the budget for early childhood initiatives in non-government schools. However, none of the other areas for which the commission sought support were addressed within the budget. Two days later, however, the government announced the scrapping of the interest subsidy scheme in releasing its response to the Connors inquiry into ACT education funding.

The Stanhope government gave a pre-election commitment to distribute the \$27 million from the previous government's free school bus scheme between the government and the non-government school sectors on the basis of need. In the two Stanhope government budgets so far, over \$28 million has been allocated to new education initiatives in government schools and only \$2.5 million to non-government schools, of which about \$2.2 million over four years would have been allocated to Catholic schools. Despite the government's media release which states that it has honoured its commitment to education, the government has not honoured its pre-election commitment to the parents of 17,000 students in Catholic schools.

There are two areas of real concern within the budget that I wish to specifically identify. First is the funding needs of students with disabilities in Catholic schools. That appears to have been ignored within the budget. These students are the only students that are currently assessed on the basis of need and therefore additional funding for the cost of these students should be the same regardless of the school involved.

Second is the scrapping of the interest subsidy scheme from 1 July. This will have an immediate impact on the financial capacity of Catholic schools and communities to develop and refurbish school facilities. There is no indication, either in the budget or in the response to the inquiry, as to how funding from this scheme is to be reallocated and, in any case, it will take up to 20 years for the scheme to be finally wound down.

Catholic schools should receive an additional \$300,000 approximately in 2003-2004 from the budget for early childhood initiatives. However, with the scrapping of the interest subsidy scheme and the shortfall in CPI supplementation against real cost increases in education, it is possible that Catholic schools will actually receive less from the ACT government.

While the Catholic Education Commission believes that all issues raised in its pre-budget submission are important, it asks this committee to recommend to the government that it reconsider particularly additional funding for students with disabilities in Catholic schools and the retention of the interest subsidy scheme with distribution to be made on a needs basis.

I would now be happy to answer any questions.

THE CHAIR: All right, thank you, John. I note that the letter signed by Mr Joy says on page 2 that the commission had been working with the government over the last two years to actually establish needs-based criteria for the distribution of the ISS funding. Was there ever any indication that they would just absolutely scrap the scheme outright?

Mr Barker: None at all, other than the recommendation of the Connors inquiry into ACT education funding. The Connors inquiry presented arguments within its report which suggested that the majority of the funding would be allocated to what the minister refers to as the more well-resourced schools.

That was true up to the point that the inquiry looked at the figures but, in the last two years, a ministerial advisory committee was established to look at the distribution of funding within the interest subsidy scheme. The last minister for education in this government, Simon Corbell, gave a direction that the funding from the scheme be distributed on a needs basis and in the last funding round that was the case. Criteria were established and funding was distributed on the basis of need.

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, when was that last funding arranged?

Mr Barker: That looked at the 2002-2003 distribution, so it was decided in mid last year.

MRS DUNNE: While the Connors inquiry was running?

Mr Barker: That's right.

MRS DUNNE: The Connors inquiry didn't look—

Mr Barker: It didn't consider the figures up to that time, no.

MRS DUNNE: What period did the Connors inquiry look at, Mr Barker?

Mr Barker: Bear with me a second. It took funding up to 2001-2002 from what I can see.

MRS DUNNE: But you're saying that the 2002-2003 figure was dealt with in a markedly different way.

Mr Barker: It wasn't marked but there was certainly a variation in how the funding was dealt with. The funding is worth about \$2.8 million a year, but that is loans over 20 years so there's only really about \$200,000 available for new applications each year. So it'll take some time for that to come into effect.

THE CHAIR: If it is only \$200,000, surely that's not a great deal of interest paid compared with the magnitude of the work. Is the scheme just dabbling at the edges or does it really have an impact on the ability of the Catholic education system to deliver in the future?

Mr Barker: It has a real impact. As I said, it's \$2.8 million a year in interest subsidy, so it's large over a long period of time. The \$200,000 is about one year's interest which might be available for new schemes. It really depends on how many applications come into the scheme. The amount of funds is fixed. We would have received last year between \$500,000 and \$600,000 in interest subsidy.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Has the commission made any analysis of the impact of this? Will it result in slowing down the building program? Will it lead to an increase in school fees? Will it lead to a halting of any building?

Mr Barker: We haven't analysed the impact in detail. There are two major impacts. One is on the Catholic system itself, which is responsible for a large part of the funding of Catholic schools, not only the development of new schools but also the refurbishment of existing schools. Many of our schools are 40 years old. Narrabundah is our oldest and Amaroo is our newest.

It impacts on the system but it also impacts on the local community who also put in a contribution to school building and refurbishment projects. The local school community might put in, for example, 30 per cent of a total school building project. They will fund that from loans over a 20-year period, so there's a massive impact directly on the school community, but also on the broader community.

When we're looking at Amaroo, for example, our newest school at Gungahlin, we need to build that on. We can't afford, as the government can, to build a whole school and just plunk it on the site. We have to stage that over a long period of time, over about four or five stages. The total cost for a new school is possibly going to end up being between \$6 million and \$8 million so, as you can imagine, the interest on that would be quite substantial.

THE CHAIR: Will it slow down, for instance, refurbishment programs? I know St Clares recently refurbished a large part of the school to allow access for students with a disability. Will it impinge on your ability to refurbish other schools in that regard?

Mr Barker: Absolutely. We accepted a student with a disability into one of our smaller primary schools last year. In order to do that, we had to spend \$45,000 just to put in some disabled access for that student. To meet the costs for those sorts of things we either have to borrow or we have to increase the levies on parents.

THE CHAIR: The St Clares project benefited from the ISS?

Mr Barker: It would have, yes.

THE CHAIR: So if the subsidies aren't available, you'll obviously have to reassess whether or not such projects go ahead.

Mr Barker: Certainly, and we'll have to reassess whether they go ahead or in what format they can go ahead. As I said, we may have to increase levies on parents in order to be able to do that.

MR HARGREAVES: If the same amount of money is returned across the system then surely it's not a case of just having no money. Isn't it then a choice for the school whether to apply those funds to interest that may be applicable or to something else, at that school's discretion? Isn't that so?

Mr Barker: If that's the case, then that gives us some flexibility on how we do that but, at this stage, we've had no indication as to when and how that money might be returned to the non-government school system.

MRS DUNNE: So we're talking \$200,000 a year between 17,000 kids. It's not very much money but not everybody builds every year. That's the point.

Mr Barker: But eventually we'll be talking \$2.8 million across that number of kids.

MRS DUNNE: None of those kids will be in school when the \$2.8 million becomes available.

Mr Barker: No, I hope we'll have some new ones by then.

MR HARGREAVES: My understanding of what the minister said was that the amount of money that was being applied to the interest subsidy scheme would in fact be applied across the system. So, it is, I think, unreasonable to then discuss the complete absence of it without at least acknowledging that it is a balancing act. And I do accept the point that the previous witness made, and Mr Barker is now making, which is that we'd like to see it happen before we actually commit to it. I accept that.

But I think we need to be a little bit balanced and recognise that there is the commitment there to actually putting the same money back out, it just won't go to people through the same formula that applied before. I have to tell you that I don't know what the formula is that will apply. I take the point that caution needs to be exercised in accepting that formula also. I have no problem with that.

Mr Barker: I accept that. There is a lot of uncertainty in the non-government schools sector with the release of the response to the report and the report. However, the interest subsidy scheme will stop from 1 July. The government's response says "increases resulting from any new per capita funding arrangements developed in due course including the funding arrangements for students with disabilities".

MR HARGREAVES: So the point you're actually making is that you don't like the words "in due course": a date would be preferable. I'd support that, I have to tell you.

Mr Barker: Yes, and that may be the case but, again, it's going to be some time before the interest subsidy scheme is finally wound down and the funds are available for redistribution. We don't know yet but it may be that the funding is targeted for other areas. It would then be unavailable for capital projects.

MR HARGREAVES: My understanding is that, when the minister was asked that question, she said it would be distributed across the schools and it's for the schools to decide. So I can understand your fears, and I can also raise the issue if I don't hear of any transitional arrangements.

THE CHAIR: If the money, though, is spread over—how many schools in the Catholic system?

Mr Barker: There are 34, including the congregation schools.

THE CHAIR: If the money is spread across the 34 schools in the Catholic system—and I'm sure any additional funding is welcome—it won't make a great deal of difference in lifting the percentage from say 17 to the 25 per cent that was the target of the commission.

Mr Barker: Won't come anywhere near it, no.

THE CHAIR: At the same time, having the money spread across the entire network—because not all schools are rebuilding or refurbishing, and there aren't new schools going ahead at the same time—the benefit in terms of the building and refurbishment program will be absolutely lost.

MR HARGREAVES: In regard to that—and this is for my education more than anything, I suppose—who were the major beneficiaries of the interest subsidy scheme last financial year? Do you know which—

Mr Barker: Across the non-government school sector?

MR HARGREAVES: Yes.

Mr Barker: Yes, in the report of the Connors inquiry there is a table and that was certainly the first time I've seen those figures. It is true that the scheme was at a level where there were sufficient funds to allow all applications to be accepted. It was only in the last couple of years that more applications came in than there was available funding for.

MR HARGREAVES: Who were the first five? I have no idea.

Mr Barker: The recipients of the highest funding were Canberra Girls Grammar, Canberra Grammar, followed by the Catholic system in total—which was something like 28 schools—followed by Burgmann College, Radford, Orana, Covenant, Trinity, Marist, Daramalan, St Edmunds and others.

MR HARGREAVES: Thanks, because I didn't know.

MRS DUNNE: If \$200,000 divided between 34 schools is about \$5,800 per school in the first year, what would the Catholic Education Commission do with \$5,800 per school?

Mr Barker: That's \$200,000 additionally per year. As I said, in the last year we have attracted between \$500,000 and \$600,000 in interest subsidy.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, but next year you're not going to attract any money, and instead—

THE CHAIR: Any new money.

MRS DUNNE: Any new money. Instead, you're going to have the money divvied up between you. Actually, it's probably less than \$5,800 because that doesn't count the Christian schools like Covenant or similar. If you are looking at \$5,000 a year per school tops, what would you do with it?

MR HARGREAVES: Has the formula for equitable distribution been determined yet?

MRS DUNNE: No, this is—

Mr Barker: Yes, there has been a formula for distribution of the interest subsidy scheme funds on a needs basis, yes. That was applied—

MR HARGREAVES: That was in the previous government.

Mr Barker: No, that was last year.

MRS DUNNE: Under the previous minister.

Mr Barker: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, and I think there were actually three aspects in there: there was what it was before the change of government, then there was the interim thing that Minister Corbell introduced, and then there was the issue of what this current budget contains, which is "see you later, we're going to do something else".

Mr Barker: Scrap it, that's right, yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Has the formula been developed yet for the distribution of the funds from the scheme that has been scrapped?

Mr Barker: Yes, the criteria have.

MR HARGREAVES: And are they going to average it out at \$5,000 a hit?

Mr Barker: It depends on the projects that come up each year. There's a maximum that any school would be able to receive and that would automatically knock out the more well-resourced schools, as the minister calls them, because they've already reached that cap and they're beyond it. Things like bridging finance have been scrapped from the system or given the very lowest priority. Then, which project should have priority really depends on the school and the type of project submitted.

MR HARGREAVES: So averaging out the actual distribution of the funds per school is really not right. One ought to examine—

Mr Barker: Not per school: it depends on the projects that are in and the number of building projects that are going on at the time, yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Would it appear then, from that formula, that there is a weighting against—we'll use the minister's own term here for the sake of continuity—the well-resourced schools? It's a weighting against that sector, isn't it?

Mr Barker: Yes, it is.

MR HARGREAVES: So it's flipping the thing around the other way, so the poor schools have a better chance at it.

Mr Barker: That's correct, yes.

THE CHAIR: Has there been any analysis of what the changes to the ISS had achieved before it was scrapped? Was the minister's directive that it be directed towards the less well-resourced schools actually being followed?

Mr Barker: There still weren't sufficient funds to meet all the needs. Certainly, the first and second priorities within, I think, a five-stage criterion, were met.

THE CHAIR: I notice that you say in some of the material that you've written and put out that the government has failed to honour its pre-election commitment to distribute the funding, and I think it says, "on a needs basis". When we quizzed the minister on this on Friday, she claimed that the outstanding needs had been met, which has seen 92 per cent of the funding go to the government sector and only 8 per cent go to the non-government. Do you believe that to be a fair reflection of the need in the community?

Mr Barker: I don't know how I or the minister could make a comment on that basis. The pre-election commitment was made to distribute the \$27 million from the bus scheme on a needs basis, following the inquiry into ACT education funding. Certainly, the government met its commitment to having an inquiry. However, in the last budget, the 2002-2003 budget, it distributed \$20 million of that \$27 million to government schools and \$1 million to non-government schools before public submissions to the inquiry were even due.

In the second budget, it distributed another \$8.6 million, I think it was, to government schools and another \$1.5 million to non-government schools before it had responded formally to the inquiry's report. So, as far as I know, there has been no basis of need established on which to make that distribution.

MRS DUNNE: On the subject of the \$27 million, which has become inflated over time, did you know, Mr Barker, that \$250,000 in this year and then half a million dollars next year was being allocated to cleaning and toilet paper and other consumables in the preschool system, out of that money?

Mr Barker: No.

MRS DUNNE: You didn't know that? Are you surprised to learn that?

Mr Barker: No. I noted that the preschools recommendation within the Connor's inquiry had been supported.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, but are you surprised to find this coming out of the \$27 million free school bus money reallocated?

Mr Barker: Surprised is probably not quite the word. Certainly, the commitment was between the government and non-government sectors on a needs basis. I'm not 100 per cent sure whether preschools are part of the school system.

MR HARGREAVES: Well, we are.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that's a good submission. I have one last question. Mr Joy's covering letter says on the third page, "The Stanhope Labor government has failed to honour the principles of MCEETYA's agreed framework of principles for funding schools to which it is a signatory." There are further details of it in the pre-budget submission. Do you want to make any comment on how they have failed?

Mr Barker: Yes, there's an anomaly in the government's acceptance of the recommendations of the Connors inquiry. Recommendation 2 talks about accepting the principles of MCEETYA's national guidelines for schooling. However, the third recommendation is supported, which adopts the principle that the government's primary responsibility is to a well-resourced public education system. The MCEETYA established a schools resourcing task force which set up a number of principles for funding schools. One of those stated that the government has an equal responsibility to all students, regardless of the school or sector they attend. We believe that Simon Corbell signed up, as did all state and territory ministers, to those funding principles, and we believe they haven't been honoured.

THE CHAIR: Any further questions? John, thanks very much. Do you have closing remarks that you'd like to make to the committee?

Mr Barker: Once again, I'd stress that the real needs of students with disabilities in Catholic schools are not being addressed. That's an area of real concern on which we had assumed we had some support prior to the budget, but nothing has happened within the budget.

26 May 2003

THE CHAIR: Thank you, John.

The committee adjourned at 1.18 pm.