

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Members:

**MS K GALLAGHER (The Chair)
MRS H CROSS
MS R DUNDAS**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 29 MAY 2002

**Secretary to the committee:
Mr D Skinner (Ph: 620 50137)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

The committee met at 9.36 am.

CHRISTINA RYAN,

SUSAN MARGARET SALTHOUSE and

DIANA PALMER

were called.

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the committee hearing. I just have to say that these are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, so they are protected by parliamentary privilege, which gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities.

It means that you are protected from legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this 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. There's the warning.

Welcome, and thank you for giving up your time this morning to come and talk to us. You've written kind of a submission, which we have, but maybe you would like to make an opening statement to take it from here.

Ms Ryan: We made a small submission with various dot points just to highlight some of the many areas where women with disabilities experience fairly serious disadvantage of a discriminatory and also systemic kind.

There are several key points that we'd like to raise with you, which I've also outlined in my letter to you covering the submission. They're mainly surrounding the discrepancies that occur in funding allocation to women with disabilities as opposed to men.

We need to make it clear that we do not for a moment suggest that men with disabilities are not deserving of the support that they're getting, because they are, and they certainly also experience grave disadvantage in this society. But our real concern is that there is a very grave discrepancy between men and women in the money that they get and the support that they get. What this does, as a flow-on, is that it actually keeps women with disabilities in the serious poverty that they live in. It denies them social and employment interactions to the point where we're actually almost hidden away and isolated. So it's got all these flow-on effects from that lack of support.

There are two key areas that we think could be concentrated on that could actually change some of this, that could be dealt with now if a political decision was made to deal with them. One of them is in the area of the disability support program run by the health and community services department. About 70 per cent of the clients of that program are men. The number of men and women with disabilities in the population is exactly the same—there's no situation of more men than women having disabilities—but 70 per cent of the clients of that program are men.

Now it is quite probable that that situation has arisen by accident, that there are simply more men that have asked for help, or more men have simply been given it because the money available or the support available at the time was able to be allocated to this person over that person. We think that this is a very good time—with the restructuring that's currently going on in that system—to institute gender analysis. So service providers need to provide statistics on how many men or women they are servicing, the amount of their budget allocation that goes to men or women needs to be identified as well, and the Office of Disability also needs to do this and to collate the information from the service providers. We feel that this may, over time, improve that discrepancy, so that we can approach a closer to 50:50 ratio of people being supported under that program.

The reason that people need support is so they can do things like go out and work, so it has a flow-on economic impact on the community. If people are at home on a pension—and half of all women with disabilities live on a pension according to the latest information that we are able to obtain, as opposed to 35 per cent of men with disabilities. So we're talking about women being on pensions, living in government housing, having a lack of the support services they need, so they're not able to work. If they do work, it's very difficult to maintain the services. Support services like transport might be organised, but to have it consistently organised is a very big impact on whether they are able to continue working or not. So some of those things will benefit women if they gain some of that disability support program money.

One of the other areas that is ripe for dealing with right now is the Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement, and the money that flows through to the territory from that. Again, there is a major discrepancy in the amount of money that women benefit from as opposed to men, and it's about the same ratio. That money does actually flow through to the disability support program, but it also provides employment support services. Some of that was dealt with in the federal budget; they talked about increasing those employment support services to people with disabilities.

The proportion of men getting those employment support services is about 66 per cent, so again women are not getting the support services, so they're not getting the jobs, so they're not able to become economically independent or to contribute to the community—so it's another one of those flow-on effects. One of the tables that we have provided to you shows you some of the flow-on effects. It shows you the discrepancies between men and women's access to the funding allocations, and there's another table that shows you the flow-on effects that arise from women with disabilities being in poverty.

These are some of the issues that we have raised in our submission and that we think need to be addressed—and that need to be understood as being the side-effects of a lack of support by the various programs that are available. There is a much lower rate of home ownership amongst women with disabilities as opposed to men, which means that women with disabilities—50 per cent of whom are living on the pension, remember, or about \$200 a week or that equivalent amount—because they're renting properties, have a higher percentage of their income actually going into rent, so they have less actual money, and that keeps them in poverty.

They are much more likely to experience violence at home or at work, and we know that the rate of violence that women with disabilities experience, which includes rape and abuse, is about twice that of other women in the community. It is a very, very serious area of violence. Some work has been done over the last few years by Women with Disabilities Australia on working with the refuge sector across the country, getting refuges more accessible and getting action plans in place for refuges, but there still needs to be a lot of work done and refuges need a lot of support to make sure that they are able to deal with women with disabilities. There is a much higher likelihood of institutionalisation because women are in poverty and they have fewer options for their housing, so that's a really major factor.

There is still a much greater likelihood of women with disabilities being sterilised against their will, or even with their knowledge. This mainly impacts on women with intellectual disabilities. We know that in recent years the rate is about 1500 a year in this country—still happening; that's the ones we know about. It's something that's happening in this community, and you can do it by going to a private gynaecologist and having it done through the private medical system. There are still methods in place, so don't think that problem has gone away. And, of course, because women with disabilities are living in higher levels of poverty, they have much less capacity to purchase the services that they need to assist them in being independent. That's the lovely picture.

We would like to see gender auditing put in place across the board so that, for all programs and projects and funding allocations to organisations that affect anybody with disabilities in the community, there is some sort of monitoring put in place so that we know that women are gaining benefit from those programs, and that there is some forward plan put in place so that there's an increase in funding so that over time it will increase to 50 per cent. We also want to urge the ACT government to consider the unmet need of women with disabilities when it is talking to the federal government in the CSDA renegotiation process, and we know that there's another telephone hook-up next week between the disability ministers. So there are options there that they can take.

Is there anything you'd like to add, Sue?

Ms Salthouse: Yes, I would like to add, in regard to this particular diagram, that it has other implications that I didn't include there, in that the lower income means that women with disabilities are of course then forced to find accommodation in places where rents are lower. And that pushes them outside the city areas, to the outskirts of Canberra, which means that their ability transport-wise to access jobs, which tend to be in the town centres, is much more difficult. So that's not really brought out there, and that's another thing which tends to force them out of the community and out of an ability to be part of an inclusive and integrated society.

One of the studies that Women with Disabilities undertook in 1999 was that we undertook a profile of women with disabilities in the ACT and region, and this was the first time that a study of this sort had been done. And one of the major things that came out of that was women's feeling of isolation. And you can understand that from that feeling of isolation comes associated depression, which again puts a load on the health services. And so you get into this spiralling situation that, because women are not being supported in an equitable way at the very level of allocation of funding, they then have a cascading effect where they are accessing the funding, but in a negative way when bad

things have happened to them through their lack of income, their isolation, and then the mental health problems that arise from that.

As Christina said, it means also that they're not able to contribute to the life of the community, and there is a lot of potential and a lot of will there. If women with disabilities were getting equitable access to funding to maintain their independence, they would be able to participate more in the life of the community. I think that that's what we're looking towards as a community these days. We are looking at a more inclusive model for people with disabilities in general. And this means, you know, we're constantly at the crusading edge, if you like, in that community attitudes need to be continually revitalised, revamped—reminded that people with disabilities wish to be included on the basis of their abilities, and that the services that are in place, if they were distributed in a more equitable way, would enable women with disabilities to maximise their abilities to a greater degree.

And I would like to emphasise what Christina said, that finding out what sort of budget allocation is being made to women with disabilities, as compared to men with disabilities, would be a relatively easy matter, in that the Office of Disability, as the purchaser within the ACT Department of Health And Community Care, would be able to ask all the service providers to whom they provide money to give them feedback on the allocation of that money. That would be a relatively easy thing to be put in place through the Office of Disability, and Chris Healy, as the interim director of that, should be able to instigate that with relatively little difficulty.

And as Christina said, at the moment, with the disability reform group looking at structural changes to disability services, there's a chance that, with some prompting from the Legislative Assembly, it could be easily put into the policy direction for disability services to have that general auditing process embedded in the new disability services.

The other thing I would like to highlight was that on Monday night, I think, in Tony Delroy's session on *Nightlife*, he had a ¾-hour interview with Rhonda Galbally and Tim Noonan, who are concerned federally with people with disabilities. Rhonda is a lawyer and member of Women with Disabilities Australia, and she had polio in her youth. She highlighted that Australia in general is behind other countries—countries in Europe and the USA—in its representation of people with disabilities on boards and advisory bodies; it has lower percentage numbers of people with disabilities, and certainly lower representation of women with disabilities on advisory boards.

I think that this is an area in which the ACT could show leadership to Australia in general, by taking pro-active steps to look at the composition of their advisory boards, to make sure that there is equitable representation of women with disabilities on those boards, both in disability areas and in general areas in the community. I think those general areas in the community need to be emphasised because, I think that, as a government and as a community, we need to be constantly looking for inclusive models that will assume that people with disabilities take their part in the community and that they are assisted to do so through the mechanisms of support that are there. That's what I'd like to say at the moment.

THE CHAIR: Can I just ask a bit about Women with Disabilities ACT, in terms of what the organisation does. Is it an advocacy organisation, or a rights-based organisation, or part of a broader organisation nationally?

Ms Salthouse: I think it is all those things. Our convenor is Diana Palmer, who is listening to the session here today. Women with Disabilities ACT is a branch of Women with Disabilities Australia. We are concerned at all levels that we support women—it's run absolutely by women with disabilities; it is run for women with disabilities. It acts as a support network for women with disabilities in the community; it acts on a number of levels as an advocacy body. We also seek to act as a lobbying body—hence our presence here today. Diana is involved in many organisations, particularly with AAPAC, looking at access and women's health as well. Christina is a member of the ACT Legislative Assembly's Women's Advisory Panel.

I have been invited to be a nominee for the IT community advisory panel because of the work that I have done with cyber-communities—this is Women with Disabilities Australia work that I've been involved in that flows back to the ACT. I did a considerable amount of work with Women with Disabilities and their use of telecommunications, and have been involved in two studies, one looking at the general population of women with disabilities, and the second, conducted last year, looking at women with disabilities in rural, remote, and regional Australia and their use of and dependence on, but lack of access to, telecommunications.

The other position where we hope to be able to have a lobbying front is that we have a nominee for an interim position on the Disability Advisory Council. So we have a very strong and talented field of people at the lobbying front. Our other arm is just to give general support to women with disabilities in the community, and to this end we run a social support program where we meet regularly and have women with disabilities in the community meet with us. Sometimes we have speakers; sometimes we look at specific health matters; sometimes we just meet socially. We have a membership of about 35 women with disabilities, and an associate membership of another 15 to 20 organisations with whom we're in contact in the ACT.

Ms Ryan: One of the things that should also be pointed out about Women with Disabilities, both ACT and Australia, is that I think it is the only disability body—there might be one or two others but we don't know of them—that takes all types of disabilities, so we don't have a specific disability sort of field that we target. We target women. For that reason, the work that we do is quite diverse. It's also very challenging. For example, the Deafness Association needs to concentrate mainly on providing resources so that its members gain access to information on that particular disability, but we might have deaf people, we might have blind people, we might have people with access needs that are mobility related et cetera.

With social events, when we have lunch somewhere we have to find somewhere that we can actually all go to, so that the guide dogs don't freak out, so that people with wheelchairs can get in and use the toilet et cetera, and it's almost impossible. It's very, very difficult. So it's quite a challenging group. We do that on little or no money. And I suppose that raises the fact that there is no women's funding program in the ACT. The lack of a women's funding program means that the work we do is voluntary, and of

course we've already outlined to you the poverty scenario for women with disabilities. So we're literally doing that.

The few women that have Internet access do some of that, but of course we're on limited resources as well, so it's quite a strain to actually keep the group functioning, to provide the resources and to be as inclusive as we want to be for the women with disabilities in the community because we do not have any secretariat or infrastructure support. And that wouldn't apply only to our group, but also to other women in disadvantaged circumstances. But it certainly needs to be looked at—a women's funding program I think. And it will provide better quality of information and advice that will also provide greater capacity to encourage representation, for example.

Ms Salthouse: Within that limited funding though, we have undertaken this and another report. In fact, I brought in only two copies, but I will send a third in. Unfortunately, with this, this is the last copy I have, but you might be able to photocopy this and give me back the original.

The peer support program which we ran was innovative in that we enabled a group of women with disabilities to form a peer support group and we led them through—it was an eight-week program where they developed their self-esteem and looked at access avenues within the ACT. It was quite a challenging program, but it worked. It highlights too—and this is a little off the agenda that you have—that there are many instances where choice of programs and choice of ways of including people with special needs are needed. On one hand I'm saying, "Yes we want an inclusive society", but on the other hand in many cases women with disabilities, or people with disabilities, appreciate a forum where it is just people with disabilities, because in that sort of forum they're in a situation where they can operate on an equal footing.

When you're an inclusive situation you're always behind the eight-ball, if you like. You're always putting in the extra energy to get there on time. If you've got an intellectual disability you're always made to feel—not made to feel, but can always feel the fall guy. So there's need for different lines of services operating, or delivery of things to operate.

Ms Ryan: Can I just say there that that raises something which I think should be considered fairly paramount for any government—that in the ACT there is no government agency that has a disability action plan.

This is of some concern. A disability action plan is a formal document that outlines how over time an agency, department or whatever will make itself more accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities. And the only thing that the human rights commission has lodged with it from the ACT is part of the accessible transport strategy, which is a national strategy based around the transport standards. So it's not even something that the ACT developed; it's more of a national thing that we've just got a sort of branch of. There should be a disability action plan for every single government department, as there is federally, and there should be one for every single agency.

We're also in a position where we can insist that providers of government services—you know, where the government purchases their services—could also have some level of disability action plan. It could be encouraged as part of their funding agreements. To do

this is not a difficult process, although it can take a bit of consultation, but it would provide a level of capacity for people with disabilities to actually relate to the government and all of its processes and agencies. And that isn't there at the moment. It would be very interesting to know just how many of the websites are fully accessible for people with disabilities, and I bet you that there are limitations on all of them. So that's one area that can be overcome.

One of the other things that Women with Disabilities has been discussing amongst our membership recently is the actual make-up of the Disability Advisory Council. And the reason that we have done this is that we, as an organisation, do not have a representative, but some of our members have been representatives on that committee. We would like to see the advisory council increased in number. We think it is too small. For example, the Women's Advisory Council has about 15 members; the Disability Advisory Council is half that size.

We would like to see a majority of the members of the council being people with disabilities—we think that is very important—and we would like to see half of the people with disabilities being women. And we think that's very important. The reason we raise the increase in size is that the diversity of people with disabilities is quite high. Even all of us who come with wheelchairs are very different and have very different needs and life experiences that impact on our capacity to interact with the community.

We feel that an increase of the council—you know, adding maybe another four or six people—would actually provide a capacity for there to be that diversity amongst the people with disabilities, and for the women to actually not just be one single woman representing all women with disabilities in the ACT, which is the situation we are in today. It's not satisfactory, and it puts a lot of pressure on that single woman. The Women's Advisory Council obviously has a much broader membership, and there's a recognition that it takes more than four women to represent the women of the ACT. So we need to re-examine that model for an advisory council, and I think we need to do that urgently because the membership is currently in a state of transition.

MRS CROSS: I agree in part with why you are wanting to increase the number. I would be concerned about increasing it, though, to reflect the diversity of disability, because there are so many categories of disability that, if we were to use that as a premise for increasing the number, where would it stop?

Then you would have accusations of, "Hang on a minute, why did you pick this one?" For example, the Women's Advisory Council that you're on at the moment, that has a very large number, and it's got a great representation. Some people say it's too big. In fact, I've heard this from a lot of people. I serve on a number of boards that vary in numbers, but I know that we came down with a decision on one board to limit the representation to, I think, 11 because number doesn't equate to effectiveness and better outcomes.

Ms Salthouse: Look, I agree. Certainly we're not advocating that there be representation of every disability category, because it would be impossible. But what we are advocating is a slight increase in the committee—and I think 11 as you've said is a good number, because—

MRS CROSS: That was just an example.

Ms Ryan: Yes, in fact it's a number we can discuss.

Ms Salthouse: It's certainly up to you, but I think what we're asking for is an examination of the viability of six as a number. Now at the moment, that consists of—well, it did consist of four people with disabilities, of whom two were men and two were women, and then one carer of a person with a disability, and then a representative of a large service provider organisation. And the balance was there, but the diversity was not there.

I think then, due to circumstances, one of the women had to resign. And the Disability Advisory Council has had its term extended. They were nominated and selected for a two-year term—and I'm not quite sure what has happened within the department of health in that their term has now been extended until February 2003, which means they will have been the sitting council for three years and two months. And this has led to the resignation of the second woman member, because she has other commitments and just can't keep going for that time.

So, at the moment, I know they've just had a meeting where they have called for nominations to fill those interim positions, and that's currently with Jon Stanhope. But that's with the numbers at six. I'm just surmising here that the extension has been so that the Disability Reform Group can do its work and it may be that out of the Disability Reform Group's work there will come recommendations for an ongoing Disability Advisory Council. I'm not sure if that's the reasoning, but it could be.

Ms Ryan: There's some further parts of that. For example, if the council was 11 and, say, eight of those were people with disabilities, increasing the numbers of women from two to four, you're obviously going to have a greater experience level amongst four women with disabilities than you get with two. It's that kind of thing we're talking about, rather than making sure that every disability gets a go.

The other thing that is of note there is that that's a classic example—both the chair and the vice-chair of that committee are men. So, you know, the dynamics—the whole disability sector seems to be run by men; they sort of look after everything. And we in fact as an organisation—and I won't go into any specific details—after putting this submission in to this committee, have been under some pressure from some quarters of the disability sector to retract quite some parts of it. The information in it is not comfortable for some people with disabilities, particularly for men. They don't want to know about these issues. They want to know about ramps at doors and getting onto buses, and that's fair enough; they're important things, but we are concerned about violence and poverty and not being able to get jobs, you know? We think that's important.

So we have refused to change our submission, we have not retracted it, we've provided a copy to the Chief Minister and also to the Disability Advisory Council, and it stands as it goes.

THE CHAIR: Di, if you wanted to come up to the table to speak that's fine.

Ms Palmer: I'm Di Palmer, convenor of Women with Disabilities ACT. I would like to say one thing about meetings. I had a friend who was on a national committee, the only person with a disability, and she said everyone wanted to get her a cup of tea; nobody wanted to discuss issues with her. And that is something we've really got to work hard on, to get people to come around to doing that one thing, talking about issues with us. If there are enough other people with disabilities there, then we are the same as an ordinary person from the street, not a person with a disability that has to be cosseted. I think that's very important.

Ms Ryan: Yes. And if I can just add to that, that's one reason why we can't just increase the representation of women with disabilities on boards and committees and things. That alone is not sufficient. For example, if the chair and the vice-chair of the Disability Advisory Council are men, they have a capacity to control the agenda of that committee, so it is important that women are actually gaining those positions. And, if the chair is a man, then the vice-chair should be a woman. That is something that we should be paying a little bit more attention to and not letting slide.

It's very much like not keeping the statistics. Suddenly we find ourselves in a situation where that situation just developed. We need to be a little bit more aware and controlling of those sorts of things developing, so that we can over time overcome the systemic disadvantage rather than simply expect it to go away one day and not bother us any more, because it's not going to do it.

Ms Salthouse: Yes. I think it's—sorry.

THE CHAIR: It's all right, it's just that we're going to have a couple more minutes, and I know Ros has a question to ask as well.

Ms Salthouse: Okay. This is a quick one, Ros. It's probably relevant here to just outline for you the rationale for the formation of Women with Disabilities Australia, and our own organisation, in that it was realised that the peak consumer bodies for people with disabilities were commandeered or run by men, and that women had very little voice in those consumer bodies.

There is a slight change but it's still relatively true—and that's things like the Physical Disability Council of Australia and the Blind Society, those sorts of things. And at the same time women's groups were also marginalising women with disabilities and going on their own agendas, which were very much needed, but women with disabilities were marginalised in both instances. And that was the rationale for the formation of a group called Women with Disabilities, looking at the whole gamut, or supporting the whole gamut of people with disabilities.

So sorry to intrude there, Ros.

MS DUNDAS: I just have a quick question about the statistics that you've provided us. With regard to the earnings of greater than \$200 and the earnings of greater than \$400, are the earnings of greater than \$400 on top of or within the 200 group?

Ms Salthouse: They're within. So we're looking at 33 per cent of 74 per cent.

MS DUNDAS: Right, so it's within?

Ms Salthouse: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: Okay. So it actually means that there is only—there are 33 then—no.

Ms Salthouse: Yes. It is a little confusing there, and in fact, in preparing this sheet, I turned around some sets of statistics—and these overheads were produced for a seminar that I gave to a net gains conference in 2001. And if you look that the fourth dot point on the second page—

Ms Ryan: Of our submission.

Ms Salthouse: 51 per cent of women with a disability earn less than \$200 per week, and in fact you'll see that I've turned those statistics around.

MS DUNDAS: Okay, yes.

Ms Salthouse: So it's probably easier if you understand it from those, in that 51 per cent of women with a disability earn less than \$200 a week. I turned that round to say 49 per cent earn more than—

MS DUNDAS: So there are 33 per cent of women who are earning somewhere between \$200 and \$400 per week.

Ms Salthouse: Yes, yes, that's correct. I have confused the issue a little bit there by turning those statistics around.

MS DUNDAS: I just wanted to clarify what we were talking about.

Ms Salthouse: And I did that in order to show the in bar graphs that it's just about 2:1 in each instance.

Ms Ryan: And I suppose the interesting thing about these statistics as well is that they are a couple of years old now—they're about '97 or '98. There is no longer a gender breakdown by the ABS of many of its statistics, so we actually have a lot of trouble knowing the full picture, and that's something else that governments can ask questions about. Individuals in the community and advocacy organisations cannot go to the ABS and say, "We want you to keep statistics in a certain way". But governments can.

So, if we want a regular up-to-date picture about the status of women with disabilities, then this assembly can certainly play its part in making sure that some of those statistics become available and that that gender disaggregation of statistics is provided.

Ms Salthouse: Yes. One of the other points that we haven't made, which was in the original letter to you—

Ms Ryan: It's in the submission which apparently they haven't received, even though it was sent ages ago.

Ms Salthouse: The ACT governments need to look at regional responsibility—not regional responsibility, but regional exchange; that people who are just outside the ACT are in fact accessing services within the ACT. For instance, in that peer support program three of the eight people on the course were from Captains Flat. So there's a need to be aware of the fact that people in the region are accessing ACT services to some degree. They won't have access to services coming through the Office of Disability but you would not know that there are reciprocal things happening with the hospital and I think that is something to bear in mind, that there is—

Ms Ryan: A formal relationship with the New South Wales government.

Ms Salthouse: Yes, that New South Wales might like to assist in some way.

Ms Palmer: Throw money this way.

Ms Salthouse: Yes, in that we are fielding women—and rightly so because it's best for them to look at their transport convenience et cetera to access things within the ACT.

THE CHAIR: We might have to leave it there unfortunately. We're already a bit over time.

Ms Ryan: Can I just interrupt. In our submission which you should now have—

THE CHAIR: Yes, not a problem.

Ms Ryan: One of the things that we've raised in that cover letter is that we are conscious that looking at these things sporadically is probably not a very coherent way of going about it, and we're more than happy as an organisation to develop an ongoing relationship with this committee and with the members of this committee. So we're available at any time really that you want to explore some of these issues in more depth, or with the further work of the committee to assist you with some more questions if that's necessary. So we are available and we understand that that's an important part of our work as well, to make sure that you have access to experiences and information.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Well I'm sure as the inquiry progresses we will take you up on that, because there are some more questions I have, but not for today. Thank you, Christina, Sue and Di.

Ms Salthouse: Thank you very much.

Ms Ryan: Thank you, Katy. Thank you, Ros. Thank you, Helen.

THE CHAIR: Helen in absentia.

Ms Salthouse: With that peer support program group, I have got some spare copies of that—or has it just been copied now?

THE CHAIR: It's been copied, yes. We achieved that one.

Ms Salthouse: Yes. So thank you very much for your time.

KAREN FOGARTY and

ANNE FARRELL

were called

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the Select Committee on the Status of Women. These hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege, which gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you're protected from certain legal actions such as being sued for defamation for what you say 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.

We don't have a submission from you, but we thought it important to invite your organisation along to give us your view of the status of women in the ACT. If you make an opening statement, then we can ask questions. Please identify yourselves for Hansard.

Ms Fogarty: My name is Karen Fogarty. I'm a committee member of the Chamber of Women in Business. I also have my own business. It's a law firm called Colqhoun Murphy. I'm a lawyer. I've been a member of the chamber for at least seven years.

For the Chamber of Women in Business, the most important things in your terms of reference affecting business are equal opportunity, economic independence and barriers to participation. We don't propose to comment on violence protection and the other two matters in your terms of reference.

The Chamber of Women in Business supports 120 women, most of whom are sole business owners. We do not have many members attached to other organisations. Some members are part of large organisations who choose to join the Chamber of Women in Business, but most represent a large chunk of small business operators in Canberra.

Ms Farrell: We have just run a survey, and 86 per cent of our members are either full time or part time running their own business.

Ms Fogarty: We want to present evidence today on equal opportunity, access of women in representation, and economic security. I used to be the chair of the Women's Consultative Council. We had an role in overseeing the women's action plan under the last government. Part of our terms of reference was to do the action plan. We spent two to 2½ years getting that into place and then implementing it.

From my point of view, it was not fully implemented by the change of the government. The implementation report is a useful reference. Even in looking at what we were going to talk about today, I found it a very useful reference. I know from my own background that there was a lot of community consultation in the preparation of that. There was a three-pronged approach. There was a statistical audit of all government programs across the ACT, and every single program met the needs of women. That statistical analysis was followed by a whole series of community consultation and targeted

consultations. The Women's Consultative Council then had an overseeing role. There were monthly interdepartmental committee groups to see how the plan was implemented.

From my point of view, outside my representation role in the Chamber of Women in Business, I want to make sure that that sort of process continues. It was a very hands-on process from a group of women. The Women's Consultative Council was making sure that things were ticked off and actually done. It was very useful. Rather than waiting for someone to produce a report at the end of the time to say that it didn't happen, we had a monitoring role and could say, "No, you haven't done this; you haven't done that.". The chamber had monthly meetings and I was advised on how that was going.

Ms Farrell: We had direct input into the process.

Ms Fogarty: We felt that at least it was happening. Women in small business in the ACT always feel that their voice isn't being heard. That's why we're here today. It is a question of representation of women in organisations, on boards and on committees—any position of power across all government and private industry. We're dealing with listing government boards and committees, government departments, schools, police, the judiciary, to make sure women's voices are heard. It's one thing to have input; it's another thing making the decision.

The Chamber of Women in Business wants this taken further. We want to make sure that there is a large number of women, more than an equal number, on government boards and committees, and not just the government boards and committees that are voluntary. Women have very low representation on government boards and committees representing territory-owned corporations and the paid statutory boards. Government talks of, say, 46 per cent representation, but that is not the true position for the statutory corporations and the territory-owned corporations. I don't know what the figures are currently but they were 11 to 12 per cent. That's a huge difference.

If we're making an input into our community and we're giving an example for private enterprise to follow, government has to get it right first. We feel that we're not getting our representation in that way.

MRS CROSS: What was the percentage you quoted?

Ms Fogarty: Between 11 and 15 per cent. I don't know the current make-up. That was the figure when I was chair, which was only last year.

The Women's Consultative Council did a couple of things to start the ball rolling, and I want them to continue. A women's register was set up. Women's registers are a waste of time unless they're continually updated and the people are kept in contact with. A database of about 60 people was set up. These were very prominent women in the ACT who went out of their way to fill out a database submission, come along and put it in.

That resource should be utilised and it should be continually updated. Such registers don't work unless someone contacts these women every six months to say, "Hey, we are interested. Are you still interested in wanting to be on a government board or

committee?" Otherwise they lose interest. They think they're not important. It is same as for anybody putting in a CV.

We started a mentoring program for people on boards and committees. That needs to be continued. We got along to three different seminars, with more than 20 to 30 people at each seminar. That is the number of people who are very interested. A lot of chamber women came along, all wanting to be involved.

Ms Farrell: They're very interested in being involved. A name will be picked, and that person will be on half a dozen free boards when they're running their own business as well. There's only so much you can volunteer for. There seems to be an over-representation by one person. That person will run themselves into the ground because they know it's important that our voices be heard. But there are equally talented women.

Names will come up in conversation, but because one person is known the position is given to her. It's always a free position. We don't have to pay her. She is taken out of her business. There is an economic throwback to her business. I don't think that's particularly fair.

Ms Fogarty: Whilst everybody agrees that there should be a large number of women on boards and committees, you constantly hear—it has been said for the last 20 years—“There aren't enough women out there. We don't know enough women.” This is why we started the register. To counteract that, the last government agreed to an early warning system which meant that three months before appointments a list would go out. If the agencies did not put forward enough women, then Cabinet would contact other organisations such as the Women's Consultative Council and say, “We need some nominations.”

In a practical way, that should continue. I don't care what process is formally put in place. The early warning system is also a federal initiative. The agencies need to be educated. It's no use an agency coming at the last minute when an appointment must be made and saying, “I'm sorry, we couldn't find any women.” It has to happen earlier. The agencies must be educated and told, “You must find enough women.”

We have a highly educated population. We have 322,000 people living in Canberra. We promote ourselves as the intellectual capital and now the IT capital of Australia. Why can't we find women for these roles? I can't believe that there aren't enough educated people. There may not be enough educated people who are made aware that these opportunities are there because they're in the federal sphere, but the more they're involved, the more they will be aware. There are enough women putting their hands up for all the unpaid boards and committees, but the statutory corporations don't add up.

MRS CROSS: What other economic challenges do you think face business women in Canberra?

Ms Fogarty: Business women in Canberra face a lot of economic challenges that all businesses face. One is retention of staff. Child care an issue for retention of female staff, as are flexible workplaces. Whilst that may be a federal funding issue, there must be a way to find better child-care facilities. Some of our members have been discussing this. They have to be flexible child-care arrangements. Child care between eight and six does

not fit all our members. We might have members who are running businesses at night and need child care at night, which is a very difficult thing to find. Women in small business want to support other women in small business. They also need flexible child-care arrangements themselves. That's one of our biggest problems.

Ms Farrell: That would be a bigger problem. As I said, we've just done a survey. We did this survey four years ago, and we've just redone it. The dynamic of our members has changed considerably. Whereas four years ago the number of single women with children was around 70 per cent, it's down to 40 per cent. We haven't been able to distil that information to find out whether the women are no longer in business or whether they've now found partners or what the situation is. That's possibly a question for the next survey in three years, to find out whether it is becoming harder for single mothers to go into business.

We were talking about mentoring before. I know that Canberra Business Advisory Service have had to move away from their mentoring program because of public indemnity insurance issues. If I'm a mentor of somebody and I advise them to cross the road and they get hit, then I am personally liable. So they have changed their programs. They're giving them different names such as "coaching". But then you have to educate not just women but anybody that there has been a change. They're finding it very hard and are realigning their programs.

I run a company called ISO Business Management. People will search for the term "business management", so I get odd phone calls. I get phone calls from women who have been out of the work force for 10 years and say, "I want to buy a business. What's my first step?" Obviously their first step is to go to an accountant. Next I send them to the Canberra Business Advisory Service. They've got to get the legal issues and the economic issues right first. Banks still ask you to put your house up for a loan. That's not just for women; that's for men as well. I find it hard to put this in the context of just women. There are men in the same situation. I'm sitting here for women in business and that's fine, but I think it's across the board.

There are three things that you can do in life without having to get a licence or do a test. One is to have a child, one is to get married, and one is to start a business. If you go to places like Switzerland and Sweden, you have to do an exam before you can get a business name and open a business. I'm not advocating that. Possibly it's something that doesn't need to be addressed.

I hope things have changed since I opened my business in 1994. Maybe they haven't—I don't know. Possibly a swag of papers could be handed out, with a nice portfolio that says that there is such a thing as the Chamber of Women in Business, that there are regional chambers, that there are associations, and that there is the Canberra Business Advisory Service.

MRS CROSS: It hasn't changed, Anne. It's the same.

Ms Farrell: That is a really good place to start. That's the first place everybody goes. If I'm going to open a business, I need to register my name.

Talking about women on boards, why aren't we going around the preschool associations, the primary school associations and the canteen associations and educating those women? Women who are chairmen of primary school and high school boards are highly intelligent and highly talented. They may not have a university education, but sometimes they have what you need to bring to these things. They've got that rare commodity called commonsense.

MRS CROSS: Experience.

Mrs Farrell: That's right. That's what we need to address rather than getting more accountants and solicitors and people at that level. Maybe we need to look at the grassroots level as well and tell those women that they have the skills to get on these boards. Put them on the non-paid boards to start off with so that you can see how they run. Surely there's an untapped wealth out there. Women who have been staying home with their kids for the past 20 years have incredible organisational skills that should be tapped.

THE CHAIR: I note from your submission that you get a small government grant to do your survey.

Ms Farrell: We did this year. The previous survey we funded ourselves. This year we applied for a grant. The grant was given to us, and we were able to run the survey. Money was to go towards our conference that we hold it every March, and the rest of the money was to be used for training. We award two scholarships a year, and that money has enabled us to give other grants.

THE CHAIR: Part of the job of this committee is to advise government on future priorities or unmet need. Could you isolate an example of what you believe to be a very important priority for an organisation such as yours?

Ms Farrell: For the scholarship and now for the grant, two women applied for money to do company director courses. Those courses cost \$1,800. We have capped our scholarships at \$700 so they go to many people rather than few. That covers only half the cost of such a course. Empowering women to do that course is one possibility. It is very labour intensive. A lot of us say, "I don't want to do this until I really have to." A lot of our members still have to learn how to use computers.

THE CHAIR: Is it training?

Ms Farrell: It is training. That's what we try to do with our conference. We try to bring in a fairly high-profile keynote speaker who can talk about marketing, time management and that sort of thing. Karen ran a seminar on the privacy laws. We try to do something like that so that people can come along to the conference, feel unthreatened, know the speaker and know that they can come back later to Karen, who is a member, and say, "I didn't quite understand this." We try to do that training in a non-threatening situation.

THE CHAIR: Is it training or a trainer?

Ms Fogarty: It is continuing education. It is a two-stage approach. Anne mentioned people coming into business. Whilst there is the Business Advisory Council and there are some good programs out there, a group of people still don't feel able to do that or they're stuck starting a business. It's a matter of making sure that they get the right business skills to keep going. We don't deal with a lot of people who are starting up. We deal with people who have taken the plunge and have gone in. They require ongoing training.

Ongoing training is a gap in the business market. Large organisations can afford to have in-house training. But where do small businesses go for their training and ongoing information? Our members need ongoing education and information on business skills. That's what they value most, according to our survey.

Ms Farrell: One training provider is a member. We give a \$700 scholarship, and if our member goes to that training provider they get \$2,000 or \$3,000 worth of training. She values the fact that these women are trying to start businesses. We're not saying that people should donate their time to that extent. That's her way of contributing to the organisation. She hasn't got other ways of doing it. Making sure that whoever comes to her gets trained well is important. It is a drip-feed thing.

What I needed in 1994 I didn't need in 1996 and I don't need in 2002. Company director courses are great for people who have been in business a while and may have set up a pty ltd, but they are no good to the young woman who has just started a business today as a sole trader. She doesn't have those needs. For her, the need is for courses in MYOB, email, Word and Excel. Our members range from young girls aged 22 still at school and running a part-time business to women who have been in business for 25 years. We have to use a scatter gun, which I guess is the same thing as you do. We have to try to address it as well as we can.

MRS CROSS: It is good to see you both here. My compliments to you, Karen, for the work you've done with the body you've just left. I know that it takes a lot of time and energy. Anne, I know you, having been a member of the Chamber of Women in Business. I know the voluntary time that a lot of the executive put in. What would be your greatest need? If you were to put in a request to us, what would be the one thing you would like? I have heard that training is the most important thing, but what is your number one priority as an organisation that we could help you with?

Ms Farrell: If I had a glad bag and a wish bag for the Chamber of Women in Business, it would be really good to put in a full-time secretariat. We have a phone number that's run out of my business. I do the membership database. I run the secretariat on a voluntary basis. It can be fairly hit and miss because I'm not getting paid for it. It's as up to date as I can humanly make it, but there are times when I might have two or three members sitting there waiting to go into the database, and it's time for the mail merge and, oh dear, I've got to put it all in. I've got to take time out from my business to do it.

MS DUNDAS: So you'd possibly support the setting up of a women's funding program in the ACT to facilitate women's organisations setting up that secretariat support?

Ms Farrell: No.

Ms Fogarty: No.

Ms Farrell: We would not allow our database to go outside.

MS DUNDAS: No, a grant funding program for women's organisations, so the government would give you money to have that secretariat.

Ms Farrell: We were started by a government grant back in 1992. Rosemary Follett's government gave us a grant for a group of women. Jacqui Jones was our original president, Kate Carnell was a founding member, as was Jacki Cauchi, who is still a member, and Margaret Dalton—some very influential women around town.

We were given a grant to build a directory of the women in business in the ACT. It started out as a booklet of about 80 women. We have now put it into a two-ring binder so that we can update through the year. At our height we had 150 members. We had a bit of a identity crisis for a while. The present executive has tried to bring us back into a business frame of mind. We got off the track a bit. We're back on track and we're trying to step up to that level. But we wouldn't release our database—

Ms Fogarty: I think we're talking at cross-purposes here. There are a lot of women's groups, and each has particular needs. As Anne said, the organisation was set up initially just to be a database. But it was recognised that women liked being in a separate chamber. They can communicate better and feed off and mentor one another. The difficulty that has been faced by the chamber has been taking the transitional role from being merely a list of women in business, which the original grant was for, to representing women in business in the ACT. To take on that role and to keep the cost of membership very low, the chamber relies solely on volunteer effort to keep it going.

I think what you were saying was quite different from what Anne was saying. The cost of the secretariat enables membership to stay at the same price yet conserve the members and enable them to grow and continue to promote trading and be part of an organisation. That's is where we were coming from.

MRS CROSS: Your concern is not how it's funded, as long as it could be funded in one way or another?

Ms Fogarty: As long as it could be funded and take its role further. It's a lot of effort from members on the committee, which keeps wearing them out.

Ms Farrell: We produce a bi-monthly newsletter as well as a directory, and we have a website. They're very expensive. Trying to raise funds in any given year is fairly expensive. If we could take the secretariat and purchase management time, that would reduce the cost of our newsletter and reduce the cost of our website, as long as we source our executive officer, for want of a better term, correctly so that they can do those things for us.

Ms Fogarty: It's very difficult to be part of an organisation in which all the people are performing a secretariat role, taking time to give input into policy and helping members. So much time is taken by the joint effort of the secretariat role. The policy time is just taken up. There's no time to feed back, be innovative and help the members. It's more about dealing with the practicalities. What I've said has been part of a lot of other

organisations which have a secretariat role. I can perceive the difference. It's very difficult being on the chamber and then having to go back and perform that role.

Ms Farrell: Also lead time. We can't get a letter to contribute to a budget on Wednesday when we need to get it in by the following Wednesday. We have a monthly meeting. Everybody runs their own business. We haven't got the time to write papers in a week. We have the capability, but it would mean almost shutting the door on our businesses to do it. I don't think our members request that of us, but we also know that that's something we're going to have to start doing.

We're going to have to start raising the issues that are important to us. We're quite pleased and proud to come here and to go to the red tape inquiry and to raise issues. But it takes time when you work on a voluntary basis. If that little core was taken out of the executive of 11 and set aside, it would free us up to do a lot of other hopefully good works.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for your time this morning. We appreciate it.

DENNISE SIMPSON was called.

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the committee, Dennise. Thank you very much for coming in at short notice, I know that you have only a day or so, so I appreciate you being able to come here this morning.

As to the formal part, these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, so they are protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action for what you say at this public hearing. It also means you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. I am sure you have heard that before.

We have received a great submission from you. Would you like to make an opening statement? Please tell Hansard who you are, before you begin.

Ms Simpson: Dennise Simpson, Manager, Domestic Violence Crisis Service. I am going to assume that you have read my submission.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Simpson: You are right, Ms Gallagher—I found out only yesterday morning. Given that there has been a change in the fact that I am here today, I am hoping that you are familiar with my submission.

In our submission, I have set out priorities. I had a call from, I think, the multicultural unit of the Chief Minister's Department which questioned why there was nothing in relation to women from culturally diverse backgrounds.

My answer to that is that we see women from culturally diverse backgrounds in everything we do. We see them as an integral part of, and a priority in, our work on a day-to-day basis. I did not see that what I was talking about in my submission was a wish list, I saw it as trying to put across what we saw as the main priorities. So with priorities in mind, this is what we have come up with. Perhaps you could keep in mind that we see them as an integral part of everything that I have talked about here.

I am wondering whether, because you have read my submission, it might be more useful for you to ask me questions, rather than me going over what you have already read.

THE CHAIR: Yes, we could do that. I have one question, which kind of relates to your report. It is about the report on family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities which the Chief Minister released, a month or so ago. It relates a bit to what you have said about not drawing it out specifically. Some of what this report says is that violence within family units in this community is pretty prevalent. Is that something you experience with people who contact your service? I believe you have an indigenous community worker. Is that right?

Ms Simpson: Yes. Our statistics show that 8 per cent of the clients we worked with last year were Aboriginal families. When you consider the overall percentage of Aboriginal people in the ACT, that is quite a high percentage. I could find that statistic very quickly and then I will talk more about it.

From July 2000 to June 2001, 8 per cent were Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islanders, 41 per cent were of an English speaking culture, 28 per cent were from non-English speaking, culturally diverse backgrounds, and, for 23 per cent, it was not stated. That means they, would have fitted into any one of those categories. If it is on a telephone call and the person ringing is in crisis, as our clients often are, it is not always appropriate for us to run through a list of things about their background, status or a range of things, at that point in time. Sometimes we are running on the information they give us there and then.

I did a few submissions around the time that we did the one on the status of women. One was as to budget deliberations and one was on homeless men and their children. So there were three. I was thinking that I had addressed something about Aboriginal women in the submission. However, I am glancing through and it does not look like I did. Would that be true?

THE CHAIR: No, not specifically. It was not a problem.

Ms Simpson: I suspect I have done that in my budget deliberations. Maybe I will talk about that a little bit. Would you like to hear what I wrote in that submission in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders?

THE CHAIR: I would, yes.

Ms Simpson: It is under the heading "Funding for outreach follow-up workers in the Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT". It says that the continuing devastating effect of family violence in the indigenous community is well documented in numerous reports. Within those reports it is also documented that generally Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will not access mainstream services, as they are considered not culturally appropriate. DVCS, however, works with significant numbers of indigenous clients.

We actively worked with 97 indigenous clients and their families in 2001. Many of these clients have sought support from our service over many years. For most of them their needs are complex and generally include issues of poverty, racism, housing, health, drug and alcohol. DVCS has made submissions to ATSIC for funding the regional council for the past three years, for the purpose of employing one Aboriginal male and one Aboriginal female to provide outreach and follow-up services to indigenous families affected by family violence in the ACT.

Last year we received a grant of \$40,000 which, unfortunately, was substantially less than what we had submitted for and meant that we could not go ahead with our original intention. The grant enabled us to employ a part-time indigenous family violence community worker, which is a networking education position.

Indigenous outreach follow-up workers would work holistically with families, extended family members and the community. The service would be developed in consultation with the DVCS indigenous reference group and in line with guiding principles and protocols from the report, *Crisis Intervention in Aboriginal Family Violence*, which is a Partnerships Against Domestic Violence publication.

The priority of the service would be safety for all family members, including the person who has used violence. The service would include assistance with immediate and long-term housing needs, transport, arranging child care, appointments and referral, and ensuring there are basic necessities and food. The service would also provide advocacy re health issues, schools, Centrelink, police, court and other legal processes. The service would need to be flexible to ensure individual needs would be met. We have reapplied for funding this year and are awaiting the decisions of the regional council. That is still true today.

DVCS is not entitled to apply for the federal targeted family violence funding because we are not an indigenous service, although, as stated above, we work with significant numbers of indigenous clients.

I am raising this issue to alert you of the problem and because it is very possible that we will, again, not receive the level of funding from the regional council that will allow us to implement the proposed service.

Family violence is identified as an area of major concern by the Aboriginal community and by federal, state and territory governments. DVCS identifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients as a priority target group. However, we are limited in the ongoing support we can currently offer because of our resource issue. We are strongly of the opinion that the proposed service would work to address some of the issues with the indigenous community.

Maybe I should have included it in both, but it ended up in that one.

THE CHAIR: That is all right—it is there now.

MS DUNDAS: I want to go to a different topic. You have mentioned, in the submission to this inquiry, a lot about older women—the lack of crisis accommodation in the ACT for older women. One of your recommendations was an investigation to ensure that appropriate accommodation support and care is provided for older men who have used violence in their relationship—and enabling older women living in violence to help themselves.

I was wondering if you could provide us with some background information on the number of older women who use the service, and whether or not you think that is at all representative of older women who are being abused. They might take a step, when they have been in a partnership for 30 years, and it suddenly turns violent. You have indicated in your submission that it is quite difficult for women who want to step out of that relationship.

I guess I am looking for the hidden statistic—the number of women who do not even report the violence. Anecdotally, do you have anything on that?

Ms Simpson: Not only can I not give you the hidden statistics, but I do not have the other statistic—the statistic from DVCS—at my fingertips either. I did not think about it. It is something that I could get.

MS DUNDAS: Anecdotally, what is your impression of how older women are working this out?

Ms Simpson: DVCS made this a priority area a few years ago. First of all, we convened a forum on elder abuse issues, and from that forum we formed a coalition.

MS DUNDAS: To take you back a step, why did you choose to prioritise older women? What was the initial step?

Ms Simpson: We had worked with a number of situations that involved older women, and it became very apparent to us that there were enormous gaps in service provision. With some of the cases that led us to prioritise it, we were working in conjunction with ADACAS. The situations were a little bit like one I named in here. The one I am thinking of was a mother and daughter. The daughter was an adult, with a mental disability, and the father had Alzheimer's disease. He had not been violent throughout his life, but had become violent.

It was more abuse than actual physical violence. He was doing things like spitting at them, spitting in their food and throwing food. He was also being very abusive to the daughter with the mental disability. The dilemma was enormous for the mother, as you can imagine. She was protective towards the daughter. She also had had years of a loving relationship with the man prior to his change—prior to how he had become. Where was there for this family to go? What was possible? It was incredibly hard.

I cannot remember what the outcome of that one was, but I know we grappled with it for quite a while. A big thing for that woman was that there would be somewhere for her partner to go before she could do anything. They continued to live in this abusive situation where we believed they were at risk because of the lack of services. That is an example. There were a number of examples at the time.

We ran a forum, at the Southern Cross Club in Woden, aimed at the community and service providers. Close to 100 people attended. Most of them were service providers but there were also some people from the community. We were astonished by the number that turned up.

We did not run it as an information-sharing forum, we ran it as an information-gathering forum. We had workshop areas, looking at particular issues. People were going to their area of choice—the area in which they were most involved, whether that be financial issues, care issues, domestic violence or whatever.

We were very specific about calling it elder abuse because we did not want to limit it to violence, even though that is our priority. We were also aware that there were issues involved there that were different from some of the other client areas. That was touched on in what I said before—the idea that this was a partner who for many years had been a loving father and parent.

After that meeting, we convened a coalition. That was comprised of the Council on the Ageing, ADACAS, the Older Women's Network and the Institute of Criminology—they had done some really good work around elder abuse. That was convened by DVCS. From that, we looked at our priority areas. We did papers on it and lobbied all MLAs at the time. The result of that was the inquiry which you have—report number 11 or something, on elder abuse. We are still waiting for a government response in relation to that report.

I have lost the original question!

MS DUNDAS: The information you have provided has been very helpful. The question was more as to what kind of level we were looking at. You have indicated that it does not matter, necessarily, what level it was. There were a number of instances where there was unmet need.

Ms Simpson: Further to that, I know it is a real cliché to say that this is just the tip of the iceberg, but you touched on this. Those reasons I talk about—the barriers to an older woman making this decision—are very real and so much more real than the barriers a younger woman faces.

The example I gave is one that we have come across numerous times. Of course, there is also the woman who has been in an abusive and violent relationship for 60 years. There is that type as well.

MS DUNDAS: Your recommendations refer to supported accommodation—end results. But how do we get older women in abusive relationships to come forward? Is there an education campaign needed? Is there more support needed in the community for older women to realise that violence and abuse is not acceptable? Is there a need for an education program?

Ms Simpson: That was one of our original recommendations. We said there needed to be education. Personally, I find it very difficult if we have education programs without the services to back them up. I see that as a tokenistic response. If you have the services available and your services are geared up for what that might bring, then you have your education program.

I have still lost the question!

MS DUNDAS: No.

THE CHAIR: We received, as a submission, this little table about what the government is funding for women. It says here that there is a pilot supportive housing program, specifically for older women who have experienced family breakdown and elder abuse. That is to be completed in 2002, and it is has an amount of \$720,000. Have you had any involvement in that? Do you know what it is?

Ms Simpson: No. I said in my paper that we understood there was something in the pipeline, but we did not know what it was.

THE CHAIR: I do not know what it is either, but it is in there!

Ms Simpson: I would be interested in knowing, because I have heard something. I remember thinking it was not appropriate, so I would be interested in hearing what it was. That was my initial response. I heard that, I think, from an MLA.

THE CHAIR: Okay. I will find it.

Ms Simpson: We would love to know.

THE CHAIR: The Protection Orders Act came into operation on 27 March this year. I know that DVCS had substantial concerns about that at the time, as did the Women's Legal Service. It is been in operation for a couple of months now. Have your fears been realised? Can you give me any indication of how that act is operating?

Ms Simpson: It is too soon to say. Some of the changes are more likely to come out in the longer term than something up front, because they are not those kinds of changes. There has been one change that I think is a real shame—that is the loss of the DV legislation as stand-alone legislation. The fact is that it is now a protection bill that comprises workplace violence and what were once called restraining orders. As a political stand and as a political statement, I believe it is important that we have domestic violence legislation that stands alone.

You would probably all be aware that the government has initiated some further work on the protection bill. That is being undertaken in community and safety, and there is going to be a call for submissions. There has been named in that inquiry a reference to the federal model domestic violence laws. I believe that is a very positive move—that is something we wanted done all along. We felt that a lot of work had gone into that model DV law. We did not think it was right to bypass it and make changes in the ACT without looking at that model law. Apparently that is now going to happen.

The other thing I wanted to say in relation to elder abuse is that I do not see that accommodation for older men is a priority over accommodation for older women. I see that the priority would be accommodation for older women. This does come up, and it is an interesting point to raise. You may not have been aware that this was an issue.

MS DUNDAS: I would like to get more information on the question of accommodation for older men. Are you looking for a space so the man can move out of the home to enable the woman to stay in the family unit? Or is it like the example you cited where, with old age, there is the onset of mental illness? Is it that there is not enough support for mental illness, and we need more support for the women?

Ms Simpson: It is a little bit of both. In some situations, it would enable the woman to stay in the home. But in other situations—there might be, for example, the sale of the home—it might mean that there are choices open that were not open prior to that. It might have got close to the point where none of them—the man, the woman and, in that case, the older disabled daughter—were able to care for themselves. What I am saying is that the situation can sometimes stay status quo because of the lack of options.

MS DUNDAS: Is it also about financial assets? They may be in a situation where they have been the wife to their partner for the past 50 years and have not been able to work up their own financial independence. If they could sell the family home and split that asset, it may assist to remove the barriers. I am referring to the financial impacts of elder abuse.

Ms Simpson: Absolutely! That is definitely another aspect to it. It is not something I can refer to and say, “I have this story about that”, but I can see that it is an issue. If you have no wages coming in because you are in your retirement and the family home has to be split to provide two homes, that is not necessarily a very good equation, is it? It is not necessarily going to work, if there is no other money there.

MRS CROSS: Of all the recommendations here, which is the most pressing for you? If you had to give us one, which would be immediate? I know they are all important, and I understand it is hard to prioritise them. I have read your submission and, unlike a lot of other things we see, we know that this is important in its entirety. However, if you were to want one thing done sooner rather than later, which would it be?

Ms Simpson: There is one thing coming to mind, and I am feeling a little bit funny about saying this. I am going to have to touch on two things here, Mrs Cross.

MRS CROSS: That is all right.

Ms Simpson: I think it is important that we continue to look at the needs of women and their children escaping domestic violence. It has been a long time since there has been another refuge in the ACT, so that is a priority. The thing coming out for me in that question is to work with boys who are using violence. There are two areas—not only using violence but also young boys who have witnessed, or been subjected to, violence.

This is an inquiry into the status of women. Anything to do with our children and our sons has an enormous impact on women. I am not seeing that outside this, so I have included it.

It is women who are generally being assaulted by their sons. It is a quite rapidly growing concern and I have tried to demonstrate that there. Lots of these young men, unless there is intervention that is going to make some sort of difference in their lives, are going to be the young men who are violent to their partners in the future. For many of them, there is such a sad quality of life at this point of time.

We have been working with significant numbers of them, although nothing like the numbers of women and their children. I am saying that the rapidity with which it is growing is significant.

To give you an example, I was talking to one young man about work the other day. He is very violent to his mother. He has thrown her on the floor, choked her, hit her and thrown her against walls. So we are talking of quite violent behaviour.

This young man grew up with violence. His father, who was violent, left the home at some point. I do not know whether he had to leave because there was an order against him—or why that broke down.

This young man lived with his father for a while. His father then sent him back to live with his mother and new stepfather. He does not get on with the new stepfather. Most of the time, he tries to stay out of arguments. He is scared witless about his mother wanting him to leave home. He is afraid of having to be out there on his own. He does not have any friends, and he does not go to school. He stays in his room most of the time.

There are two sides to that story. It is so sad. This woman's safety is paramount, but there is a young man who is obviously very sad, confused and hurt. How do you make a difference in his life?

THE CHAIR: This question follows on from that. In your opinion, as to how governments fund services like DVCS, is there as much emphasis placed on violence prevention programs as there is on reacting to violence? Would you like to see more emphasis placed on violence prevention programs and early intervention? What is your opinion?

Ms Simpson: I would definitely like to see more. I would not like to see us taking away from Peter to pay Paul. I believe we have to be very cautious about that. We continue to need the services that we have. We continue to see that they require additional funds for expanding the work that they are all doing—but preventative work is very important.

I feel quite concerned that some schools can be hard to access. It is often a decision of the principal as to whether or not they are going to have particular sorts of curricula that involve things about positive relationships, things that might enable a young person to manage their lives in non-violent ways and give them information that they may not otherwise receive. I do not believe it is okay that it is up to principals to make the decisions on this sort of thing.

One of the areas that we find more difficult to get into than any other area is primary schools. To me, that is where we should be—in the primary schools. We should be with the kids when they are really young. Sometimes lots of things about them are already formed by the time we get to them. We are always in high schools and colleges. So that is a bit of a dilemma.

THE CHAIR: You have a couple of community educators—I do not know what their job title is—who do this kind of educative violence prevention work?

Ms Simpson: We have one part-time position of 18 hours a week. Then we have the position I referred to before—the indigenous family violence community worker. The 18 hours a week education position works predominantly in high schools and colleges. Like I said, it is also trying to do some work in primary schools. The indigenous family violence community worker works predominantly with indigenous family violence issues—indigenous services and whatever. That is a networking link, in conjunction with other indigenous workers running workshops, forums, holding fun days for kids and running competitions in the community. There is a whole range of things that are awareness-raising.

MS DUNDAS: On another topic, in your submission, you listed statistics about the crisis telephone line. You used those to illustrate the violence of sons and stepsons. I note that 4,099 of the calls received in the 18-month period were from existing clients. I am wondering about the number of repeat offence complaints that are coming through on the phone line. How often do you witness the cycle continuing? How do you work to break down that cycle and resolve the situation so the violence is not experienced again? How often do you see—I am sorry. My question is not that clear, but I am concerned that there is a large number of existing clients calling the crisis line—so obviously they are still in crisis.

Ms Simpson: For many of them, it is follow-up to their original situation. One phone call from a client can lead to two full days work for one of our workers. That work will be contacting services and trying to arrange specific things. The client might ring back. There could be 10 phone calls from the client in a couple of days, over different issues that are coming up. “No, we have not been able to do that yet. Could you ring back at three o’clock? We are expecting a phone call back”—that sort of thing.

MS DUNDAS: So the statistic is more about the individual case being followed through?

Ms Simpson: That is purely number crunching. There are also significant numbers of clients for whom the crisis continues in their lives. In some of those cases, we are working with both parties and in others it works towards separation. For some of them, the man might be attending the group—either the mandated group because there has been an arrest, or a voluntary group run by RA. In those cases, he might be utilising our service as somewhere to ring when he is feeling really angry or is about to use violence. You might have a woman who is waiting to see whether, because of the group, there is any change before she makes a final decision.

A lot of women use it as a place to talk about how hard they are finding it. There are many times when it is not about an ongoing crisis, as opposed to someone on the end of the line to talk to about how difficult it is or how the kids are reacting—there are so many different things.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for your time, Dennise. As the inquiry progresses, we might need to speak again. We will try to give you a bit more notice next time.

ALEX CAHILL,

DIRA HORNE,

EMMA ROBERTSON and

AMY McGINN

were called.

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the Select Committee on the Status of Women. I have to tell you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, so they are protected by parliamentary privilege, which gives you protections but also some responsibilities. It means you are protected from certain legal actions such as defamation for what you may 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.

We don't have a submission from the Youth Coalition. If you want to make some opening statements, then we can ask questions. Identify yourselves for Hansard.

Ms Cahill: My name is Alex Cahill. I'm the Projects and Policy Officer for the Youth Coalition. Dira, Emma and Amy are on our board. They're also direct youth service providers. That's why we've asked them here today.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is the peak body for youth affairs and represents the interests of people aged between 12 and 25 years and those who work with them. In making our address to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we will be directly addressing the issues of young women in the ACT aged between 12 and 25.

Despite the significant advances and changes in the status of women, there still remain many obstacles both institutionally and attitudinally which prevent young women from exercising real choice and from participating fully in the ACT. Research conducted for this presentation concluded that there are numerous issues with regard to enhancing the status of young women and that each is a significant entity. These include equal access to education, participation in decision-making advisory groups, affordable and appropriate housing, personal security, health, and drug and alcohol issues. My colleagues will discuss these issues in more detail throughout this presentation.

The Youth Coalition believes that the enhancement of the status of young women in the ACT must begin at the most critical area of development. To achieve rights for young women, and to bring these issues to the forefront of government policy, young women and/or the organisations that advocate for young women must be represented on all consultative and ministerial advisory boards. We believe that young women are not adequately represented on, and do not have the opportunity to equally participate in, the major decision-making advisory groups in the ACT.

Upon critical analysis of the ACT women's action plan for 2000-01, which we believe will be a major policy framework contributing to the foundations of this standing committee, we were impressed by the commitments of this government in many areas throughout the plan. Yet we believe that there is an issue that must be addressed if equality of opportunity is to include all women.

The ACT women's action plan makes no specific mention of the development of specific policies in relation to young women. Adolescence and the early 20s for young women are crucial development periods within their lives when improvements are needed in the general physical, mental and social wellbeing across all areas of their lives.

The ACT government, as mentioned in the ACT women's action plan, prides itself on having the highest representation in the country of women on boards and committees. However, on closer inspection of this document and on consultation with the ACT Office of Women, we find that there are no young women represented on any of the important advisory councils. We at the Youth Coalition see this as a significant gap in representation. The Ministerial Advisory Council on Women also has no young female representative and no organisation representing the rights of young women. Even after further discussion with the Office of Women, no changes have been made to this council.

We believe that the Youth Coalition and the service providers within the youth sector who work predominantly with and around the issues affecting young women should be acknowledged and included within such councils as primary sources of information rather than being used as a secondary source to read through papers, and policies and submissions that have been generally formed and tokenistically given to the community or the youth sector for consultation.

The women's homepage on the ACT government web site has many important programs and policy papers but none that specifically deal with the issues concerning young women. Our local government does not have a clear youth policy platform, let alone a policy that deals directly with issues for young women.

Whilst the ACT young people's framework compartmentalises service delivery, recognition must be given to the holistic approach youth services engage whilst working with young people in their response to their needs. Some needs can be anticipated and planned for in program delivery. Others emerge without warning.

Whilst the framework aims to identify and address issues currently faced by young people of the ACT, program delivery and priorities may need to be adjusted as youth service providers continue to respond to the needs of their local communities. One of these needs is in the area of service delivery and a process specifically funded to deliver services that address the issues and needs of young women.

In conclusion, it is perhaps time to adhere to the commitments expressed by this government around youth participation and youth engagement and look at the representation of young women at all levels of policy development and service provision.

A framework for young women must be developed so that they can take their place in society. If this is not addressed and a pathway of opportunity is not created, the general issues of inequality in our society will continue not to be addressed.

Young women need to feel accepted and to be provided with the opportunity for strong female role modelling and mentoring. That can be developed through their engagement on boards and committees that work to enhance the status of women. Young women need a pathway to success, to be given the opportunity to achieve self-development and self-determination. Providing clear opportunities and raising the agenda around young women's issues can be achieved through inclusion rather than exclusion, which only achieves the ever-present gaps and power imbalances in our society.

Ms Horne: My name is Dira Horne. I'm the Manager for Anglicare ACT Services. We provide a range of services for young people across the ACT and New South Wales. I'm also a member of the Youth Coalition's board.

I'd like to focus today on housing issues for young women and young mums and talk about improved access to affordable and safe public housing for women on low incomes and particularly young women escaping domestic violence. ACT Housing has a policy around women escaping domestic violence, giving them an early allocation 1. This provides difficulty, because quite often ACT Housing requires proof, protection orders and support letters. Many women do not have access to, or have not accessed, the legal and support systems, which also reflects the isolation of experiencing domestic violence in their lives.

An early allocation 1 or 2 removes choice. Women are only given two choices in a wide geographical area—Civic or Belconnen—and this often results in inappropriate allocation, as the system relies on turnover and often less than desirable properties and allocations.

I'd also like to talk about the security issues for single young women in public housing, including violence experienced from other tenants. I think that the specialist housing managers that have been put into place in the ACT have addressed the next level of need, although we need to see development of housing models which support the particular needs of young women and women with children, with a particular emphasis on a separation of support and tenancy management in order for them to maintain their security of tenure.

Young women and women with children are often forced through the SAAP system, through eviction, non-payment of rent and debt, going into refuges and then having to come back on to the waiting list. It's all one bucket of money within the ACT government, and we need to look at how we maintain young women's security.

We've worked with a lot of young women with children who try to secure a place in rehab. It might take six months to go into rehab, but ACT Housing policies often mean that they can't vacate their property for that long. They have to give up their security of tenure, go into a rehab service and come back out through the refuges and reapply for housing. Women who have drug and alcohol issues can maintain their properties while seeking rehabilitation. There are costs associated with maintaining their tenancy and paying for rehab and child care through that process.

I'd like also to look at models of housing that respond to particular needs, such as age and disability housing. Maybe single women need to be appraised in the same light for public housing. Small cluster housing styles have been proven to work. We need to look at selective and appropriate housing instead of allocating young women public housing in unsafe areas.

Restraining orders are not always an appropriate option for young women. In flats and high rises, taking out a restraining order against the tenant next door often increases their risk of violence. Often young women and women with children will resign their tenancies, due to choices being inappropriate, and enter the private market. Then they lose their tenancy because they can't afford it and they re-enter the public system.

Ms Robertson: I'm Emma Robertson. I'm the Canberra Operations Manager for Street Outreach for Open Family Australia.

I want to touch on a couple of things today. I want to expand on what Dira has said about housing but also look at health outcomes for young women.

At the moment there are inappropriate accommodation options for young mothers who are going into independent living. They are often allocated housing in the large government housing complexes that don't have facilities for children. They have a lot of stairs, and generally it's an unsafe environment. I recognise that ACT Housing doesn't necessarily want to put them there either, but because there's a lack of places and often a very urgent need they don't have a lot of choice.

There is also a lack of appropriate accommodation for young women with really high needs or complex issues, particularly young women who use drugs and alcohol and/or have mental health issues. Many of these young women go in and out of our crisis accommodation services, but they often don't engage with them or they're kicked out due to their chaotic behaviour or their lifestyles. I think it would be great for us to address the resource and training needs of the existing services but also to look at other innovative ideas like the need for a youth night shelter—different options for these young women.

I also want to comment generally on the accommodation crisis in the ACT. Even young women who don't traditionally fall into an at-risk service stream are being locked out of affordable accommodation. The result is that we see many young women whose best option for accommodation is to hook up with an older man who can provide them with shelter, food and security, usually in exchange for sex. It would be good for us to look at these issues that are happening as a result of the accommodation situation for young women.

Everything relates back to health outcomes for young women. Many young women are accessing the Junction Youth Health Service as an alternative to a less youth friendly mainstream health system. The main issues continue to be sexual health, contraception, drug and alcohol, and mental health. Unfortunately, this service has limited hours and a high demand, so access is starting to become an issue.

I want to touch upon drug and alcohol use amongst young women. My observation is that this is changing. Specifically, we've seen a shift from the use of one drug of choice to more poly-drug use and a rise in the use of pills, mostly amongst harder core users. It would be good if our responses reflected this change.

I also want to touch upon sexual assault. The Hayden Brown report *Shadows and Whispers* cites two different reports: one that 89 per cent and one that 90 per cent of homeless young women are sexual assault survivors. The same report also cites that 76 per cent experience sexual abuse after homelessness. This is consistent with what young women are reporting to us.

We've had a rise in reports of drink drug-spiking. This is an issue that should be seen in the context of sexual assault rather than as a drug and alcohol issue. Again, our responses should reflect that.

Generally, there has been a rise all across the board in the violence that young women are experiencing not only in the home but also on the street due to the change in drug use. There need to be more support services for people who are experiencing this.

They are pretty much the things I want to mention here today. When young women are experiencing a variety of issues, it makes it very hard for them to look at other issues like education or to pursue good health outcomes in their lives if they're not able to deal with the basic things like accommodation or the experiences they've had.

Ms McGinn: My name is Amy McGinn. I am from Community Education and Training. I'm the Training and Development Officer there, and I also run a student-at-risk program with teachers in schools in the ACT. I'm also on the board of the Youth Coalition of the ACT.

Education is such a broad area, but I want to bring up a few points today on alternative education programs and lack of in the ACT at present. The closure of SWOW in the late 1990s left yet another gap for young women—also men but primarily young women—to go into, especially if they were pregnant during their school years.

Three alternative programs are available in the ACT. As they are not that flexible, there is a lack of pathways for young women. One is for young women to go to year 10 and year 12 at CIT. There are child care issues, the learning curriculum is not flexible and it is still school orientated. They're in a classroom setting, and that is a disadvantage. That is primarily one of the reasons why they leave school early.

Youth in the City also run a school program which is funded for 12 places. There is only room for a small number of people. A young woman who wanted to get into the program there had two children, one of school age and one a three-year-old. She couldn't get child care for the three-year-old, so she didn't go, nor did the five-year-old child, so all three of them are not in the education system. She is a young indigenous woman. There's a lack of pathways to refer her on to anywhere else, and there is a lack of opportunities to try to support her to get child care.

At Community Education and Training we run a youth centre literacy program which has 30 funded places. We have 26 young women and a few young males. That program only runs for nine months of the year. After that, you refer these young people back to the education system to do year 10 or year 12. There aren't pathways available in the ACT.

I also want to talk about the lack of resources and training for teachers who work with at-risk young people. In schools, there are such minimal resources and time for teachers. They're already extended by the curriculum and doing alternative activities. Sitting down with a young woman at the back of the room who is quiet and not causing much fuss is not necessarily a priority for a teacher. They're doing their work. They're getting on with it, but they're not really participating. There may be at-risk factors of sexual assault, abuse, family relationships. A study done by Mission Australia and released this morning involved 2,500 young people. It resulted in quite interesting findings.

I also want to talk about how information is disseminated to young women in high school about safe sex and safe sexual practices. Young women hear the same stories in the school setting over and over again. They continue not to practise safely. The information they're receiving is being censored. Teachers say that they're not equipped to give this information out. They don't have the skill base to deliver the information, nor do some of them feel comfortable about talking about condoms and various methods of safe sex.

Recently I went into a school and spoke with 140 young women about safe sex. The questions that were given out a week prior had been censored so severely that everything the young women wanted to ask they were no longer allowed to ask. We could talk about STIs, but we couldn't talk about how you could contract them. We couldn't talk about sexual contact, even though it was safe-sex education. We couldn't show a condom; we couldn't show a dental dam. This was due to parents maybe not being happy. These were high school students going into three different colleges in the ACT. So there's a lack of resources for teachers to be able to deliver this information and there is a lack of education for them on how to deliver it effectively.

They're some of the things that I wanted to bring up today in looking at a harm reduction model.

THE CHAIR: What's your view on how young women relate to the termination laws of the ACT? Does the Youth Coalition have a view on that, or is it too tricky to get into?

Ms McGinn: I can only speak for young women. Termination laws cause a lot of confusion for young women, who ask, "Can we do this?" There's not a lot of information out there to make them aware of the Pregnancy Support Service and what that service does and help them understand the reproductive clinic and their philosophy. Some young women are getting referred to the pregnant youth support service when they want to terminate, so they're getting mixed messages from services and the referrals are not always accurate.

Ms Cahill: I can back what Amy is saying about confusion, access to information and what's available for young women. It is quite a huge issue in the ACT.

Ms Robertson: I think we also need to recognise that young women are seeking support from youth services around these sort of issues, so that's one of the things that youth workers would be supporting young women around.

Ms McGinn: Due to demand, youth services and agencies are working to maximum capacity and seeing more young people than their funding criteria provide for.

Ms Horne: At the Junction Youth Health Service, Monday is a particularly busy day because of practices over the weekend. The Junction is open only from one till five on five days a week. We have a lot of young women coming from private schools, public schools. A whole range of young people access the Junction on Monday on sexual health and pregnancy issues particularly.

MS DUNDAS: You were talking about the housing crisis. Are a lot of young women homeless? You talked about them linking up with an older man in exchange for sexual favours. There has been talk from other organisations about dangerous sexualised behaviour in young women living on the streets. Have you seen that among the homeless? What levels are we talking about?

Ms Robertson: It's a complex issue. We bring in a lot of young women who are sexual assault survivors. They already have complicated issues around sex. But it's definitely a survival tool if you're homeless and you're on the streets. It's an option to find accommodation. It becomes very complicated for those young women.

MS DUNDAS: You said that the Junction was busy on the weekend and that drug use is wider. There has always been anecdotal evidence about young women in the ACT binge drinking on Friday and Saturday nights, throwing it all up on Sunday and going back to school on Monday. Is binge alcohol drinking among female school students still a problem? I'm talking from my own experience—not personally but at school. Has the change in drug use affected alcohol use? Are we seeing more alcohol use leading to drug use leading to mixed drug use?

Ms Robertson: Possibly the more alarming thing is the change in the way people are using drugs and alcohol. The drugs and alcohol aren't changing so much, but we're seeing people using them to much higher levels. They're getting a lot more out of it a lot quicker a lot younger. Alcohol use is one part of what's going on. People are more likely these days to be taking drugs and alcohol to excess over the weekend, combining them. That brings a whole lot of other associated things. We're seeing a rise in violence as a result of that.

MS DUNDAS: The survey of drug and alcohol use in schools showed that young people didn't realise the risks associated with alcohol. What can we do, particularly for young women? How do we combat drink spiking as a sexual issue and too much alcohol, passing out and not knowing what is happening to your body? Any ideas?

Ms McGinn: One of the thoughts I have on combating it is to provide training to teachers within the education system. Workers on the frontline generally have that training already. The two can meld together, not censor information, look at a harm minimisation model and talk quite frankly with young women about the issues and say,

“If you do this, these could be some of the consequences. From that, this is where you go.”

Ms Cahill: Amy, talking about the sex education said that only certain questions are allowed. It’s important to look at having youth workers back in the colleges and the schools. A lot of young people have issues around confidentiality with teachers or guidance officers within the school, whereas research has shown that they feel much more comfortable speaking to a youth worker who is on site in the school and who may have their own office or may be running groups with young people. They tend to be able to relate much more, and I guess you’re not going to be facing that issue of having a lot of the information blocked because the teachers are concerned about the behaviour.

MRS CROSS: You said earlier that safe-sex education in schools is being censored. Is that a directive from the education department, or is it an arbitrary thing school to school?

Ms McGinn: It depends on the school and it depends on the school policy. I honestly don’t know if there has been a direction from the education department. I can’t answer that.

MRS CROSS: How many examples do you have of specific schools?

Ms McGinn: I go into schools and work with teachers, so I can say that at least a dozen schools have different—

MRS CROSS: Are they public or private?

Ms McGinn: Both.

Ms Cahill: Before sex education comes up on the curriculum, letters are sent home to parents to sign to say, “Yes, my child can participate in a sex education program.” I have issues around that.

MRS CROSS: Probably one of the reasons that happens is that we allow freedom of religion. There are religions that have certain—

Ms Cahill: So then the parents can choose.

MRS CROSS: That’s right. We have to take that into account.

MS DUNDAS: Is the censoring of information a recent development?

MRS CROSS: No.

Ms McGinn: No, it has always happened.

MRS CROSS: It was around in my day.

Ms McGinn: Different schools, with different philosophies, interpret what information is okay to be delivered and what isn't okay to be delivered. Going into schools doing this education is really difficult, because you're taking in your tools. You're taking in vibrators, dental dams, condoms and pieces of fruit, and you're making it fun and enjoyable so they get this information. They get it correct the first time; there's no misconception. The young women can write down their questions on a piece of paper and put them in a box, so no-one is confronted and embarrassed about it. It's about having a good time. It's not a bad thing. It's about being safe. Hopefully that will flow through in a bigger model.

Ms Cahill: I worked in a high school in Queensland as part of the full service schools program, which was funded by the federal government. Every Monday morning I would go to the bus stop out the front of the school and pick about five to 10 young people and say, "Maybe you should come and sit in my office for a few hours." They were still coming down. They were still drunk. There were so many different issues. I would have some of them in my office until lunchtime. I would encourage them to do some reading, to do whatever they were capable of at the time.

When I reported to the behaviour management committee on the issue within the school around drug and alcohol, the school denied it and didn't want any drug and alcohol issues brought up in the school because of what the wider community may think of their local high school. That was in Queensland, but I still see those issues as relevant to what's happening in the ACT. The young people felt comfortable coming and sitting with me, because of the trust I'd established with them. But the school—the principals and the management committees—totally denied the fact because they would have had to deal with those issues.

As Amy said before, they're already inundated with the amount of work they have to achieve academically and to work within the curriculum. They just didn't seem to have any space or any understanding of what issues young people were facing on the weekends. Young people were turning up to school still coming down or still drunk. Quite a few young women brought alcohol with them to school in drink bottles and were drinking it throughout class. They said to me that that was the only way they could cope with the pressures of years 11 and 12, the interaction between male and female and the associated development changes.

As I said, I went to the management of the school, and they denied that there was an issue. That's what we're facing continually at the moment trying to access the education system as youth workers. Developing links there is very critical, as is understanding that the relationship between a youth worker and a young person is different to the relationship between a teacher or a guidance officer and a young person.

Ms McGinn: Psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg speaks of a young woman in year 11 in Victoria who had a heroin habit. The school wanted to kick her out because she was a user. He did a lot of work with teachers in the school to keep her in the school, to see her through year 12. She completed year 12, and after she completed then she went through a program. Now she's clean and doing really well. If she had dropped out while she was using, then she may not have ever completed.

So there are real issues about how schools can and how housing can support these people in the accommodation or the schooling system and about how these people can maintain a pseudo-healthy lifestyle while they're in that situation so they can continue with education or hold on to their accommodation. To take them out of their accommodation and put them back out on the streets seems ridiculous.

Ms Robertson: It's important to recognise young people as a resource when we're designing education programs. I talk to a group of young people in Quamby. I ask them if they were a youth worker going into a school to do drug and alcohol education what they would tell young people so they didn't end up being in the situation they were in. They often have some interesting things to say that we wouldn't necessarily come at. They also have the capacity to talk directly to their peer group in the right language and the right way.

MS DUNDAS: That leads on to my second question. Alex, you were talking a lot about youth participation and young women not being utilised. We've just discussed a whole lot of barriers to young people participating in broad society. How do we break down those barriers? Do you have any suggestions not only about assisting young women to be active participants in that higher level of the community but about how we overcome the barriers to young women even wanting to look at that kind of participation?

Ms Cahill: I think the main thing is accessing youth service providers who work directly with young people before setting up boards or consultation groups and asking them whether there are young women who would be interested in participating within those committees or boards. Have a mentoring program working with the youth service provider or the youth worker, possibly with the mentor attending the initial meetings with her.

I was talking about clear pathways for young women to access these areas. I think it's very challenging for a young woman to attend a committee where there may be a group of older women who are very well educated. That's why it's important for a youth worker to be present at those initial stages to help the young person develop their own standing and be able to voice opinions on issues.

A lot of young people don't feel that their voices are being heard. That has a lot to do with the development stages of adolescence. They want to be taken seriously. When they do voice an opinion, they want to feel that it is followed up and they would like to hear back from groups or committees they address.

Another issue is often we are paid to attend consultations, but often young people are expected to participate within consultations or forums without any remuneration. We're not saying cash, but there are a lot of different things that young people may need and could be offered as part of the consultation process. It's about giving them the feeling that they are important and their voice is being heard.

MRS CROSS: How many members are on the board of the Youth Coalition?

Ms Horne: Twelve.

MRS CROSS: And how many of those are 25 or under?

Ms Horne: Three.

THE CHAIR: Part of the job of this committee is to report on how effective existing ACT government programs are in addressing women's issues. In your opinion, is the way the youth sector is currently funded effective in that way, or would you see that there are other priorities or that priorities need to be shifted? This report mentions a lot of concerns about young women's health, self-harm and things like that. Other reports isolate young indigenous women as not having necessarily received services that they should have. I'm interested if all four of you want to answer that question from your own point of view.

Ms Horne: Under the Department of Education and Community Services, we are in the process of the youth service review, but I think we need to look across the government portfolios, through health and education, at a whole range of issues and not just focus on what comes from our funding body from the youth services program. Certainly the health needs of young women in the ACT need to be addressed. I think we need to take a whole-of-government approach, particularly in the youth sector, with accessing mental health, drug and alcohol and other government services being particularly difficult.

Ms Cahill: We were discussing that question yesterday when we met. The four of us here work in close contact with young people. When we were looking at the question of effective existing government programs, we weren't very aware of them. That is a great concern to us, seeing that we're youth service providers. If we're not aware of them, then how can young people be aware of them and how can they access them?

I contacted the ACT Office of Women and asked for a current list of government-funded young women services and was told that they don't have a list and that it wasn't generally broken down into specific services, which I questioned. When I first looked at this question, I contacted the ACT Office of Women and was not able to get a clear list. I have some concerns around that.

Of course we have the *Contact* book, which lists all the programs that are available, but there's no specific area we can go to directly to look at what programs are supporting and resourcing and developing programs around issues for young women. That was a concern when we met yesterday. Does that answer the question, Katy?

THE CHAIR: Yes, kind of. I see your point. I was looking not at existing ACT government programs for women but existing ACT government programs and how they relate to women or impact on women. I'd be looking at the youth sector as an ACT government-funded program and looking at how those services relate to women and at whether there are priorities in the way services are funded. When I was involved in the youth sector, we always felt hardly done by in one area, because everyone else got all the cash. It was so competitive. I'm interested in an opinion on priorities. This committee has to make a recommendation to government in November about future priorities. It's meant to shape the way the government funds programs as they relate to women. Do you see a priority in how government funds programs, or are the priorities as they stand okay and you just need more?

Ms Robertson: My observation would be that young women access mainstream youth services through long-term case management, but certainly more boys access those services for the crisis and short-term and immediate stuff. That takes up that service, if that makes sense. There are some things to look at for young women.

In terms of priority, health is such a broad term. In looking at health outcomes, there is accommodation, linking with other sectors such as drug and alcohol, and mental health. Those are the issues coming up which have a direct effect on health outcomes for young women.

Ms Cahill: We spoke briefly before about the Junction Youth Health Centre, which is the primary point of contact for most young women. It's funded only to open between the hours of one and five. If a young person has an issue arising from a weekend, they have no point of contact until 1 pm on Monday. There are concerns around that.

THE CHAIR: Do the young women go to Family Planning?

Ms Cahill: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I remember when I was young that was where I headed, probably because there wasn't a Junction.

Ms Cahill: They do access it.

Ms McGinn: Again it goes back to doing education in the schools. When you talk about services available for young women and where they can go and get information and talk about different options, they say, "What's Family Planning? Never heard of it." It's not promoted within that area, not as much as it was in the 1980s when Family Planning was the place you went and everybody was aware of it.

A few young people in the school system know about the Junction Youth Health Centre, but because of the hours it's open, as Alex mentioned, it's not accessible for the other groups of young people. The Junction is run off its feet. We need to look at more efficient funding so it can look at alternative hours, taking in more young people and running specific programs for young women. It can also look at referral points or pathways young women can go on to. It may be an outside program, but it all comes together under the umbrella of the Junction. One model alone is not usually enough, because there's nowhere to refer on to. Under that funding, and with the hours it's open, you can't build up a dependency with your client group. It's essential that you move them on, but there don't appear to be the service providers and direct workers in the ACT. There's nowhere to send them off to.

Ms Horne: Family Planning does have a Saturday afternoon clinic that is accessed by young women. The Junction and Family Planning do work together through cross-referrals. The Junction not only meets the immediate medical needs but has a whole support system in place. Quite often the experience of the Junction GPs is that young women will go there with a headache or present with a minor health issue, and after spending time with the GP or the nurses, a whole range of issues come to light. Counsellors and youth workers offer a whole range of other services after that first point of contact. Family Planning don't necessarily have the whole approach, but Family

Planning certainly refer young women with extensive issues back to the Junction Youth Health Service for a whole range of other needs to be met.

MRS CROSS: Which come out as soon as the trust level is established?

Ms Horne: Yes. The GPs at the Junction have been there for quite some time and have built up a rapport and a reputation with young women in the ACT.

Ms Robertson: I'm certain we have a lot of services in Canberra. When I am referring, I listen to what young women are saying about their experiences with different agencies. The Junction has a very good reputation. In finding out what agencies are doing good practice, young people are a good resource of information on the experiences they have and where they would send their friends.

As a priority, it's important to have more workers on the ground. We've talked about youth workers going into schools. Under our current system, most youth centres wouldn't have the resources to send more people out to schools. I'm a street-based youth worker. You can have more youth workers doing that. We cannot expect the current systems to meet the demand. It's a very effective way to connect with young people, because they do go with the personal relationship. Often a significant factor in people accessing support is whether they connect with a worker or a person.

Ms Cahill: And meeting them in their place rather than expecting them to always come in and access services. Sometimes the best work you can do as a youth worker is in the middle of the skate park.

MS DUNDAS: Who is missing your services? Is there a sector of young women—be they indigenous young women, culturally diverse young women or young women with disabilities—who aren't able to access the services?

Ms Robertson: My observation would be that young women from culturally diverse backgrounds don't access mainstream youth services.

Ms Horne: And indigenous.

Ms Robertson: And I think there are barriers for indigenous young women as well.

Ms Cahill: I think they're all interconnected. I don't think we can separate them out.

Ms Horne: The Junction does have good statistics on those two areas: indigenous young women and women from non-English-speaking backgrounds. I think their statistics are quite high in those areas.

Ms McGinn: That's an anomaly in the sector.

Ms Robertson: Indigenous young women are not necessarily going to access a service that has indigenous workers. If there are indigenous workers, it's a benefit and it's encouraged. Canberra has quite a small really tight indigenous community and it's growing, but when a young person goes to a service there is still an issue of

confidentiality. Is it going to get back to a cousin? Is the person working there a relative? You have to look at a balance.

MRS CROSS: What's the most pressing problem?

Ms McGinn: There are so many. Have you got all afternoon?

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Alex, Dira, Emma and Amy. Thank you very much for coming, for your expertise and for your information. As the inquiry progresses, we will be having further hearings, and it might be good for us to get you back and answer some questions.

Luncheon adjournment

ROSEMARY BUDAVARI was called.

THE CHAIR: Rosemary, I have a formal sheet that I have to read out. These hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly and they are protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections, but also certain responsibilities. It means you are protected from some legal actions, such as being sued for defamation for what you may say at this hearing, but it also means that you need to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence would be treated by this Assembly as a serious matter.

Thank you for coming along this afternoon—sorry to keep you waiting. We have received your submission. If you could make an opening statement and identify yourself for Hansard, that would be excellent. Helen will join us at some point—and we can ask questions of you. If that is okay with you?

Ms Budavari: That is fine.

THE CHAIR: Thanks, Rosemary.

Ms Budavari: My name is Rosemary Budavari. I am the Coordinator and Principal Solicitor at that the Women’s Legal Centre of the ACT and Region. I should say in opening that our centre is very grateful to the committee for inviting us to appear, to address the committee. We think this issue is a very important one for the ACT community and are pleased to be able to make a contribution.

I will go through the main points of our submission. We have addressed the terms of reference in the following way. We have looked at the effectiveness of ACT government programs as to their differential impact on women’s equality of opportunity, economic independence and security, access to and support of healthy lifestyles—and barriers to participation.

The main point we wanted to address under that heading is discrimination in the ACT, which is currently covered by the ACT Discrimination Act. We believe that act is very well administered by the ACT Human Rights Office. That act allows women to make complaints about sex discrimination, sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, and discrimination on the basis of marital status, sexuality or status as a parent or carer. The ability to make these sorts of complaints should increase women’s equality of opportunity, economic independence and security and break down barriers to their participation in the work force and the community.

Unfortunately, it is our experience that this is not occurring in a systematic way. We have constantly—every year since we opened in 1996—had an increase in the demand for advice and assistance in these matters.

We have not had the opportunity to do any systematic study about this, but I can certainly say, having worked as a solicitor at the centre for two years, that, far too frequently, we hear stories from women about being sacked after they have announced their pregnancies. The employer may take the stance that there have been problems with the woman’s work performance, but it seems that that coincides with the announcement

of the pregnancy. We are asking the committee to recommend some supplementary funding to our centre to allow us to assist individual women in making these complaints.

Fortunately, the forms put out by the Human Rights Office are very good, and they are clear. Many women need some assistance in completing that form. Once the employer has had the opportunity to respond to the complaint, the woman will often need assistance in how to frame her reply to that response and how to prepare for the next stage in the process, which is a conciliation meeting between the employer and the woman—facilitated by the Human Rights Office.

We have frequently had the experience of prioritising and attending those meetings with young women. Unfortunately—I am sorry I cannot provide you with any defined study about this—sexual harassment is occurring with young women and women in their first job in the work force, either part-time or full-time. Many of those young women are very nervous about attending a conciliation meeting with the employer, even though that meeting will be facilitated by someone from the Human Rights Office. We have attended a number of those, with successful outcomes for the young women. They have received apologies, references and monetary compensation.

THE CHAIR: I am interested to know why people would pursue what would be an unfair dismissal under the Workplace Relations Act, through the Human Rights Office and not through the arbitration commission, which is a similar process and a lot quicker to get to. Is there a reason why women choose to go through the Human Rights Office, which can be a longer process when it comes to getting conciliation?

Ms Budavari: It is our experience that the awards women are given through the Human Rights Office can be more generous than what can be obtained through the commission. Generally speaking, the commission will compensate women for lost wages or the capacity to have earned for a certain period after they have been dismissed. That usually has a six-month cap on it.

THE CHAIR: It does, yes, under the law.

Ms Budavari: It is our experience that the commission will not award anything for humiliation, loss of self-esteem, depression or anxiety, which are frequently associated with what has happened, particularly to a young woman in the workplace.

Some women we have assisted have had to see a psychologist as a result of their experience. For some of them, it has been very difficult to go into another workplace where there are men present, which is sad. Unfortunately, that is a valid experience for some of those women. Our centre would certainly advise on both avenues, and it is up to the woman to choose.

THE CHAIR: Would you represent them at a commission or conciliation hearing?

Ms Budavari: We have a limited ability to do that. We certainly do not provide representation for everyone. We would look at each one on a case-by-case basis. We tend to prioritise women from non-English speaking backgrounds, indigenous women and young women—women who we feel would not easily be able to represent themselves in that setting.

MS DUNDAS: You talked about the increase in demand for this service. You said that the outcomes under the Discrimination Act are not happening—we are not reaching equality. Do you think it is because of a lack of adherence to the Discrimination Act—like a lack of prosecution? Or is it a lack of education about the Discrimination Act and equal rights? Why is it so? Why is it not working?

Ms Budavari: That is why we have addressed the broader structural issue in the second part of the recommendation. We think there needs to be an education campaign about the legislation for both employees and employers. When we have been discussing this in our centre, we have thought of things like the very successful television advertisements which were run about mental health issues, and also, in a slightly different context, the recent Centrelink campaign about people notifying of changes to their circumstances.

Something short and sharp like that is needed, which basically says to people, “It is no longer acceptable to sack someone because they are pregnant. It is no longer acceptable to ask women at interview if they intend to have children, or if they have children—if they are going to need to leave work.” We have heard stories like that—that women have been asked that at interview—and there have been stereotypical assumptions made about a woman’s ability to do her job because she is a parent.

MRS CROSS: Or may intend to have a child.

Ms Budavari: Yes. We think some sort of education campaign would address the structural issues, rather than dealing just with individual complaints.

THE CHAIR: I am sorry, I keep interrupting, after saying you could make an opening statement. Do you think that, because many cases are settled confidentially as part of the settlement procedure, there is not that kind of public knowledge or transparency about the cases the Human Rights Office is dealing with—that it is still hidden, in amongst the settlement conditions? Is that a problem, or do you see that as a kind of necessity in getting people to the table to settle?

Ms Budavari: That is right, it is a difficult one. Certainly many the women we see would be very hesitant about going to a public hearing. They are often quite willing to try conciliation, but do not want to have to take the next step of going to the tribunal, if conciliation does not succeed.

The latest annual report of the Human Rights Office has a case studies section. They have tried to change some of the details about matters which have been successfully conciliated, in order to give the public some idea of the types of matters they are dealing with. If that were to get more publicity, it would address the issue of there not being a great deal of knowledge in the community about what is happening at the Human Rights Office with those kinds of matters.

THE CHAIR: Bad employers who do that to women cop the fine, and they might cop a letter apologising, but that is the end of their punishment.

Ms Budavari: Yes.

MRS CROSS: Rosemary, I have done research into the pregnancy issue and have tabled a bill for this. When I was canvassing the business community, I found that there are many businesses—particularly small businesses—that are not aware of some things. They are aware of things that are not in the act, or things that they think are in the act, that they do not do, but then there are other things in the act that they are not sure about. So the education factor is a very important one.

Because I have been involved in the pregnancy and maternity leave matter for some time, I wanted to ask you: what incidents of pregnancy discrimination have you had that have come to you? I know that many do not complain. Many people will not take it forward, because they are afraid of persecution down the track. What is the incidence of pregnancy discrimination versus potential pregnancy discrimination? I have statistics from the Discrimination Commissioner, but I would be interested to know what you are getting.

Ms Budavari: I could look at our statistics but, anecdotally, I would say that the bulk of it would be actual pregnancy discrimination, rather than potential pregnancy discrimination.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, Rosemary—keep going.

Ms Budavari: Do you want me to go through every point?

THE CHAIR: Yes—whatever you would like to say to us, basically.

Ms Budavari: All right. Dealing with the effectiveness of ACT government programs in relation to violence prevention, and personal and community safety for women, the two major areas we wanted to raise under that heading were the recent changes in relation to protection orders and the review of the victims of crime scheme.

I will not address what our submission says about protection orders legislation in any great detail because the government has commenced a review of the Protection Orders Act and the Protection Orders Regulations. We have been invited to participate in that review, so we will make our comments in that forum.

It is unfortunate that the terms of reference for that review were drawn up without consultation with the sector. The department has acknowledged that that is a problem. It has invited written submissions about the terms of reference and has indicated that perhaps those terms of reference could be changed. We will certainly participate in that.

The main point we wanted to stress, from this committee's point of view, was that we definitely see that there is a need for domestic violence to be treated quite differently from other forms of personal protection, like disputes between neighbours. We will certainly be making that point again to the department.

In relation to the victims of crime review as it relates to domestic violence victims, for some time we have been concerned about the 1999 amendments to the victims of crime financial assistance scheme. Basically, our view of the impact of those amendments is that they have severely limited the ability of female domestic violence victims to be compensated for their injuries.

The amendments resulted in the removal of the pain and suffering component from all awards. Currently, victims of crime can be compensated for pain and suffering virtually only if they have a permanent injury. Our argument is that, although many domestic violence victims do not in fact get permanent injuries, they get injuries which should be compensated.

Many victims, particularly female victims, will not be in the work force. They will be women who are at home looking after children, so they will not have a component in their award for loss of wages. To try to remedy that, we are suggesting they allow for costs of childcare and housekeeping. It may be that these can be claimed under the existing scheme, but it is certainly not a practice for those sorts of expenses to be claimed. I do not think many women would be aware that they could claim those kinds of expenses. Some women will try to minimise their expenses. So maybe there needs to be some education about that possibility for victims of crime.

At the time we wrote this submission, I do not think the report from Dr Dare—the consultant who did the review on behalf of the government—had been handed down. His report has since been released by the government. The government has invited community organisations to respond to that report. I will read you some of what we have submitted to the government in our response.

We have said we are particularly disappointed with the fact that the report found that nothing should be done about the widespread view that current provisions for eligibility of victims of crime for compensation are unfair and inconsistent. The reason the consultant recommended that nothing should be done is because there is no consensus on what should be done. In the absence of any consensus, he suggested using the opportunity to explore whether awards for pain and suffering should be available. He suggested the minister might charge a representative group to develop proposals.

In the absence of what we think would have been a proper finding in relation to that issue, we support the formation of a representative group. We would simply say there needs to be a strong women's voice on that sort of group.

Some of the other recommendations we have supported are that materials given to applicants for financial assistance should be redesigned so they are more user-friendly. Processes of applying for, and being granted, financial assistance should be made less confronting and daunting. As there is considerable opposition to the condition that an applicant for financial assistance must have reported the crime to the police, this condition should be reviewed.

We would go further and say that that should be removed. Often, with female victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, there is a reluctance to report to police. Why should someone be deprived of the opportunity to obtain compensation because they have not made a report? If they can establish, on the balance of probabilities, that they have been injured as a result of a sexual assault or domestic violence, then why should they not be compensated?

We also supported the recommendation that solicitors should be able to charge a fee based on the events involved in the matter, according to an agreed scale. There has been a controversial issue about this. The 1999 amendments restricted solicitors to charging a fee of \$650 to help an applicant with an application for financial assistance. The result of that has been that most private solicitors in Canberra will not do it, because it is not worth their while.

THE CHAIR: Is there any other legislation to which that sort of cap applies?

Ms Budavari: Not that I am aware of.

THE CHAIR: That applies specifically to victims of crime?

Ms Budavari: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Is that because \$650 would probably not be enough to pursue it right to the end—properly?

Ms Budavari: Yes, it probably would not be enough, at the rates solicitors charge, which would be \$150 to \$200 an hour. That is only about three hours worth of work. Basically, with an application for compensation, you would be looking at taking the initial instructions from the client, getting medical reports, police reports and any other supporting documentation. You would be presenting those and attending at a conference at the Magistrates Court with the Australian Government Solicitor. You can see that there would be three hours work there already. Then, if the matter is adjourned, or they need further information, you have run out of capacity to do that and get reimbursed for it. There are some solicitors who will do it, but they are not making any money out of it. They are doing it as a community service.

THE CHAIR: How does it compare to legislation covering victims of crime in Queanbeyan? Is it different from the way the New South Wales legislation operates?

Ms Budavari: I do not know the details of the New South Wales legislation. Certainly the New South Wales legislation has attempted to cap the cost of the scheme to the government. It is true, as it is with public liability issues, that there is a move for caps to be applied. I am aware that the New South Wales government has done that, but I am not familiar with the details of the scheme.

Our next point addressed the term of reference relating to the effectiveness of ACT government programs, including targeted support for women from specific groups within the community. Under this heading, we address the needs of indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The main point we wanted to make quite strongly is that, if we had to prioritise our points, we would probably say this would have the highest priority. We do not believe the legal needs of indigenous women in the ACT are being properly addressed. There is quite a history to this. In any event, as a positive step, we are trying to hold some consultations with indigenous women.

Our centre and the Welfare Rights and Legal Centre are having a discussion tomorrow with Julie Tongs from the Aboriginal Medical Service. Louise Taylor, an indigenous woman who is on our management committee, is going to attend that discussion as well. That will be about trying to get some good consultation with those women about what type of service they would like to see in the ACT. From this committee's point of view, we are asking this committee to recommend that the government puts some resources towards that.

THE CHAIR: You said the legal needs of indigenous women are not being addressed. How do you get to that point?

Ms Budavari: Our centre sees indigenous women on the same basis as we see non-indigenous women. As a result, about three per cent of our clients are indigenous. Yet we know, from research which has been done in the past, that indigenous women have greater needs in relation to the legal system than non-indigenous women. On the basis of that research, we believe we are not meeting those needs among the indigenous female community.

We also publicise the existence of an indigenous women's legal advice line. That is a telephone service run through the Women's Legal Centre in Sydney. That is staffed by indigenous women workers who are paralegals—they are not solicitors. It basically means that an indigenous woman can ring the service and speak with another indigenous woman, as her first point of contact.

There are several models in different parts of Australia for how the legal needs of indigenous women are addressed. That has been found to be a more successful model than having a general women's legal centre staffed by non-indigenous women who say, "Come and see us."

There are other centres staffed by indigenous women—so there are face-to-face appointments with indigenous women as their first point of contact. Lots of those centres have outreach services into the indigenous community. Indigenous women workers from the centre go out into the community with a solicitor. That is how the service is delivered, rather than expecting indigenous women to come into an office in Canberra that is staffed by non-indigenous women.

We have always had a knowledge—this has come from previous consultations with indigenous women as well—that we are not really getting out there and finding out what their needs are. A report on family violence in the indigenous community in the ACT and regions was delivered to the government a couple of months ago. We are certainly seeing some indigenous women with those issues, although not to the extent alluded to in the report. Some of the refuges have very high percentages of indigenous women seeking the protection of a safe place to stay.

MRS CROSS: I am mindful of the time. We have a few questions to ask you. Do you want to finish your synopsis and then we can ask you some questions?

Ms Budavari: Yes, that is fine. The rest of the submission can speak for itself.

MRS CROSS: I have a number of questions. I read your submission with interest. Are incidents of stalking in Canberra high, compared to elsewhere?

Ms Budavari: We have not done a study on it, so I can speak only anecdotally. From time to time, women we are seeing report stalking associated with family law problems.

MRS CROSS: Do you find that the current law is effective?

Ms Budavari: There have been some prosecutions and some quite appropriate sentences handed down recently. Many women are reluctant to use the criminal law for that purpose. They are often more willing to rely on obtaining a domestic violence order, or dealing with it in some other way. If it is occurring because the man is attending at the woman's residence to see his children, then they may change those arrangements. The handover of the children takes place at a more neutral point.

MRS CROSS: Have you come across Internet stalking of women?

Ms Budavari: No.

MRS CROSS: I have a lot to ask. I will ask one more question now, to allow my colleagues to ask questions as well. What do you find are the trends of violence against women in the ACT?

Ms Budavari: The trends?

MRS CROSS: Is there any form of violence against women here, as distinct from other cities in Australia? We have unusual demographics, with the highest education and a high standard of living. Do you find it similar to elsewhere, or does it differ?

Ms Budavari: I suspect I am not really qualified to answer that. Someone from the Domestic Violence Crisis Service or maybe the Family Violence Intervention Program would have more of an idea about that.

MS DUNDAS: I have a quick question about the law reform process. You briefly mention the need for reform of the Law Reform Commission. Can you briefly expand on that?

Ms Budavari: There was a recent report on sexual assault law reform handed down. There is a list of Law Reform Commission members who participated in the inquiry, five of whom appear to have resigned. So they were members of the commission only until 1999 or 2000. As far as we are aware, they have not been replaced. That leaves five commissioners. Over the last couple of years, half of the Law Reform Commission seems to have gone, without having been replaced.

It is my understanding, although I was not involved in this capacity at that stage, that the Law Reform Commission did have a certain number of members who were representing community interests, rather than having been appointed because of their legal or policy expertise. From the list of people which appears in the report handed down last year, currently there do not appear to be those types of people on the commission.

THE CHAIR: As to how your service is funded, you have two full-time solicitors, did you say?

Ms Budavari: One is full time and one is part time.

THE CHAIR: Do you manage the workload?

Ms Budavari: Yes.

MRS CROSS: How much more money would you need to meet the needs?

Ms Budavari: I should have said earlier that, after we made the recommendation about ACT government funding, we have recently received some supplementary funding through the ACT Law Society. We were funded to employ a locum solicitor for four days a week for six months. That was approximately \$20,000. We had some discussions with the Chief Minister. He indicated that he, as Attorney General, felt it was appropriate for that sort of funding to be continued by the Law Society. There is quite an elaborate process associated with that.

If we could get that sort of supplementary funding, or maybe even an increase on that sort of supplementary funding, to allow us to have another part-time solicitor for the whole of the year rather than just six months, and that could continue from year to year, that would certainly assist.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Rosemary. We might need to talk to you again, as it continues. Thank you for your time.

JULIA BILES,

ANN WENTWORTH,

BARBARA SILVERSTONE and

ETHEL BETH SEARLE

were called:

THE CHAIR: Welcome everyone, thank you for coming and giving us your time and expertise this afternoon. Before we start I have to say to you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, so they are protected by parliamentary privilege, which gives you protections but also responsibilities. It means you are protected from certain legal actions, such as defamation, for what you say at this hearing. It also means you have the responsibility to tell the committee the truth and that giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

We have got your submission. Perhaps it is best if you make an opening statement, and then we can ask questions. Or if questions pop up, we could ask them during your statement. It will be pretty informal, if that is okay. Please introduce yourself for Hansard.

Ms Biles: I am Julia Biles, and I am currently president of the Older Women's Network (Action), which is the ACT branch of a nationwide organisation. On my left is Ann Wentworth, who probably needs no introduction to you, because she has held positions on many committees and working parties in the ACT and is a current member of OWN (Action).

Next to her is Barbara Silverstone, who is the current convenor of the national body, OWN (Australia) and is also a member of OWN (Action). She and Betty Searle, sitting next to her, are foundation members of OWN (Australia). Obviously, Betty is still a member of our organisation. I feel very much like a newcomer when these two are here because they are foundation members. May I call on various people to speak?

THE CHAIR: Absolutely. Whatever you like.

Ms Biles: I would like Barbara and Betty to give a little background on how this organisation came about. Then I will expand on what we do.

Ms Silverstone: The Older Women's Network (Australia) started in Sydney in around 1986. Older women felt that their voices were not being heard in the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association and decided they had better do something about it. The network started with the approval and support of the pensioners organisation.

Four or five years after that there was this think tank in Sydney to which people, including Betty and I, came from all the states of Australia. It was decided to form OWN (Australia) to represent older women on a national level. Obviously, each state body interests itself in issues in their own states.

Ms Searle: There are not just eight bodies; there are groups all over Australia, in country towns and coastal towns—in many towns. It is a very virile organisation.

Ms Biles: Our aim is to enhance the welfare of older women through providing them with information and a program of activities. A lot of our activity is lobbying because we take up issues that relate to women, particularly older women. We discuss and pursue them, and we bring them to the attention of groups of people such as you because we believe it is very important that the views of experienced older women are taken into account when legislation is being drawn up or when policies are being made at government level.

We are also very strong on presenting a positive image of older women. As you would agree, the image that is presented of older women is of dithering, bumbling women getting in peoples' way. That is not at all what we are like. If you look at the report that came out this week on the health of ACT people over 60, you will find that we are a very active and involved group of older people.

We also strive for recognition of the work that women have done and are continuing to do. If you look at unpaid work, not only in the ACT but throughout Australia, you will find there are hours and hours being done by older women.

One of our concerns at the moment is that, because of the lack of child care in the ACT, a lot of older women are not having the leisure that they should be having in their retirement; they are working full time in child care with their grandchildren. A lot of those women still have parents, so they are the meat in the sandwich: they are looking after the older generation, and they are looking after the youngest. A lot of that work goes unrecognised, and it certainly goes unpaid. One of our objectives is to make sure that all of the work done by women is given due recognition.

As I have said, we attempt to provide input into government. We also work to overcome social isolation. A lot of older people—particularly older women, because we live longer than men—are on their own. Unless they have a group of people with similar interests, they do not choose to go out and be involved in things. There are members of our organisation who, if they were not coming to our gatherings, would be very isolated. That is what we are about. Would anyone else like to add to what we do or are concerned with?

Ms Biles: No, I think that is an excellent summing-up. We did not have very long to put our submission together, so it was done in haste. The main issues we have addressed are housing, health, transport and lifestyle. We have expressed our appreciation of the quality of aged persons units and their availability. Betty, you are currently living in an aged persons unit.

Ms Searle: Yes. I think ACT aged housing is probably the world's best. I live in a horseshoe shape of 10 lovely garden units. The only problem is that they have built a ghastly block of flats next door, of fibro walls, I am sure. We have a joint lawn out the front on the footpath, and they have put in underground sprinklers so that every time we go out, night or day, there is this huge pool of water running in the gutter and we have to sort of jump over it. I thought we might like to complain about that. I am very satisfied there except for that particular problem and the fact that it is on a dangerous corner. Cars can come around that way and this way, and we are lucky not to get knocked over. We would like a sign which says "Aged persons here" or "Stop!"

Ms Biles: I am sure that will be pursued because, once Betty raises something with our organisation, we get onto it. As far as the APUs—aged persons units—are concerned, we commend what is being done, and we hope that many more of them will be built. They must be close to shops, and they must be on bus routes. In the planning of any more of these, we need to make sure that that is where they are.

As far as housing is concerned, self-funded retirees are the ones who seem to fall down a crack. Because they are self-funded retirees they are not eligible for pensions, yet these women are not sufficiently wealthy to go and buy a fabulous townhouse. We would ask if you could exert some influence in the right places so that models could be put forward. Perhaps it could be funded by government and private enterprise—working together. There are all sorts of occasions when government and private enterprise can work together.

As for the sort of group housing, I think Abbeyfield is one. But, again, Abbeyfield is for low-income people. So it would be appropriate in the ACT to start looking at housing for the middle income group, particularly older women. There are models in Queensland that are up and running, where you have a group of, say, eight to 10 self-contained areas with a communal living area. The Older Women's Network (Australia) has been involved in such proposals.

Ms Silverstone: They have been trying to develop that in New South Wales and there is also a similar sort of community housing in South Australia. The other point I would like to bring up with you is that this housing needs to be built with wider doors, hallways and with room to move in the bathroom because, with a wheelchair or walking frame or something like that, it is very difficult, isn't it Betty?

Ms Searle: Yes.

Ms Silverstone: I would like to emphasise that. We should also point out that the houses that some of these older people are rattling around in could be much better utilised by a young family because they are larger and have larger gardens and all that sort of thing. We need to look at a concept of swapping.

Ms Biles: Can I come back to the issue of self-funded retirees buying their own dwelling—whether it be a flat, a unit or a house—if they are not so well off that they can just shell out whatever it is that it costs. Council on the Ageing has done a lot of work on this, and I would really suggest that you talk to them about some of the proposals that they have put forward in the past or are presently developing.

There are ways with mortgages and loans for older people, particularly the sort of loans that are paid back out of an estate rather than loans that are paid back on a monthly basis, that enable some self-funded retirees—not all, but some—to purchase or have part ownership of a dwelling. These sorts of problems have many answers, and that is one. I did not think to bring that information with me, but I can either get it for you or suggest you call on Jim Purcell.

THE CHAIR: Would there be some self-funded retirees who own their own homes, but these have become inappropriate for whatever reason so they are required to sell that house in order to purchase something more appropriate?

Ms Wentworth: Many times it is because there is a death or because their spouse has to go into a nursing home or an aged persons facility. Generally, it is because of divorce or death. They do have some money, but they do not have sufficient money, especially after divorce. At the time children leave home there seems to be a growing incidence of divorce.

Ms Biles: “We stayed together for the children.” But it does happen. We are finding that older couples are divorcing. Once you do that, your combined wealth is okay. But once you split it, you just do not have enough.

Ms Wentworth: And you are ineligible for government housing.

Ms Biles: So it is that group of self-funded retirees that we feel do not have a voice.

Ms Wentworth: Or women who have had low-paid jobs all of their lives and have never actually purchased a dwelling. They are stuck, too, in many cases.

THE CHAIR: Presumably accommodation closer to shops and transport is usually more expensive, so that would impact as well.

Ms Wentworth: They do not want to live way out away from friends.

Ms Searle: Do you mean more expensive to build or more expensive to upkeep?

THE CHAIR: To get into it in some way. Whether you buy or rent it, I would imagine that it is more expensive.

Ms Wentworth: Yes, and if people have to buy further out, we then come into the transport area. A lot of older women have never driven or, as they have got older, they have had to stop driving because they cannot see well enough—or for whatever reason. So building aged persons units further out, whether public or private, exacerbates the transport situation as well.

Ms Biles: I would like to move on to health.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Ms Biles: There are several areas that we are pursuing at the moment. I am sure you have all received a letter either from our organisation or from individuals to do with the convalescent facility. There is a lot of confusion. Since we started using the term “transitional care”, the whole thing has become clouded. We are very concerned that there is no convalescent facility in the ACT.

People argue that there are beds at Burrangiri, but they are emergency. The building itself, the institution, is not a convalescent facility. We are very interested in a convalescent facility. During the previous government, the Older Women’s Network called a public meeting, and we had over 100 people. Michael Moore and Jon Stanhope, as Leader of the Opposition at the time, both attended.

Chapter and verse was given—details. We had so much support. People from all sorts of organisations—not just ours—were giving evidence of their experience, on their discharge from hospital with crutches or a walking frame, of going home to a house on their own—there was just nobody there. They do get community service people coming in, but there is nobody there at night. Now, if you are on your own, you have got a plastered leg and you are not used to walking on a frame, getting up and going to the toilet you will have another fall and you are back in hospital. It is inhumane to send people home on their own.

They listened to our arguments at the meeting and very shortly afterwards it was announced that \$3.49 million would be made available in the budget for what we thought would be a convalescent facility. But the name has become “transitional care”. There is a blurring here. Transition from what to what? We envisage it as transition from hospital to home. What is clouding the issue now is that it is transition from hospital to nursing home. That is another issue. A convalescent facility is a facility not just for old people but for any age. It is for people who are discharged from hospital and who will be going home.

The Morling Lodge issue clouded it even further. When the ministers for health, including Michael Moore and Bronwyn Bishop, met in South Australia, the Commonwealth said, “We will do a dollar-for-dollar deal if any of you will be in it.” Michael Moore put his hand up. That is when this decision was made that the Commonwealth would pay dollar for dollar with the ACT for some sort of transition. But it became people in aged care who were in beds in hospital waiting to go to a nursing home. So the 12 beds at Morling Lodge were made available, and that took some of the \$3.49 million.

Several of us were appointed to a transitional care reference group, and we made it quite clear what we meant by a convalescent facility. We discussed the sort of people who would be entitled to go there. It was not just old people; it was any age. But it was people who would be going home afterwards. We looked at staffing, we looked at all of these issues and we were told that our deliberations and recommendations would then go to the new minister.

Our reference group has not been meeting, because we have been waiting for some sort of decision. That is where we are at. Ann is also a member of the transitional care reference group. Do you want to add any more to that?

Ms Wentworth: I would just like to say that Jon Stanhope made a very strong commitment in his election promises that there would be a convalescent unit. We identified a house at Chapman.

Ms Biles: Yes.

Ms Wentworth: It is owned by Housing, and Bill Wood is responsible for that. He is quite happy for that house to be used.

THE CHAIR: Is that Chapman hostel?

Ms Wentworth: Yes. He is quite happy to have Chapman hostel refurbished and used as a convalescent unit. Getting it out of the grounds of any hospital is brilliant because it means that all hospitals will refer to it. If it is in the grounds of Canberra Hospital or Calvary Hospital, they will, in effect, own it and refer to it and the other hospitals won't. We need it to be apart from both of the main public hospitals. The money is there for refurbishment. In fact, the money is sitting there until 30 June, as I understand, and then no-one is quite clear whether it will be rolled over or reabsorbed into Health or used to do something else that is desperately needed in Health. I do not know.

The snag now is in the running costs. We envisaged a convalescent unit as having a carer there responsible at night and perhaps one or two people during the day and we envisaged it buying in the normal range of services, from OTs to physios. The department set up a bells and whistles model. It is wonderful. It has acute care nurses running around every which way. But this is not a convalescent unit: these people have been discharged from hospital well enough to go home but unfortunately not able to go home when home is empty. So you do not need stacks of acute care nurses running around, for God's sake.

This, of course, drove the price right up. They came up with costings of \$1.2 million to run this every year, I am told. This was sent over by the department, I gather from Maureen Sheehan, to Jon Stanhope's office to be included in the budget deliberations. This was seen as being terribly expensive and not what was needed.

Ms Biles: It was not what we recommended.

Ms Wentworth: And it had nothing to do with the transitional care reference group, I hasten to add. Julia and I are not responsible for this rubbish.

THE CHAIR: Is there any licensing requirement for convalescence facilities, like having a certain amount of staff if it is a government-run facility in, say, child care?

Ms Wentworth: Katy, I do not know. I have not heard about that. But you are right about the child care one. It is a federal law that came in a few years ago. I do not know about convalescent facilities.

Ms Biles: We would dearly love to get some action. It is going to be a couple of years.

Ms Searle: It is nearly 12 months, isn't it?

Ms Wentworth: We are going to run another public meeting on 3 July if what is in the budget is unsatisfactory. I belong to several older persons groups, such as the University of the Third Age, Council on the Ageing—I am a vice-president of both—and the Older Women’s Network, and it is quite clear from talking to people—this is an unrepresentative poll done by me—that this is one of the things that older people are talking about: they want a convalescent unit.

Alongside older people talking about it, people from agencies such as the Brain Injury Foundation are talking about it, too. There is this great dearth of beds for people who are discharged from hospital—for them to just get on their feet and then be all right. We do not want them readmitted to hospital with something that has gone drastically wrong. We want to treat them like human beings and not make them into scared, hurt people. That is our passion at the moment.

Ms Biles: Yes, it is a passion, actually.

Ms Wentworth: And we are calling another public meeting.

Ms Searle: We will keep at it until you do something.

THE CHAIR: When, Julia?

Ms Biles: July the 3rd.

Ms Wentworth: At 2.30. Hughes Community Hall.

THE CHAIR: Ros, did you have a question?

MS DUNDAS: I did. In the written submission you refer to the ACT as being the only state or territory without a psychogeriatric. Could you expand on that point?

Ms Wentworth: Yes. As I understand it, a few years ago the Howard government funded psychogeriatrics in every state and territory except the ACT.

Ms Biles: That is true.

Ms Wentworth: And we still have not got one. We have asked for one several times, and Michael Moore actually lobbied quite hard for a psychogeriatric. We believe that the population in this town is ageing and it is warranted.

MS DUNDAS: So it is more of a lack of funding from a federal program?

Ms Wentworth: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: And you do not care where the money comes from, as long as there is one?

Ms Wentworth: I do not care where the money comes from.

Ms Biles: As long as we get it.

Ms Wentworth: We just want it so that people in this town are on an equal footing with people in other capital cities around Australia.

Ms Biles: Federal funding goes into these units in every state and territory except here.

Ms Wentworth: There could be an ACT component necessary, too. I do not know exactly what the funding is, but I know that federal funding kicked it off in other places.

Ms Biles: And there is proven need for it. Surveys of the health of older people in the ACT would show you that. Are we running out of time?

THE CHAIR: No, you have got another 10 minutes.

MRS CROSS: And we would like to include time for questions.

Ms Biles: I think it is obvious what we are asking for in transport.

Ms Searle: Yes, it is such an effort. I recently had some fractured bones and was getting on my feet just to get into the bus because I do not have a car. Even though they have rails, you are never too sure they are going to be suitably hard because the driver might suddenly decide to shut the door and you are not in properly. So you need some sort of ramp in some buses or maybe all buses.

MRS CROSS: That has actually been budgeted for.

Ms Biles: There is a ramp thing, yes. In that disability stuff. We have also expressed concern about the public library service.

Ms Searle: Yes, that is in a very dire situation. They are thinking of closing Civic library and building it over in what they call the “arts centre”—that is, the theatres. It is supposed to be going over there. Now, older people who get buses into Civic in order to go to the library will have to walk all the way over to Civic Square—over to here, in fact. That is a very sore point with readers.

MS DUNDAS: What about the libraries in the regional centres, such as the Kippax library or the Dickson library?

Ms Searle: I belong to Friends of the ACT Library Service, and the only library, apart from Civic, that we have had a question about is Kippax, which at the moment we think is being attended to. The whole thing is being rebuilt—the whole shopping area, including the library.

Ms Silverstone: Woden library is fairly difficult to access, as well. There are buses that go past now, but not terribly frequently. If you go to the bus interchange, for example, it is quite a long hike to get up to the library.

Ms Wentworth: As far as I know, Belconnen and Dickson are well patronised. I have not heard any complaints about either of them, and I mix in that area.

Ms Searle: No, Dickson is excellent.

Ms Biles: We do applaud the government for its efforts to assist older people to acquire computer skills, but the demand is greater than the supply, again. I know that as soon as the University of the Third Age advertise a course, if it is anything to do with computers, it is booked out immediately.

Ms Wentworth: We book the short courses out. They were advertised in the prospectus, and in January people started ringing in on the due date that we had advertised them for. They were booked until October from the first few days. Then they were just booked solid for the year. We cannot run any more courses in U3A than we are presently running.

Ms Biles: So you cannot say that older people do not want to learn new skills. There is a great demand, and those who have acquired basic skills now want to get more experience. If something can be done there to support the programs that have been started, that would be received very well.

Ms Wentworth: COTA is starting to run, too.

THE CHAIR: Do U3A get any of the digital divide grants that were given out?

Ms Wentworth: U3A Online got some money, and COTA got some money through the digital divide grants. They are putting computers for the public to use into the COTA library. But U3A ACT did not; neither did it apply for any grants. It has no capacity as a big voluntary organisation. It has no paid staff to actually cope with grants—neither could U3A pay GST. It is just too difficult. We run on members' subs and that is it.

Ms Biles: Finally, one of the barrows I frequently push is to do with lifestyle and healthy ageing. Older people are very interested in retaining good health and fitness levels, but programs appropriate to them must be provided. If you think of what is being provided in the fitness centres, it is upbeat and it is not the sort of thing that older people are looking for. The YMCA provides appropriate programs. The facilities there are quite appalling—I work there. We need more and better places for older people to go to do strength training and low-impact aerobic stuff.

The YMCA does a fabulous job on very little money. The set-up there is appalling. I think it is a prime site; if only they could sell it and pull down the dreadful building they have got. But they cannot do those things without help. In the classes that I run, I get 20 women in their 70s and 80s. Once they come, they bring their friends with them. It is a burgeoning area; it is expanding rapidly and it needs support from the government. I know you have got lots of demands, but that is one area that will pay well because healthy people are not going to be queuing up at your hospitals.

Ms Wentworth: Yes, they are not going to be breaking bones and having falls so much either.

Ms Biles: That is right; fall prevention programs. If my colleagues agree, I will leave it there.

Ms Searle: Because we have to answer questions.

THE CHAIR: Yes, we have got some questions.

MS DUNDAS: When we had the Domestic Violence Crisis Service in earlier, they were talking about how they prioritised problems of elder abuse.

Ms Wentworth: I worked on that with Council on the Ageing. Is it appropriate that I talk about this? Elder abuse is of growing concern to many of us. It is one of those problems that were never talked about. It is akin to how incest was seen in the 70s: it did not happen, and then suddenly it started to be talked about—the same as domestic violence then started to be talked about in the 80s. Elder abuse is now being talked about, and more and more agencies are coming across people who are suffering from psychological, physical, financial or sexual abuse or neglect. There are a whole lot of causes of elder abuse. And it is not only male to female; it can also be female to male.

The chief form of elder abuse that Council on the Ageing has come across is financial. Financial abuse is generally perpetrated by those nearest and dearest to older people: their children, their relatives and their dearest friends. It is one of those things that older people are reluctant to do anything about because, once they do, it means their family supports and their grandchildren are not seen again. It is the removal of the ones that you love.

It really is an insidious problem, and it is something that agencies are attempting to come to grips with because it is necessary in order to improve the lives of older people. As people live longer, there is this tendency for mother's money to be managed or mother to be neglected. We are just not going to sit by and see this happen.

Ms Searle: I know of a case where a mother signed her house over to her son, and the next thing you know she is in a nursing home and he has taken over the house. And that is not uncommon.

MRS CROSS: Following on from Roslyn's question, how safe do old people feel in their homes? I have heard about family abuse, but there is also abuse done by non-familiar people. How safe are people in their homes and in public places?

Ms Wentworth: Older people do not feel safe in their homes or in public places. However, the statistics quite contradict their feelings of non-safety in public places. The people who are really not safe in public places are young males, between about 18 and 30. They are the group that are being thumped most; it is not older women. But whenever there is a bag snatch or an older woman is knocked over, it is reported in all the media in town. This gives the impression that older people are not safe, so then older people start saying: "It is not safe to go out at night. It is not safe." And I think this is a great pity.

Ms Silverstone: That is the other side of the coin, though: a lot of older women do not go out at night, so they are not there to be banged over the head or whatever.

Ms Wentworth: It is a circular argument.

Ms Silverstone: I know, it is.

MRS CROSS: So would it be correct of us to assume that most of the abuse is done by people known to the person and that the amount of abuse done by non-familiar people is a small percentage?

Ms Wentworth: Yes, it is the same as incest; it is the same as domestic violence. People know the perpetrators.

THE CHAIR: In your opinion, Ann, what steps could a government take to try to address some of the problems of elder abuse?

Ms Wentworth: We talked to Heather McGregor at length about this because in many cases it would be better if Heather had access to yearly reports on how sons and daughters were managing mother's or father's money, for instance. It depends on the agreements that are reached, but all of these agreements should at least have some sort of oversight. They do not. They only do if you go through the courts or the tribunals.

THE CHAIR: Is that for people Heather is a guardian for?

Ms Wentworth: Yes, but the guardianship rules could be broadened to anyone who has any sort of care.

THE CHAIR: And the Public Trustee would have a role there, too, perhaps.

Ms Biles: And it needs to be regularly reported upon.

Ms Wentworth: Yes, we thought yearly reports. Younger people do tend to anticipate the death of their parents. They wish to use the money. We're living longer, just to annoy them!

Ms Biles: And it is not coming quickly.

Ms Wentworth: And we are going to live longer just to annoy them.

Ms Biles: There is also a feeling of guilt on the part of the older people because they think, "I want to make sure that I have got a large sum for the young ones when I go." We are trying to encourage them to take up skiing, and that is spending the kid's inheritance. Spend up. Don't have the lump sum. But a lot of people think, "No, I'll go without. I won't go on that holiday because it will cut into the nest egg that I have got for my children and my grandchildren." They are going to be much better off than them.

MRS CROSS: I told my parents to spend theirs.

Ms Biles: I am flat out spending mine.

Ms Wentworth: There are forms of abuse other than financial. There is no way older women will go into a women's refuge; they are totally inappropriate places. At one stage Toora, one of the refuges that you are probably familiar with, made one of their halfway houses available for older women. I do not know if they are still doing that, but they

certainly were a year ago. It is totally inappropriate for women of my age to try and share a space with women and kids. It just does not work. Older women who are bashed—and they are bashed—will stay home and cop it rather than go to a refuge like that.

MRS CROSS: Because there is no appropriate place to go.

Ms Wentworth: It is totally inappropriate, and the refuge workers—well, I am looking at you all; you are young.

MRS CROSS: I will remember you in my will for that compliment.

Ms Wentworth: Some of us want to talk to people who have shared some more of our life experiences. Let me put it that way.

MS DUNDAS: So you think there is a need for an appropriate facility?

Ms Wentworth: There is a need for an appropriate facility, and then there is need for housing to follow on. We all know about how difficult it is to move women on through refuges into appropriate housing. There needs to be another stream moving older women on, too, because they cannot go home.

THE CHAIR: Are there any other questions?

MRS CROSS: Yes, on paying bills by phone. You are saying you would like to see that happen. Why can't you pay bills by phone now?

Ms Wentworth: Well, I do.

MRS CROSS: I pay by phone. It is one of your points here: you say you would like the government to revert to the previous policy.

Ms Wentworth: Wasn't it rates that you could not pay by phone?

MRS CROSS: Rates you cannot do by phone. Yes, that is right.

Ms Wentworth: Yes, that is the one that is impossible to pay.

MRS CROSS: You have got to go to the post office. Okay.

THE CHAIR: We might leave it there. We have not discussed taking up your suggestion to talk to the Council of the Ageing, but I think we will. I am sure they are also good people to listen to during this inquiry. Thank you very much for your time this afternoon.

KASY CHAMBERS,

MERRINDAHL ANDREW,

ERICA LEWIS and

LEONIE WHYTE

were called.

THE CHAIR: Welcome everyone. Thank you for coming here to the Select Committee on the Status of Women. We have just a little formal bit that I do at the beginning—just informing you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly and protected by parliamentary privilege, which gives you some protections and also some responsibilities. It means you are protected from certain legal actions 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.

We have your submission. I do not know how you are planning on dealing with it in terms of who addresses us first, but perhaps we can just throw it over to you to make some opening statements and I will try to behave and not ask questions in the middle—in terms of which I am a serial offender—so we will have enough time to ask some questions at the end, if that is all right.

Ms Chambers: We will talk to the submission, so WEL is going to cover the issues that are at the start of the submission.

Ms Andrew: I am Merrindahl Andrew, the convenor of the Women's Electoral Lobby ACT. We have decided the way we would do it was to single out, each of us, one of the main issues that we have addressed in the submission and speak to that, and then answer questions on those issues plus the ones in the submission.

The one that I am speaking on is citizenship, leadership and representation. One of the things that makes it difficult for women's organisations to respond to inquiries such as this is the lack of gender disaggregated data about people who use ACT government services and about outcomes that they receive through them.

So one of the things that WEL ACT and the YWCA Canberra would like to see is that all major statistical indicators within ACT government reports include a gender disaggregated component, and that these statistics be both compiled as a gender report and repeated through the individual departmental reports as well. I am sure you have probably read by now a submission by Val Thompson and Hazel Moir about sporting facilities in the ACT, and that is one of the kinds of consultations that is able to be done once these statistics are available.

But they had to trawl through the reports to find those statistics and, as Erica will talk about shortly, unfunded women's organisations do not always have a lot of time and organisational capacity to do that kind of research, so it would make it a lot easier for us

if we had the data available to make input without having to go to the extent of research that Val and Hazel did.

The other thing I would like to mention about representation is the consultative mechanisms for dealing with women's policy in the ACT. We were interested that the Ministerial Advisory Council has been adapted to one where organisations are capable of being represented. But one of the problems that we can see is that it is not explicit to the rest of the community which representatives are affiliated with which organisations and that is causing ambiguities for people who are on the Advisory Council and might want to represent the views of their organisations but it is not clear whether that is their capacity or they are there simply as individuals for their personal knowledge.

We are also interested in the re-establishment of a young women's advisory council, or a consultative forum, but we want to make sure that the previous forum is evaluated fully before the institution of a new one. Those are just a few of the issues that I wanted to talk about. I chose those because they are things that inform the rest of the kind of policy inputs that can happen for women in the ACT.

Ms Lewis: I am Erica Lewis and I am representing the Women's Electoral Lobby this afternoon. Just to follow on from Merri's comments, I actually was a member of the young women's advisory forum last session—towards the end of its life, it must be admitted—and maybe my frustration with being involved in that process was because I had not been involved from the start, but I did find it very difficult to understand what my role was meant to be on that body and what we were actually trying to achieve as we went through it.

But my topic to talk about is funding, which I am sure is a popular topic with women's organisations in the ACT. As far as I am aware—and I have asked many people and had a pretty solid look—the ACT government does not have a funding program for women's advocacy organisations. You know, the government funds service delivery but not advocacy, which is an important part of women being represented in the public voice of the community and women being involved in debate around some of those really big issues about safety, violence, employment—all of those issues that affect women—but we dedicate very few resources to ensuring that those women's voices are heard.

As you have seen in our submission, we have spoken about a grants program—it is page 5 of our submission. We have spoken about the need for a grants program in order to facilitate individual activities on a kind of one-off basis, and also about operational funding and the importance that that has for the operation of community organisations.

The example that we have listed in our submission in terms of something that project funding would have been very cool for is the Women's Constitutional Convention, which will happen in Canberra the week after next, some time very soon. That will be a great relief. But there are going to be about 40 speakers and workshop presenters at that conference. There are women coming from all states and territories—significant numbers of indigenous women. But when the group of women's organisations who are involved in the Women's Constitutional Convention approached the ACT government for support—and we in fact asked for in-kind support; we needed a fax machine and little things like that to operate an office—we could not be helped. There wasn't the facility to help us because there isn't a projects program in the ACT.

Just so it is up front, we do have money from the federal government for a lead-in project, and we did secure some funding from the National Museum to support rural and regional participants attending the conference, but the conference itself is being run on a cost-recovery basis, which is really exciting and will be quite hairy towards the end. But for those kinds of projects that people do that add to the community, that strengthen the women's organisations, that are important, the ACT government does not currently have a mechanism to support them, or not one that we could find and certainly not women-specific.

The other thing that is important in terms of funding for women's organisations is to talk about operational funding. Operational funding is that recurrent funding that organisations get to enable their organisations to operate. Because most of our organisations are run by volunteers, most of our volunteers spend their time doing the things that make your organisation go: your memberships, your GST—and that really does take a long time—newsletters and a lot of those things.

And to find the time to write your submissions, to be involved in the policy work, which is probably why you got involved and the best service that you can be to your members, the women you represent, and in terms of building a relationship with government, what is most useful for government, that is actually very hard to do. Because you have to put out a newsletter, you have to pay your bills, it is actually much easier to watch the deadline for the submission go by. You know, the ATO is not going to chase you for the submission; it is going chase you for your BAS, eventually.

And so operational funding would free people who are volunteers and support their work. Most of us bear the cost of our volunteering work—you know, email access, stationery, paper, whatever. We cover those costs ourselves and it means that being a participant is a privilege thing. I can appear here today because I have a job where I can say, "Hi, I'm going out for a couple of hours, back later". And I can participate because I have a tertiary education and I know how to access the information and I can facilitate that myself.

But if we want our women's organisations to reach out more broadly through the community they also need to be supported to do that outreach work to include more women, to include more diverse groups of women and those women who are normally silenced from the process because it is just too hard to access, because of cost, because of accessibility, because of all those things. And that is where operational funding comes in.

I also wanted to tell you that, while I know New South Wales is a whole lot bigger than the ACT, the New South Wales government made 14 awards under its 2001 Women's Grants Program. Five grants were funded in the large grants category, from \$31,000 to \$100,000, and nine grants were made in the small grants category. I was also able to find that Tasmania has a grants program and Victoria has a Women in Leadership grants program. So other governments do it and it would be very nice if the ACT government could see its way clear to do it, because we think it would have benefits in terms of hearing women's voices, in terms of strengthening consultation and policy processes for the government.

Ms Whyte: I am Leonie Whyte, Research and Policy Officer for the YWCA of Canberra. One of the issues that the YWCA would like to highlight today is around women and violence, and women's safety.

Since our submission we have noticed that a reference group has been announced around the government implementing a framework around violence and community safety for women. So we are very interested to see how that progresses and to be involved in that.

MS DUNDAS: Sorry, have you been invited to be involved?

Ms Whyte: We haven't formally been invited as yet. We have spoken to the women's policy unit and they have indicated that the YWCA and other women's organisations will be involved, but I think at this stage they have only consulted with the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and Rape Crisis Centre.

MS DUNDAS: Thank you.

Ms Whyte: As expressed in other forums, the YWCA is concerned about negative experiences of young women being subjected to sexual harassment and assaults, particularly at public events but of course under any circumstances. As a follow-on around issues that arose from comments made in relation to women's safety at the Summernats, the YWCA convened a working group involving women's sector organisations in October last year. That convened a public forum entitled "Canberra Safe—creating safe and inclusive public events in the ACT" and I think most of the outcomes are outlined in the submission that we have provided.

I think the main points were around culture and attitude change. It was commented that this needs to occur if violence against women is to be eliminated, and it is going to require the development and expansion of strategies to educate children and young people, as well as other members of the community, to understand the impact of violence and change negative stereotypes around women and violence.

Following on from that, it will require increasing the perception that violence against women and treating women as objects are not okay, and, especially at events, that event organisers and the media consider the impact that their publicity and advertising has on the general public and the messages that they are presenting around women and violence, and women's safety at public events. Our recommendations include increased research being undertaken in regard to sexual assault at public events in the ACT and, as mentioned before, that strategies be developed and expanded to educate people around the impact of violence.

Ms Chambers: I am Kasy Chambers, from YWCA of Canberra. In terms of talking about the status of women, one of the areas is economic wellbeing—well, for the participation and status of anybody. One of the areas that we see impacting on women in the ACT in the next couple of years perhaps is the simplification to the Social and Community Services Award that is currently happening. We are not entirely certain where that particular process is up to but we are advised that it is a process which will take place, if it hasn't already.

Our concern is about the outcomes for the large numbers of women who are employed in the community sector. It is a sector that is mainly female and it will impact on the economic wellbeing of women and therefore their status within the ACT.

There is also another impact: a flow-on effect for women accessing community services—many of the clients are female—and the lesser degree to which those services will be able to meet those needs. So we are asking that the ACT government has a close look at ways to combat the financial effect of that award simplification by considering the tendering process around service provision and around the purchaser-provider model. Most funding is currently done to a competitive tendering model, and this may well disadvantage organisations that intend to keep their staff and their prospective staff at a level which is currently acceptable. And we just feel that that may have some effect on the community sector and its employees and the users of that sector. So I just wanted to highlight that issue from our submission.

THE CHAIR: I am not certain I understand what is proposed with the SACS award.

Ms Chambers: It is proposed that the levels 5 and above, which—don't quote me on this; I suppose I am being quoted—is about \$45,000 and upwards, will be frozen for a period of time until the other states and territories catch up to the ACT.

The issue for the ACT is that the community sector services compete with very many government positions which are much better paid for similar work. There are also other issues about the cost of living in the ACT and high rental prices, but certainly it is that competition with the government sector which is going to make it more difficult for us to offer services to women, and to men, and for the women who are employed in the community sector, and it is a vastly female work force, to maintain their level of economic status.

THE CHAIR: And is that something that government is imposing?

Ms Chambers: It is coming from the industrial relations court. It is not something that is within the jurisdiction of the ACT Legislative Assembly, but what is is the way in which the government of the ACT buys services and pays for community services. And I guess that is where we are asking that this committee has a look at how that happens.

MS DUNDAS: We had representatives from the Youth Coalition in earlier today, also talking about the barriers to young women participating in the community. They also told us all the horrific stories around young women and violence and young women and sexual health and young women et cetera et cetera, which all added to the barriers of young women being able to participate in their community on boards et cetera. They talked about running a women on boards campaign and the young women's consultative forum as part of the ministerial advisory council for women. How are those organisations actually working to encourage young women? What support is there for young women to be involved in the broader community, as you said?

Ms Chambers: Certainly in the YWCA, any of its committees has to have a certain percentage of women who we consider as young women, under 30. So that is part of our national and international agreement. It is actually quite difficult for us to find women who are able to take up those places or who are motivated to take up those places. I am

not sure whether it is ability or motivation, because there certainly are plenty of barriers keeping young women from those types of participation.

And you talk then about the Youth Coalition and some of the issues, the violence and all those sorts of issues that were stopping young women accessing. And, slightly tangential to your question, I would like to add to those issues that the Youth Coalition raised the issues of self-violence, which are affecting young women to a much greater degree than young men—and the degree of services that are available for those areas, particularly around health promotion, so that we are actually looking at prevention and intervention in a universal service at that end of the spectrum before we actually get to the mopping up afterwards.

Ms Lewis: I would probably say that I don't think that the young women's forum that I was involved in helped an awful lot of young women participate. As far as I am aware, the young women members of that forum were largely there in their capacity as workers in organisations that were related with youth things, at some stage. When I accepted my position I was actually specifically told that I was not there as a WEL person. I think I was then still the Young WEL convenor for the ACT. But I was told I was there because of my work with young people through the Students Association of the University of Canberra. So that creates an interesting tension about whether that is a forum of young people or a forum of people who work with young people.

I guess WEL in the ACT is pretty proud to note that it has done the generational change in terms of leadership of its organisation. I was the convenor before Mary and we have a strong collection of young women members. We have over 100 members in our ANU club that we run, and those are largely young people. There are some men as well. But it is about resourcing and support. I was very fortunate in my time as convenor to have a job that supported me and did not mind me spending all that time on the telephone and having strange media crews wander through the office.

But it is about having those supports; it is about being able to go to the meetings at night and not being scared to get on the bus—you know, the unlit bus stop outside Ursula College, on the way to Civic. It is about feeling safe. It is about having the money to go to the functions to make the networks to do things. And it's about, I guess, other women from women's organisations having the time and capacity to sit with you and say, "Okay, let's do this together", so that they provide that support so that young women can step into those roles.

But those are all barriers about time as well as the other things. I cannot really remember what the latest figures are but, if you look at undergraduate students, the majority of undergraduate students also hold down part-time jobs as well as full-time uni loads. The same is true of most TAFE students. Most young women, most young people, have many demands on their time, and being committed to a community organisation and to being an active citizen is a huge call on your personal life and your time, and those are all barriers as well.

MS DUNDAS: I guess I am just interested in how we translate what has happened in WEL, with young women being involved there, to other organisations, to government—

Ms Lewis: Guts and determination. It is about networking though. In WEL I think it worked because we had a number of young women who knew each other and who decided they would do this together and they recruited their friends and then they waited on campus and they sat out at O week and they recruited a whole lot more people. And it is a friendship network, which supports each other in their participation but also excludes other people who you don't happen to know. So I guess it has upsides and downsides, but I think it has to be, in so many ways, through word of mouth; otherwise you get the usual suspects.

Ms Whyte: I think there is definitely room here for a formal peer support mentoring program. I feel that it is quite daunting to be involved in some boards and formal committees and other leadership opportunities when you don't have the networks that Erica is talking about, and a lot of women don't when they are sort of first starting off, especially disadvantaged young women. So if there were some formal processes around women that wanted to be involved, it would be, I guess, the foot in the door to start off with.

Ms Andrew: Yes. The other thing I was going to mention is that it is connected again to the capacity for organisations to do their operational business and have that happening without taking up too much of the resources of the organisation, because to get people involved you need to be able to offer them opportunities to do things that they are interested in and to have input on policy decisions. I mean it is not very appealing to say to someone, "Come and help me fold newsletters".

Ms Lewis: Although that's where you start.

Ms Andrew: It is more appealing to say to say, "Come and help me organise these awards that we're going to give out for comments that denigrate women", or something like that.

Ms Lewis: And volunteer management is intensely resource-intensive, particularly if you are a volunteer to start with.

THE CHAIR: Not wanting to take away from what you are talking about in terms of participation, but we have to acknowledge that there are a lot of young women, young people, who use our ACT government programs that are not interested in being involved in any sort of representative capacity. So, if we just shift to looking at priorities of ACT government funding in relation to women—not just to young women, but women—and your views on that, what would you see as priorities for the next two to three years? I do not want to take away from that—you know, getting people involved and what has happened at WEL is excellent, but WEL's a bit different to ACT government.

Ms Lewis: Yes, but I think it is also important to acknowledge the good things that young people can do and young women can do in running their organisations and to present positive portrayals as well as listen to the problems.

Ms Chambers: I think in terms of funding priorities that the suggestions in our submission fall almost into two areas, some of which are almost about attitudinal and governmental change, and some of which actually require funding. So I will talk to a couple of those funding ones, because that was your wording. We would see housing as

a huge area for the need for funding—not that housing so much specifically targets women, but women are targeted by the inadequacies of the private market. Landlords tend to, I guess, discriminate against people with less money and against people with more children. And unfortunately, typically they are often women. So the inadequacies in the private market do hit women harder than they hit men on the whole. There is also still a shortage of emergency accommodation for couples and for families in the ACT, so we still see families having to split up if they are homeless. So that would be an area of large funding and a priority. And the area that we talked about, the community sector, is another. They are a couple of the areas we would touch on. Some of the other areas we have spoken about, things like Canberra Safe and safety, are often around attitudinal change, campaigns and culture, rather than funding per se.

Ms Lewis: I think the Youth Coalition raised this morning the issue of access to child care—I think accessibility to child care and affordability. I guess the instances I am most aware of are those where people have had to leave study because they could not access appropriate childcare for their children, particularly for babies. In terms of people accessing education and work, the provision of those child-care services is just fundamental to them being able to participate. But the big problem that I know arises for tertiary students is also around field trips that run over weekends, night classes, where you just can't find any child care, and those kinds of things, which are the reason that some young women leave university. I know there is a childcare workers inquiry going on, but those problems stop people being able to take the jobs they are offered and get the education they deserve. And education is just such a fundamental part of being an empowered citizen and participating, and what your work outcomes are likely to be and where you are likely to end up, that that is a real problem.

THE CHAIR: Family day care, which provides night and weekend care, is not well publicised in terms of child care options for people. They are solely thinking, “Centre-based care is it”, and that it is only 8 to 6 Monday to Friday, whereas in actual fact there are seven or eight family day care providers in Canberra. Is that something that people are not interested in or—

Ms Chambers : I think you're right. I think that when we think about child care we think about a centre with 30, 50 or however many children in it, and I think that that's the same when we talk about the campaign that's going on at the moment around child care pays. And family day care is given an even lower amount than that. I think it isn't as much in the public eye. I think that the quality accreditation scheme that is happening to family day care at the moment may well help with that, but I think it could be better publicised. But there is also an issue of not all family day-carers want to work evenings anyway. They put in a tremendous number of hours—I think it was 60 hours a week to pull a salary of about \$30,000. They would be really lucky to get \$30,000 for that, so it is an area where there is some available, but probably not all family day-caregivers. But I think you're right. I think it needs to have its profile raised significantly as a provider of quality child care.

MRS CROSS: I wanted to talk to you about paid maternity leave. I wanted to ask you what model you advocate, because I see from your submission that you've read Pru Goward's submission, and she offers a number of different options. Which one did you favour?

Ms Chambers : None of those particularly in that report—probably more a hybrid. In addition to reading that, I am also familiar with the New Zealand, French and British models. First of all, I would like to rename it in our submission “parental leave”. I think that “maternity leave” makes this a woman’s problem, and it is not. So I think we should be talking about “parental leave”. And I think we should be looking to a model where the amount of leave possible is split between both partners, whether they be a male and female or whether they be both female, so that parental leave is actually allowable for both male and female of a couple, and so it can be the primary care giver who chooses to take that time off and not necessarily always the mother.

So we are thinking about models that do not encourage discrimination for the women in the work force. We would also like to see it in the overall terms of a population policy, and be thinking about those sorts of issues, and then be looking at parental leave within that policy.

Ms Andrew: I would like to say that we support what Kirsty said about emphasis on parental leave instead of just maternity leave, because we do not want to be entrenching a gender division of unpaid labour, even as we are trying to improve conditions for women. WEL’s position is that paid maternity leave should be funded by government from general taxation revenue. Beyond that, the model that we support has not been determined fully. But we don’t believe that the cost should be borne either by businesses alone or by individuals. Another point I would like to make is that WEL is concerned to emphasise that paid maternity leave or parental leave is not about improving Australia’s fertility rates in the first instance; it’s about empowering people to have lives that are not either family or work, but that can combine both.

Ms Lewis: And both organisations are, of course, writing responses to the HREOC report, and your paid maternity leave forum will be appearing in Canberra on 24 June.

Ms Andrew: Paid parental leave.

Ms Lewis: We haven’t done the flyers yet, so it can be incorporated.

Ms Chambers : But I think in terms of how that parental leave should be funded, we would be supporting it through a tax through something similar to payroll tax, or something that your taxes—that’s there that’s not—

MRS CROSS: You’ve been reading my submission.

Ms Chambers : No—sorry, I should say “yes”, shouldn’t I?

MRS CROSS: Sounds like it, that’s all right.

Ms Chambers : So that it is a broad-spread tax—and it won’t lead to employers making decisions about which gender they employ, or about whether they put on a half person or three-quarters of a person, or a full-time.

MRS CROSS: I just wanted to ask you something about mental health. What is the basis of your belief that men and women need different mental health strategies?

Ms Chambers: Men and women often exhibit different symptoms of mental health issues, so that women will often have more internalised intrinsic depressive type disorders, whereas men are often more likely to exhibit disorders around substance abuse. There is also a high level of violence associated with mental health at times, and so often where women and men are collocated through mental health treatments, there can be issues of fear around accessing treatment. So I think because it often presents differently, it should be treated differently, and because, where the treatments come together there are so many other issues going on for people who are having mental health issues, that fear and the kinds of issues that they can talk about in therapy groups—all those things are better segregated.

Ms Lewis: And of course, women have different significant life events to men that give rise to different mental health issues, postnatal depression being the one that springs to mind.

MS DUNDAS: You have mentioned in a number of different parts of your submission the need for appropriate material around sexual and reproductive health for young women, specifically in terms of culturally diverse backgrounds and those kinds of things.

I was wondering if you could expand on the points made and how you think it could be achieved—not just breaking down that taboo of making sure that the material is culturally appropriate, but then actually getting it into the hands of the people who need it. How do we break down that kind of actual contact taboo, because they are less likely to actually get in contact with the service, all those kinds of things?

Ms Andrew: Well, one of the starting points for our concern about this issue is anecdotal reports of international students on campus at ANU and University of Canberra not feeling like they are able to access reproductive and sexual health services. So one of the responses that we think should happen is that material be distributed through the international student liaison groups, so that would involve some interaction between the ACT government and the two campuses. I guess that is the most practical suggestion, definitely.

MS DUNDAS: Just before you answer this as well, we also heard earlier today that, in terms of lower schooling, secondary and primary schooling, when information was being put into schools it was being censored by teachers in the schools in terms of what could be asked and what information could be issued. I know the YWCA runs outreach programs to schools. I wanted to know whether the YWCA had encountered those kinds of problems where the information is being censored before it gets into the students' hands.

Ms Chambers: It can be difficult to know if you are being censored, I guess. But the main way that we work with young people in schools—and I was going to advocate for this as one of the answers to your questions—is working in the classroom with young people so that the information is coming first hand, and working in a way that is actually outside the school day, so that the normal school rules don't apply. This is simply different to the teachers, and we make sure that we work with the schools in some form of partnership—that we're welcome there, that that teacher actually wants that service and it's not been put upon them by the principal.

I think it needs to be a universal service too, so again to make sure that we are reaching people, and that people who have taboos or to whom this is taboo aren't opting out, that we do actually aim it at everybody so that it does go through the schools, it does go through those sorts of areas and avenues that aren't threatening, that all young people are turning up at, so that if there are young women from cultural backgrounds whose parents might not want them to access this at home, they're still getting it at school.

And I am certainly aware, as a small population, that every sort of migrant population or population from other cultures is necessarily small as well, so I think we should also be looking at importing some of the material that is used in other states from like-minded organisations, so that we do not have to invent it each time. But I think it does need to be a universal approach. When I say "universal" I mean across Canberra, across young people.

MRS CROSS: Can I ask a question following that. I know we are always running out of time; that's the problem.

I wanted to ask you about what you think is the economic and health and general well-being of migrant women, older and young women. Are you seeing a lot of these women, or are they not coming to you?

Ms Andrews : We're not a service provider.

THE CHAIR: We've got the migrant advocacy organisation coming in at another time.

MRS CROSS: I wanted to ask whether they're utilising your service.

Ms Chambers : The ones that we actually target are, but we don't see a great deal of them through other services; we don't see a great number. Our child care services are used in a way that reflects the population, where they're placed.

MRS CROSS: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIR: We might have to leave it there. Thank you for your time.

HEATHER REID was called.

THE CHAIR: Heather, welcome to the Select Committee on the Status of Women. Thanks for your time this afternoon.

Ms Reid: Thanks very much.

THE CHAIR: I have to read this formal piece about being legal proceedings, and parliamentary privilege, et cetera. This is to let you know that these are legal proceedings and, as such, are protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you some protections, but also some responsibilities. It means you are protected from certain legal actions, such as being sued for defamation, for what you may say at this public hearing. It also means you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. I might leave it at that.

We do not have a submission from you, but we were interested in hearing a perspective about women in sport, and life in the ACT. Would you like to make an opening statement? We can then quiz you on that.

Ms Reid: Sure, yes. Thank you very much. I understand the enormity of your task, to some extent.

To set some background, I am here primarily as President of Women's Soccer Canberra. I have been involved with the development of soccer as a sport for women since the early days of 1978.

I am also a member of the ACT Sport and Recreation Council, and have been for the past 10 years. I am the longest-standing member. That council is the advisory council to the Minister for Sport. The main task I have in relation to the council is chairing the grants sub-committee—whereby we look through all the grant proposals for every organisation and determine the appropriate levels of funding.

I have been an employee and President of Womensport ACT, which is the umbrella organisation for women in sport. It is like a lobby group, as well as an advocacy group for women in sport. I am a life member of that organisation.

To provide that background suggests, to some extent, that I am largely representing soccer, but I am also wanting to talk about women in sport in general. Probably, compared to a lot of states—I have a fairly broad knowledge of what happens in the other states in relation to funding for women's sports programs—the ACT does quite well, particularly the parent organisation, Womensport and Recreation ACT.

I am personally concerned about some developments within the organisation, as it no longer stands, from my point of view, as an autonomous body but is now resident within the Bureau of Sport and Recreation. I have expressed my personal concerns about that to both the association and the bureau.

Largely, some of the problems in relation to that stem from a lack of leadership. One of the issues which really troubles me—being one of the few female leaders in sport in the ACT—is that there is not a very strong government-supported program which does much to educate women to become better leaders and to stay in sport.

Katy, you would be familiar with a private program I facilitate on mentoring of women in sport. That has been indirectly funded by the Bureau of Sport and Recreation. That is terrific, but we seem to miss the mark when it comes to providing enough support for women to continue in a very male dominated industry—continuing in the positions they are in currently, and going forward. We have had some inspirational people come and talk to us about how they have managed to survive, including Ms Gallagher, women from the Chief Minister's Department, and other senior leaders.

With regard to the barriers to women's participation in sport, in a true leadership and decision-making sense, we need to provide a little bit more active support for them. I am not necessarily talking about money. I am talking about a mentoring program or access to education—whether it is a director's course, or some other kind of leadership program.

The representation of women in presidential positions, or CEO positions, in sport in the ACT is also reflected at a national level. It would be less than 15 per cent. For example, I am often the only woman sitting around a board table with seven or eight blokes in suits. It is pretty tough if you are not very confident, or unaware of meeting procedures, and the way in which the industry works. There are issues about leadership across the board.

The other thing I am concerned about—specifically wearing my soccer hat—is the matter of funding for teams that participate in national leagues. I was a little late today because I have been trying to get the statistics. From the Chief Minister's Department, and not the Bureau of Sport and Recreation, there is a fund which was established by Kate Carnell, under the 'Feel the Power' campaign, to support teams participating in national leagues.

My view is that there was no open and transparent process to apply for this funding, which was \$600,000. However, word around the industry was that that \$600,000 had already been allocated to about seven sports. Two-thirds of it—\$400,000—was allocated to four teams—the Brumbies, the Raiders, the Cosmos, and the Canberra Cannons.

The Cannons are a private franchise, and people scratch their heads about why they got \$100,000. Why the Brumbies and the Raiders—the Raiders being supported by News Ltd—got that money, we do not know. But the purpose was to spread the message about Canberra and "Feel the Power".

The balance—and this is what I have been trying to find out—was divvied up between the women's basketball team, the Canberra Capitals; the two hockey teams—the Lakers and the Strikers—they got an equal amount of, I think, \$40,000 each—and an under-18 boys Aussie rules team, the Rams, that participates in the New South Wales/ACT league.

When I inquired about access to that funding for the Canberra Eclipse, which participates in the Women's National Soccer League, I was basically advised that we were not in a strong enough competition, we did not bring enough draw power or economic benefit to Canberra, we had no television coverage for our league, et cetera, and therefore we were not entitled to any of that money. I was told by a couple of people not to make too much noise about it, because it could jeopardise funding to one of the teams that was currently getting some funding.

For the three or four years that the fund has existed, I have never seen any application for access to funding from it. With the new ACT government, I understand there is a strong push to make it a much more open and transparent process, and that access to the money will be transferred to the Bureau of Sport and Recreation. Hopefully, all sports with teams that participate in national leagues will have equal access to it.

I would like to think that the money previously allocated to a soccer team which played in a national league—the Cosmos—will be equitably distributed to the only other team which participates in the National Soccer League, which is the Canberra Eclipse. I understand, from both Jon Stanhope and Ted Quinlan, that that is what they would like to see as well. But I am concerned that the word may not necessarily always follow the policy—or the policy may not make that happen.

I know of other women's teams, such as the Capitals, which do not get equitable funding through the program. That suggests that the women's teams are inferior, that the status of those teams is not the same as the blokes. It means we do not have the capacity to roll out some marketing—some proper promotion. We can pay a coach at a part-time level but not at a full-time level; we cannot properly pay our athletes. In fact, the Canberra Eclipse players pay to represent the state in the national league.

This year, for the first time, through some pretty heavy lobbying to the government, we managed to get \$7,500 for a program which costs us a minimum of \$45,000-\$50,000. That was without any marketing machinery behind it. It was without a full-time coach and without any players on contract. One hundred thousand dollars went to the Raiders—to do what? Perhaps pay the physiotherapist's bill for the team for the year—or one-sixth of a player's salary!

MS DUNDAS: I am sorry to interrupt you, but it should be mentioned that the Eclipse won the national league. They are a top-notch team.

Ms Reid: They play in a competition which has six teams. People would argue, “Yes, but it is only a six-team competition.” They have the best players in the country playing in that competition because they are all identified as Matildas or young Matildas. That is their competition, leading into world events. Three of those players are about to go to the inaugural World Youth Championships in Canada this year.

All of that means there is tremendous potential for role models. If we cannot promote them—if we cannot publicise them—then we are losing the whole role model thing, and kids wanting to be a Lauren Jackson or a Kristin Veal. We can name a couple of the Capitals players. We should be able to roll off the tongue a couple of players from the Strikers, and a couple of players from the Canberra Eclipse, but we cannot. That is largely because of the lack of funding. Without funding, we cannot buy advertisements

in the *Canberra Times* regularly like a bit of the other sports can, and we cannot buy a strip on TV to promote the games—all those things which have a knock-on effect.

With regard to media coverage, you may have been following some of the press about sport in the *Canberra Times*. I know the government cannot do much about this, but it is all about role models, and who our sports people are. I have brought three of the recent papers. There is men's football, football, racing, football, football and football. There is no women's sport story in the Saturday *Canberra Times*.

There might be a snippet about something that has happened. There is a wonderful little letter to the editor from the Australian women's rugby union team saying they beat USA—and they got this much coverage. Yet the Brumbies—how many days in a row did they get? This is a double-page lift-out from when they played. It says, "They did us proud." They did not even win!

THE CHAIR: They did not win, no.

Ms Reid: They did not even win—but this sells newspapers. I am fully aware of the commercial realisation that sport can sell newspapers, and they say that men's sport—or rugby union/rugby league—sells newspapers. The other side of the coin is that there are commercial interests behind rugby union and rugby league. Whoever owns those papers has an interest as well to make sure that their product—being rugby league, rugby union or Aussie rules—is sold.

Soccer does really badly in the *Canberra Times*—and women's soccer does even less. We cannot afford to pay somebody to do our regular media coverage. We should not have to. There are assigned journalists who go chasing after stories about groin injuries, broken toes, twisted elbows, or whatever, for male athletes. Apparently the general public is not as interested in that with women's participation in sport.

MRS CROSS: Unfortunately, Heather, that is not just an Australian problem, it is a global problem.

Ms Reid: It is.

MRS CROSS: A lot of it is driven by sponsorship. Sponsors will always favour male sports people over women. That is the way it has been for a long time. We have tried to shift it.

Ms Reid: I know. It is my job—I work in the area. I know how difficult it is.

MRS CROSS: We do not have the female equivalent of Michael Jordan yet. I do not think we are not going to, in my lifetime.

THE CHAIR: Well, they probably exist.

MRS CROSS: There are better ones than that now. They are just not sponsored.

Ms Reid: There are a few. Culturally and socially, women's participation in sport will never be taken as seriously because they cannot run as fast, jump as high or be as strong as males. There is a wonderful quote about how we should not necessarily compare males against females, because you do not compare a Mike Tyson against a Jeff Fenech. It is a different way—it is a kind of power ratio.

MRS CROSS: That is why they split the categories at the Olympic Games.

Ms Reid: My view is that it is no longer just a men's sport versus women's sport argument. It is very much commercial sport versus others. It is commercially in the interests of Channel 9 to promote rugby league and the subsidiary companies of Channel 9, whether it is PBL Marketing or whatever other papers and magazines they own—they have to promote rugby league because it is in their commercial interests—in the same way that Channel 7 or Channel 10 does Aussie rules and the other one does rugby union.

Men's soccer, for example, is relegated to late night Channel 7 or nothing—SBS. With basketball and netball, people will say, "We have the basketball league and the netball league on TV." They have paid for that time—it is not a free service. Women's soccer does not have the money or the sponsorship to do that. I am more than aware of the fact that you need money from sponsors to buy television time, but sponsors will not give you the money until you get the television time. It is all 'chicken and egg'—I know that.

I do not have any solutions for government programs to try to rectify that in the ACT. Brian Stoddart and others have suggested there should be some way in which the government can legislate for a certain percentage of television time to be given to women's sport, but the owners of the networks will not accept that.

MS DUNDAS: With regard to women's sports programs and women's participation in sport—you said you sit on the Bureau of Sport grants body—do you think there needs to be more money focused at grassroots women's participation in sport?

Ms Reid: It is interesting. Yes, there is a special active women's grants program. I understand that is a \$20,000 program administered on behalf of the bureau through Women's Sport and Recreation ACT. Organisations can apply for up to \$3,000 for specific programs targeted at women. It might be a special women's refereeing program, a coaching program or a program to get more girls involved in judo or something like that.

I think that is reasonably well supported. However, they must always be new programs and self-sustainable, so organisations are always having to come up with new ideas. We can ask, "What if we make this happen in the first year?" But it could take two or three years before it is really established and self-sustaining, so the funding might need to be extended. That is one area.

Twenty thousand dollars is not much. If that were increased, the Capitals could pay Lucille Hamilton, or one of their other players—or the Eclipse could pay Sasha Wainwright—a fee of \$10,000 or \$15,000 to be a part-time development officer or marketing officer, and get them out and about, talking to the media.

The Capitals had a wonderful strategy this year. They held a regular morning tea at Tilley's, which is one of their sponsors. They invited the media to join them for a cup of coffee, and they always had two or three players there. They informed, educated and pleased the media.

They have the luxury of players who are either on work scholarships or contracts which enable them to take a couple of hours off in the morning. I do not know if the Strikers are in the same position. I know many of the Canberra Eclipse players are not, because some are still at school and university. That funding could be extended. We could have three or four key female athletes, as our role models, on some kind of government scholarship.

When new corporations come to Canberra, the government actively encourages them to get involved as sponsors with one of our local teams. I know some deals have been done. A new company says it wants to come and establish a business here. "Yes, come and establish a business here. How would you like to sponsor this particular team?" If they extended that to include a few of the women's teams, I think that would be quite fair.

MS DUNDAS: One of the submissions we received for this inquiry talks about the systemic inequity between the cost of grants for each participation and the cost of being involved in a group sporting activity, such as soccer or netball. You share the costs among a team. The therapeutic use of swimming, walking or cycling in individual sports—statistics show that women participate more in that—is a lot more expensive. We could throw a whole lot of money at swimming pools, but it would not necessarily fix the problem. Have you encountered the problem of inequity—and do you have any suggestions for addressing it?

Ms Reid: In a previous life, for seven years, I worked for Womensport Australia as national executive director and as a women's NGO. I would go to a round table with other women's NGOs—the Older Women's Network or Women for Action and Peace and Freedom—whatever the organisation. I quickly realised that we cannot talk about women and sport, because sport is alien to many women—we have to talk about women and physical activity.

Competitive, structured, regulated sport is not what a lot of women want to get into, unless they have started at a younger age—whether it was running at Dickson or playing soccer for Majura. I am heartened to see seven, eight and nine-year-old girls now absolutely loving a sport like soccer, which started in Canberra in 1978, only 24 years ago. We have an ongoing battle with Soccer Canberra, the men's body, that wants to take over our organisation.

We are one of the few remaining autonomous women's soccer groups around the country. The integration, takeover or merger of women's soccer into Soccer Australia, at the moment, is a pretty scary situation. If Soccer Australia goes down, so does the women's component of it.

We see women turning more to the recreational sports—tennis and swimming—whenever they can. If child care is provided, that is terrific. Or they do aerobics. Aerobics is one of the highest participation sports in Australia. I do not put aerobics in a sports category. ABS does, but I personally do not, because it is something you can do in your own time, at your own level, in your own often women-friendly environment.

It is not just the Fernwoods that are women-only gyms. Friends of mine who love to go and do a pump session, body combat do that at 10.30 in the morning, when there are mostly other women there and the kids are at school.

It is not quite the fast food kind of sport thing. Indoor centres provide indoor cricket or netball, and they are very popular. For a lot of older women, once they leave school, getting them into organised, regulated, competitive sport, where they have to train at night, once or twice a week, is not easy. It is difficult to get away from work, cook dinner and get somebody to look after the kids—as well as give up a half a day on a Saturday or Sunday to participate.

The smarter organisations will make that environment very suitable and attractive for the participants. They have to offer different kinds of competitions and different formats, to make it attractive. One thing soccer has done is introduce a summer social six-a-side on Sunday—try saying that after a few drinks! It is social—six a side. The largest growth we have is in women's over-30s, where mums can come along. Their daughters or kids will play before they do. They can come along and have a run. They can go on and off the field, if there are enough players. So there is interchange. It is not competitive—supposedly—it is on a Sunday evening, and it is fun.

I do not think it is very expensive to participate in grassroots sport—club sport. It is the regulations and the environment in which it is delivered that make it a bit prohibitive for girls and women. We have to be mindful of that.

I will give another example. Rowing is incredibly popular for girls, while they are at school. The participation rate drops off once they go through to club level. Some research suggests that is because they can no longer row in a boat with their mates—they are forced to be in a crew with strangers. They are then put on the competitive path. You might be familiar with that too, Katy, through cycling. Once you start to show you have a bit of ability and skill, you have to go on the elite pathway. But they just want to cycle—they want to participate.

THE CHAIR: For me, what has come out of your presentation is that physical activity and sport are two different things—there are different barriers to face. Here in the ACT, all the figures say that women's participation in sport is higher than average. Almost half of our population participates, in some way, at some level, at some time.

From your point of view, would government priorities be more about mentoring and training of women into—

Ms Reid: Leadership.

THE CHAIR: Yes, leadership—and also recognition of women who are on elite levels?

Ms Reid: Yes. Those are the two key messages I would leave—equitable funding for teams that participate in national leagues. 'Equitable' could be construed as 'equal'. I recognise that, in rugby union, the Brumbies may be playing in an event that has several countries participating.

THE CHAIR: Equitable in a fair way?

Ms Reid: In a fair way. I do not want to perhaps dampen our desires to get access to \$100,000, which the Canberra Cosmos got. When there is major television coverage for an event such as the Super 12s or whatever, and it is Southern Hemisphere coverage and it is the Canberra Brumbies—are they the Canberra Brumbies or the ACT Brumbies? Who would know what the ACT is?

We have recently changed our name from ACT Women's Soccer Association to Women's Soccer Canberra, because, to a lot of people, 'ACT' is 'act'—it is not something recognisable outside of ACT or even New South Wales. We get Canberra-bashed all the time!

I recognise that, with that kind of television coverage, you are going to get a lot of promotion of Canberra, or the ACT. We cannot deliver that until we get some television coverage. It might be \$70,000 or \$80,000 compared to \$100,000—but equitable funding.

THE CHAIR: Regarding access to venues for teams like the Eclipse, I know the Capitals are out at Erindale in the basketball thing out there. Would you have access to Canberra Stadium?

Ms Reid: No. We do, but it is cost prohibitive. I would not want to play at Canberra Stadium! One of the problems faced by the Canberra Cosmos was that they went in to do a deal, and they had to play at Canberra Stadium. When you have 1,500 people there, it is pretty ordinary—and it is very expensive.

We have had international games at Canberra Stadium, which have been quite successful. We have had to negotiate with the government to reduce the costs and give us a deal. You pay for lighting, cleaning, catering, ground marking and venue hire. It can be \$5,000 or \$6,000 just to gain access to it.

Unfortunately, in Canberra there is no medium-sized soccer venue. You have the Canberra Stadium, and then you have something like Hawker Oval, which does not have proper amenities—changing rooms, toilet blocks and spectator services. Greenway is much the same.

We started playing our home games at Ainslie Football Club. We looked at the surface, first of all—the quality of the pitch for the players. That was absolutely perfect, but the support services for spectators and the teams were woeful. I should not say it was woeful, but there was not much. Last season, we went back to West Belconnen Leagues Club.

We initially used West Belconnen Leagues Club for some women's international games—that was some years ago. It was very good. It is a great little venue, because you get 400 or 500 people there, and they are close to the field. It is a great surface. People can sit in the club and have a drink.

MRS CROSS: There is a good atmosphere.

Ms Reid: A very good atmosphere. You can control the gate and run the canteen. There are great changing rooms and referees' rooms. All the services are there, but it is a designated rugby league facility. There is nothing like that for soccer.

We went down the road some way with the Touch Association—a netball, table tennis and athletics group—to develop West Deakin ovals. We wanted an athletics track and soccer designated grounds within that venue at West Deakin—between the Mint and the pathology centre. Plans were drawn up and we were putting in our wish lists for the various sports. It was to be the Deakin West multi-sports complex. The government thinks it is a great idea, but we will not get any support for it until we can get a licensed club on board to make it work.

Soccer Canberra has just signed the lease with Hawker Oval. They will be using that, and we will probably start to use it more. But it is still not suitable enough, because of the changing rooms, amenities and catering. There is no licensed facility et cetera. The quality of the facilities around the town is bad, for the amount of money soccer pays for grounds. We tend to use Dickson, Calwell and Waramanga as our grounds. They are pretty bad. There are accidents waiting to happen. This is not news—I have told Ted Quinlan that, several times.

When we have all of our games at a place like Waramanga, for example, there can be 700 to 800 women and girls there during one day. There were two public toilets for that number of women and girls.

At Waramanga, they have finally extended the changing room and toilet blocks, so there are three extra toilets. A few weeks ago, when the building was not finished, one of the toilets in the changing room got blocked, and there was only one toilet available. I was ready to stop games if that toilet got blocked as well.

Talking about the lack of toilets in the changing rooms, one thing that might put girls off participating is the fact that there are no changing room facilities. Kids are very good at getting out of one shirt and putting on another without people seeing their navels. Others do not care—it is off with one shirt and on with the other. Yet, in places like Sydney or Brisbane, people have a home-changing room and an away-changing room. We go, “Well, ours is under that tree over there!” But we would love to have better facilities.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Heather. It was very interesting.

Ms Reid: Thank you. It was a bit of a long rave. I do not know if you have heard from any other sports representatives.

THE CHAIR: No. We contacted you first!

Ms Reid: Thank you. It was a pleasure talking to you. I await the outcome. What will happen with the report?

THE CHAIR: We have to report to the Assembly by November.

Ms Reid: Thank you very much.

TANIA BROWNE was called.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming to talk with us this afternoon. These hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly and they are protected by parliamentary privilege, which gives you certain protections but also 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. So could you work within those guidelines.

Do you want to make an opening statement to your submission or you would prefer just to take questions?

Ms Browne: Yes, please.

THE CHAIR: Helen, do you want to start?

MRS CROSS: You said in your submission that Women's Words, provided by the former Liberal government, was effective. How should the program be expanded?

Ms Browne: Okay. Women's Words was set up under the auspices of the Women's Health Service within the last budget, and the thing that we would like to see extended in the current program is an outreach service.

The Women's Health Service is currently running what it calls "Well Women Clinics", and they are run in Tuggeranong, Belconnen and Phillip health centres as part of its outreach service. So we would like to see the Women's Words counselling service, which is a generalist counselling service, extended under its current operation.

I will mention some of the reasons that we would like to see that. Travel can be a real barrier for women that are isolated. The city is a long trek. The Women's Health Service is currently based in the city, so it is a really long trek for isolated women who live in the outer areas of Canberra. Also it can be more flexible and responsive to women's needs if a service is looking at the needs of its clients rather than the clients fitting into its sort of service delivery or its framework in terms of the way the service is set up.

MRS CROSS: What type of body image issue is the most common? What age group, and what solutions do you propose?

Ms Browne: I don't think I am really the best person to answer that specific level of detail. The way we work at the centre with body image and eating issues is under what is called a social view of health, so we do not have a really bio-medical view which focuses on the disease, or individualises the disease for the individual woman. We work under a social context which looks at the whole women's lives, and the eating disorders cover a whole spectrum; it is not just focusing on the really sick women at one end, but looking at body image and eating issues over the whole spectrum. You know, the pressures on women to diet, to achieve a certain look, particularly on young women. So I am not sure that I can really answer that there is a specific eating issue that covers a specific age group or type of woman.

MS DUNDAS: But in terms of the programs that you run with eating disorders, do you find that those programs are working at capacity? Is there scope for greater programs in that area?

Ms Browne: The current service set-up, Throsby Place, is a specific service set up for eating issues. But the way we work is within a group context. We are always over-full; we always have waiting lists for women who would like to get into more groups that we run, but it is often limited by what sort of funding we have to enable those groups to run. Most of our eating issues groups are run with quite small numbers, because we found that then they are more able to meet the women's needs within an individual and group context. I am not sure if that answer your question, Ros, but—

MS DUNDAS: No, you did. I wanted to change topic. Under the heading “Advocacy”, we have had representations saying that there isn't funding allocated for women's advocacy per se. But, as part of your service delivery contract with the ACT, I understand that there is an advocacy component. Do you find that it is adequate, or how does advocacy fit into the Women's Centre for Health Matters and the role that it takes on?

Ms Browne: Currently we are represented on quite a wide range of committees, which falls under that advocacy and representation output that we are funded to provide. Some of those include the Health Policy Resource Committee, which is run by ACTCOSS, which feeds into government policy as well. There is also the recent Options for Women that we have been actively involved with as well. Another way of looking at it is some of the individual support that we have provided for individual women. That has fallen into a range of areas but one example is for women whose needs may not have been met in some of the other services that are available, so we have sort of provided some individual support and advocacy for those women.

But we are quite stretched in that role. Those are just two or three examples of what we can provide in advocacy, but there is also a range of other things, like the Domestic Violence InterAgency that we run a secretariat support for. There is a whole range of things—the gambling advisory reference group, the women and corrections reference group.

MS DUNDAS: Do you find that you are getting enough support, or financial support, to be able to take on the advocacy role and be on all these boards and committees while implementing the health programs that you are trying to run at the same time?

Ms Browne: It is really hard to find that balance. When you talk about support, are you referring to levels of funding?

MS DUNDAS: Being able to employ a full-time advocacy officer, so there is somebody specifically doing that, so that everybody else in the organisation is doing health.

Ms Browne: No. In that case, no.

MS DUNDAS: That's not happening. So what is the end result on the organisation then, trying to balance up the importance of advocacy and coming to this forum today with the actual on-the-ground needs of health for women.

Ms Browne: It is extremely hard to manage that balancing. Currently we have sort of tried to divide up the advocacy and representation amongst the existing staff, but it is also very difficult to then get the actual grassroots client service delivery happening without impacting on that. So it is quite difficult. I would have to think about that a bit more, I think.

MRS CROSS: I wanted to ask you something about problem gambling. Is problem gambling mainly the pokies? In your submission you mentioned that you had recommendations from the study. Were they sent to the committee? We don't seem to have a copy of that. I wouldn't mind a copy. And what recommendations were offered, and what funding could be required?

Ms Browne: I thought I had included the Executive Summary from those recommendations but I can leave a copy of that with you here today. The prevalence of gambling was not just the pokies. One of the biggest issues that came up was scratchies, and impulse buying of raffle tickets and things like that. But the pokies were seen as a way for a lot of isolated women to get their needs met in a way that's not impacting on their space, so to speak. It is a really interesting report. We have not been able to implement the second phase of the report because we just don't have the funding to do that.

MRS CROSS: What sort of funding would you need to implement it, Tania?

Ms Browne: It is hard to put a quantitative figure on it but probably something around the area of \$5,000 to at least progress the second stage.

MRS CROSS: Is that to enable you to employ someone for a couple of days a week or a day part-time?

Ms Browne: Yes. I mean, there was a whole project timeframe that was set up around women and gambling and we have only really been able to do phase one, which was with a student coming into the organisation, so it was using some voluntary labour in that respect.

THE CHAIR: Tania, you said you had the recommendations with you. Would you mind tabling them now, so that we could get a copy of them? In terms of your organisation's work, what resources are put into health promotion activity or prevention of crisis situations—or do you have much control over that?

Ms Browne: When you talk about resources, we only have one full-time community development position, which does health promotion, but really all of our staff can do health promotion as well. We have another full-time position, which is our information worker. She services our health matters information line. That is also health promotion as well, in that she talks to women about and explores issues that women ring up with—in the context of their life. So that could be anything, from “My doctor's told me I need to have this test. What does it mean?” to “I need to find a counsellor. Can you recommend someone in the area of violence or relationships?” Or it could be “I'm having financial constraints. That's impacting on my life. Can you tell me what I could do or where I could go?”

Part of our work has also been working with women at the Bega, Allawah and Currong Flats, running monthly luncheons there—so information workers going along and running those lunches and getting guest speakers from other organisations. So that is also health promotion work within her position.

THE CHAIR: In terms of other organisations—I don't think it appeared today, but it appeared in other committees—there is often talk about the fact that health promotion is the key to addressing many issues, and it is often put the other way around. Would you see increasing resources to health promotion, certainly in your area, for your organisation, a good thing?

Ms Browne: Certainly, yes, absolutely. As with so many community-based organisations, you get this bucket of money and you have to deliver x, y and z, and often up to three quarters of your bucket of money is going on salaries and it leaves very little for your actual service delivery. We only have one full-time community development position that we can fund at the moment. So certainly more resources to run more programs would be really good. We target isolated and disadvantaged women.

THE CHAIR: I was interested in that. How do you target those? I mean, you can't go out on the street and—

Ms Browne: Often our community development or CD work comes through the majority of calls that we're getting on the information line. We have done a lot of work for women in non-English speaking background communities, for example, which are often among the more isolated groups of people in communities. And we have made reference to that in our submission in referring to the dearth of bilingual community educators that we have at the moment.

With community development work, often it is about building up relationships too. So getting to know the communities and what their needs are is a way of targeting those people too. We try to do as much outreach work as possible as well, so we go out to the communities. For example, we ran some groups last year at Gungahlin for women around body image and eating issues, and new mothers and their body image and eating issues. And another isolated group of people is the new mothers.

We are looking at doing some work in the future with The Junction Youth Health Service. Again, another more isolated group of people is the young, and we haven't done much work with younger women, as such. So it's about building up relationships with those communities. You can't just go in and say, "We've got this program to run". You need to really build up relationships first, so it does take quite a while.

MS DUNDAS: To go back to the counselling service and Women's Words, in terms of an outreach program, how do you see it operating and is there also a need for, I guess, follow-up? I mean, you run one phone line for people to call in. I assume there would be a lot of issues that require a lot of follow-up work. Is there an outreach follow-up? What should be happening there?

Ms Browne: I'm not sure exactly how the service would work, but either having a service available to go out to the communities, like I was talking about before, or even to go out to individual women's homes. That way you would get a context of their life as well, and they may be more comfortable talking to people that way.

THE CHAIR: Would it be also like going to visit groups that operate at Tuggeranong or somewhere like that—established groups, new parents groups, all those.

Ms Browne: Yes, it could be that. Often, for some people it can be really intimidating going into large government buildings, and so it's about making the service flexible so that people can access it at different points, whether that be in other community-based organisations or buildings or whatnot, or whether it's actual individual people's homes. I'm not sure.

THE CHAIR: This one might be hard, but if you could list the health issues that are affecting women—you must keep some statistics about demand and cervical cancer or something like that—could you give me the top five off the top of your head?

Ms Browne: I couldn't really give you the top five, because our information worker would be the best placed to answer that question, but we generally get a lot of calls around menopause; we get a lot of calls around counselling. That is a particularly high issue—

THE CHAIR: In terms of depression or like—

Ms Browne: “Where can I go for counselling?” is often the question that gets asked.

MS DUNDAS: So that is women who have identified that they want somebody to talk to?

Ms Browne: Yes, they may not be in a crisis situation. They may just need to explore an issue, so it might not be a situation where they need ongoing counselling for months or years. It might just mean that they might need, say, six sessions of having an opportunity to talk to someone around the complexities of their life. Often it is not just seeking counselling for one specific issue; it can be a whole range of things. It's just the context of people's lives.

THE CHAIR: Yes, sure.

MS DUNDAS: So what is the answer to that question, when somebody rings up and says, “Where can I go for counselling?”

Ms Browne: It is getting harder and harder to answer that question, because there isn't much available that's low-cost or free. There's a whole range of really good psychologists and services. For example, Relationships Australia is a really good service that offers a whole range of counselling but it still has a sliding scale and for some people that's just not an option.

Another issue that has been coming up is in relation to GPs that bulk bill. That's been a really tricky one in that most of them don't now, and for some people it is a real issue of actually having to pay up front and then go and claim. It can even be a barrier for them, so that is something that we are trying to deal with at the moment.

THE CHAIR: You made statements about Throsby Place not always offering maybe the diversity or the flexibility that is required, and you mentioned that you run some groups. Are there enough alternatives in terms of programs for women in this area to access? I don't even know what Throsby Place is, but is that the only alternative outside of some of the stuff that you are doing?

Ms Browne: Throsby Place was set up probably around 2000—

MRS CROSS: For women with eating disorders?

Ms Browne: Yes. It came about after a seminar was run earlier in 1999 and a steering group was put together. The steering group was established from interest groups to address gaps in the ACT and Throsby Place was set up as a result of that. But since then the steering group has not met, and I guess our concern is that the service is run from a bio-medical point of view, or framework, and often that can discount the whole spectrum of eating issues.

I am not sure that I can really elaborate much on the service, as such. I mean, we have tried to establish some links and work collaboratively with the service, but they come from a very fixed and limited sort of framework, which often precludes looking at other ways of working.

MRS CROSS: I want to get back to the migrant situation. I wanted to find out from you which migrant groups are the most vulnerable that you come across, and what level of bilingual community educators do you think are needed to have a positive impact, and what would that cost?

Ms Browne: Okay. Again just to give some background, the Bilingual Community Educator Network was established in the late 80s or early 90s. It is set up to do a four-day training for people from non-English speaking backgrounds, not just women—but it is mostly women who access the training.

And they then go and get contracted as sessional workers for organisations such as ourselves, the breast and cervical screening program, carers association, the Electoral Commission and the Red Cross. What has happened is that most of these workers have now found full-time employment, and no training has been run since 1999, so there is a significant reduction in the pool of available workers.

In terms of identifying which communities particularly, I cannot really answer that question, but I can give you an example. We got some funding to run a Healthy Women group for women in migrant communities. We wanted to run it for four different communities.

We have been unable to finish running the program in two communities, simply because we haven't been able to get the bilingual community educators to run the program, because there are just none left. So what we would like is to see some more training run under the Migrant Health Unit.

Colleen Crane is the person who has been running the training there, and it is just a matter of putting some funds into the Migrant Health Unit to enable that training to run again. Again, I am not sure about costs, because I don't know much it costs to run a four-day program for 15 to 20 people. Colleen would be a really good person to contact to get that sort of costing.

THE CHAIR: Have you got a board?

Ms Browne: We have a voluntary management committee.

THE CHAIR: Okay. You alluded to this before, but the Women's Centre for Health Matters has been involved with Options for Women in supporting the moves by Mr Berry to repeal the Health Regulation Information Act and remove certain sections of the criminal code. Was that a decision that your board felt was important for your organisation to be involved in and to lobby for?

Ms Browne: Yes. We have been involved in previous abortion action as well; for example, in 1998 when the Osborne act first came up, and prior to that in other situations, and lobbying—prior to my time so I can't actually specify what.

THE CHAIR: Yes. So do women come to the centre seeking information about pregnancy, options for pregnancy and things like that?

Ms Browne: Yes, we get a lot of calls on our information line from women ringing up who might want information on where you can go to have a baby in Canberra, for example, or what sorts of things you might need to know. So we have produced a pamphlet called "Having a Baby in Canberra". We also get women ringing up who might have an unplanned pregnancy and just want to know what options they've got in terms of management, and we will refer them on to other agencies.

We do not actually provide counselling as such, but we can give them referrals to other agencies like Pregnancy Information and Counselling Service. Sometimes they will just ring up and say, "I want to know the number of the abortion clinic", in which case we would give that to them, but we certainly would explore that with women in the first instance.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. You're off the hook, Tania. Thank you very much.

Ms Browne: Thank you.

NADIA DOCRAT was called.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for coming in today to speak with the Select Committee on the Status of Women. I have to advise you that these are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, so they are protected by parliamentary privilege, which gives you certain protections but certain responsibilities as well. It means you are protected from legal action such as being sued for defamation for what you may say. It's a public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth.

We don't have a submission from you, but when we were putting a witness list together we thought it was pretty important that someone from the university, namely the women's officer, come and talk to us about issues affecting women in the ACT. I don't know if you've seen the terms of reference.

Ms Docrat: I have.

THE CHAIR: You might want to make an opening statement, and then we can ask you some questions.

Ms Docrat: I discussed what I was going to say today with the women's collective, because I haven't had a department meeting as yet. There are more than 3,000 members of the women's department at ANU, all of them undergraduate students. The most important issues they've raised with me are security of person in and around the ACT, specifically on campus and the immediate area surrounding it, access to health care, education, and money—how hard it is to find work and support themselves as students and how difficult it is to access youth allowance and/or Austudy, depending on their age and what time they started studying.

I find it very interesting that the women who do approach me are usually in the humanities and social sciences, including law. The majority of women at the ANU do study in those areas. They asked me to come here and put forth what they had to say as students and as women in the ACT, but to keep in mind that a lot of them only live here for a short time studying and very few of them stay. Once they've graduated they leave the ACT, but while they're here those issues are important to them.

MS DUNDAS: I have some questions about security of person. I know there have been some under-reported cases of violence or rapes either on campus or in colleges at ANU. I don't know if there has been an increase. You wouldn't necessarily have statistics, but they're quite alarming. I heard that there was a gang rape on campus.

Ms Docrat: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: What is the university doing to combat this? What can the ACT government do to help combat this? Security of person was the first issue you raised. How are women on campus and in the broader ACT feeling?

Ms Docrat: There are two feelings. Outrage is the first one. Even when women are scared, they're angry at the same time. Then there's fear, which is appalling. There's very little information out there. You can't get hold of statistics. I found it very hard.

Campus statistics, territory statistics and federal statistics are bitterly hard to come by. There's a complete lack of information.

What is the university doing about it? It's not a problem if they don't address it. So if they don't talk about it, therefore it doesn't exist and they never have to deal with it. I think that's the reason they don't collect statistics. I think that's a reason a lot of people don't collect statistics in the first place. But it has been brought to their attention, and at the moment we're working with administration to fix the situation, but because we have an open campus it's not just a student issue. In the case of the gang rape, the woman concerned was not a student. She was not even an employee of the ANU. She really had no reason to be there in an official capacity. So it is a greater community issue.

I think the role of the ACT government would be to raise awareness and educate people about what can be done in a situation. I understand that things like this can't be prevented. You can't be everywhere at once. You can't say, "Don't do that," and people won't. On the other hand, if people are aware that when things like this happen there are measures they can take, the matter will be followed through, they will be taken seriously, they won't be treated as the problem when in fact they are the victim, and that they will be put in a position of power, things like this will decrease because there'll be a deterrence. Of course, there'll have to be punishment, but the punishment is not the deterrence. It's the fact that if you do this you will be reported and you will be charged.

Also as part of security of person, there's a huge increase in drink spiking. People need to be aware of that, but it's also partly the responsibility of those who serve alcohol, because alcohol has to be treated like the drug it is. It's not just about slipping Rohypnol into somebody's drink. It's about getting them so tanked that they don't know what they're doing. That, to me, is an offence. In that respect it has to be made very clear, and the penalties have to suit the crime.

THE CHAIR: When I was at ANU, if the police wanted to come onto the campus they had to ring beforehand.

Ms Docrat: Yes, they still have to be invited.

THE CHAIR: That's still required, okay. Do you see that as a problem? What's the view of the women's officer or the women's collective on that?

Ms Docrat: As the officer, I don't think the police presence is necessary on campus if security can deal with the situation. With the lack of information, rumours escalate once the police are there. The collective sees police presence as necessary for things like gang rape. There's such a communication breakdown that contacting security isn't enough, and there's not the facility to contact the police immediately on campus. Our emergency phones go straight through to Unisafe. At times there's a 45-minute wait to be attended to.

THE CHAIR: Can you tell us a bit about the emergency phones? Where are they?

Ms Docrat: At the moment we're having a safety audit, so the phones are hot topics, because they're currently painted in camouflage colours. I don't know why.

THE CHAIR: How clever!

Ms Docrat: They do have reflective strips on them, but they're highly prized to stick on your bed in colleges.

THE CHAIR: Of course.

Ms Docrat: There will be more emergency phones, and they'll have self-identification, so as soon as you activate them security will know exactly where you are. At the moment you have to know you're in location No 34 or whatever. I don't know about anybody else, but if I was running down Uni Ave, I wouldn't know what number location I was at.

That's what they want to put in, but the first thing they say is: "How much is that going to cost?" To my knowledge, there have been five rapes on campus since O Week. That's only the ones I know of. There are going to be heaps more that are unreported, within colleges especially. There was one attack at 2 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon right outside the Chifley Library, which is a major library open to the public.

We need more security guards so there's a greater presence on campus, and if the police need to come in, then they shouldn't wait to be invited in situations like this. There should be some sort of mechanism that allows security to say, "We need police assistance," and it arrives immediately.

THE CHAIR: I guess in universities there's a fine balance between clamping down on law and order and setting off some kind of protest amongst the student movement. There is a balance between being gung-ho and the need to address crime.

Ms Docrat: Once students are aware of things that are going on, they are more likely to agree with a police presence. It's a very small proportion of students that know what's going on, and a smaller portion of that select group that are doing something about it, which is a big problem. That's why when the police arrive on campus there's huge rumouring, especially when they come in on horses, which I find very bizarre, but that's just me.

THE CHAIR: It does stand out. What about public transport around the university. There used to be Brian's Bus.

Ms Docrat: Getting to and from uni.

THE CHAIR: And even around the university grounds. Is there any transport?

Ms Docrat: At the moment Brian's Bus does operate. That's very limited. It's great if you need to leave uni at 5.30. When classes finish at five to and five past the hour, that's not really possible. You would have to hang around for Brian's Bus. It's very small. It gets very full. People are more likely to walk, or they take a 34, which is the most common bus. It goes around Daley Road. It doesn't run frequently enough, and the stops are very oddly placed around uni. People are more likely to drive around. We have a lack of car parking space, which is another big problem. But that ties into security, so they're

looking at increasing the shuttle bus route and perhaps having another shuttle bus, which is important.

MS DUNDAS: The ANU campus is one of the biggest campuses in Australia. To walk across it at five past six when a class is finished is a problem. It is also a problem at the University of Canberra. Is there a problem with lack of lighting and the pathways you have to travel to get from one end of the campus into the city. Are problems encountered where the campus meets the city?

Ms Docrat: There's a lack of lighting in the inner north, full stop. No-one knows where the university ends and non-university ground begins. Because it's so open, I didn't realise that the Rocks area was part of the university and that the car park was. When people walk across that, they think it's fairly-well lit in comparison to the university lighting, but as a thoroughfare into the city it's inadequate. The paths that people use are not the paths that are lit. There's a difference between the lit paths that are designed to be used, that are paved, that have bins on them, and the shortest route that people take. People don't walk up past the Family Court and all the way down that street to turn at the lights. They cut across the bus depot there and go up that way. It's not as well lit. The lighting is in the wrong place, which is a problem both on campus and off campus.

Once you head into Turner, there's a huge park on the left-hand side and the bowls club on the right-hand side. It is very badly lit. There's also a row of trees which looks beautiful during the day but which at night presents huge problems. As we move into winter, it gets darker a lot earlier. Classes don't finish until 8 o'clock at night sometimes.

MS DUNDAS: And perhaps they go through till 10. There is the women's collective, and you as women's officer have an advocacy role, but what are the barriers that you think women students find to being able to participate in the collective? There are 3,000 members. I would hazard a guess that not all of them show up to collective meetings. What are the general barriers to participation faced by women students?

Ms Docrat: They are under the impression that they don't know what's going on enough to participate. It's not that women don't know what's going on. They're put in the position where they think they don't know. Other people make them feel that they don't know, and other women are part of the problem. I don't think they do it willingly. I hope they don't.

If you see a group of women who constantly participate, you think it's a clique, and therefore you're less likely to want to be involved, and women feel alienated, isolated and ignorant. To some extent I think it is true that women are ignorant, but there's no reason for that.

Of 3,000 women on campus, only about 1,500 agree with having a women's department and, of those, 16 turn up regularly to collective meetings. It's hard to get women involved. This is the best year we've had in the past three years in the women's department. I have women who don't even speak English coming to collective meetings. It's great, but so many women don't.

A lot of women find ISSANU very effective in representation. They have a woman president this year. They represent international students, which I can't do. I understand that. To me, a barrier to my advocacy role is the fact that I'm also a grievance officer, so before I speak to somebody I have to say, "Are you here because you have a grievance, or do you want advocacy?" I can't take notes if I'm a grievance officer. Sometimes the lines are blurred. I have those two roles because there's no-one else to do them.

MS DUNDAS: In the university hierarchy, are there a lot of opportunities for women to participate? Is there a gender balance on council and on the decision-making bodies that affect women's lives at campus?

Ms Docrat: I don't know about the gender balance on council. The president of the students association is a woman, and she does her job very well. As far as administration and the university hierarchy go—we're talking about third chancellors, vice-chancellors, pro-vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors—they're male top heavy. That's the way it has always been while I've been at university. I think a lot of women are going to go through and not see women in any of those positions.

In 75 per cent of their lectures they'll have male lecturers. They'll have male tutors. They'll have male PhD students. That's the situation at the moment. It's increasingly so in the humanities as well, which I thought would have more women. We have equal male/female gender and sexuality lecturers ones in the old women's studies department.

THE CHAIR: It's like two different little worlds, isn't it? There's the ANU, and you can exist quite happily. You can leave that world and go back out. Then there's the ACT, where people live, shop, pay their bills and stuff. On the campus, how do women access information on women's legal services and family planning? Are they accessing that information? There's no government shopfront, is there?

Ms Docrat: Each department carries the relevant information. In my office I carry information on the women's legal service, reproductive health services, the Country Women's Association and all that kind of thing. But women have to know that these places exist before they seek information. Women come to us for information, and we give them the information. We don't load the information onto them if they don't want it. O Week is the best time. Huge social events seem to be the best time to disseminate information. If women received information about the services available to them in the ACT at that time in writing, that would be the best thing. Posters don't work. Speak-outs don't work. Seminars don't work, purely because women don't turn up.

Women are interested. They do want to know. But there is also the boundary that they are there to study. They don't think it's relevant that they go to the legal service, health services or that kind of thing. They'd rather go home. That's another problem. Maybe they don't think they can access them here if they don't live here.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that's right.

MS DUNDAS: When women in colleges need help or need to access services, what do they do? How are services provided to them?

Ms Docrat: It's word of mouth. They're not promoted actively. I only attended one college for a year. That was Burton and Garran Hall, which is the largest and also most liberal college on campus. It's still word of mouth. The colleges aren't interested in participating with the university, let alone with the community at large, which is a huge problem. Some colleges will not distribute certain information because of religious belief. They deem it unnecessary or inappropriate.

MS DUNDAS: All the colleges have a bar; is that true?

Ms Docrat: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: So unsafe levels of drinking followed by unsafe sexual practices are almost sanctioned, because it all takes place within the one building in the college. The college isn't allowing the promotion of safe sex practices or the free distribution of condoms. Is that an accurate description?

Ms Docrat: That's fairly accurate. It's not all colleges, but that's fairly accurate. It's more a matter of them saying, "If you want the information, you should get it, but we're not going to provide it for you." It's a fact of life that students aren't going to go out and do it themselves—up to a certain level, anyway.

MS DUNDAS: How are women students working part time able to access information outside of class and work? Is there an after-hours service where that information is available to students?

Ms Docrat: After hours it is difficult. I think a lot of students go to the university health service. That's where they get a lot of their information. They can refer within campus, to the counselling service, and outside. That is a prime point. It's not just health stuff. You can speak to the GPs about almost any issue. Equity and diversity are going to offer an out-of-hours service or at least have contact people available.

MS DUNDAS: What are their current opening hours?

Ms Docrat: Nine to five—nine to four sometimes. A trend I am noticing at the moment is to committee things and have lots of representatives from colleges sit on committees, but the fact is that it becomes a large think tank and nothing gets done. But as long as they're seen to have lots of representatives, that's fine; they are doing their job.

MS DUNDAS: This is a more personal question. When I was at university, we were writing the sexual harassment policy for students, because there was no sexual harassment policy for students. It was quite a cumbersome process. If it was agreed there was a problem, there was no outcome. They just said, "Yes, there's a problem. Go away." What happens if a student has a sexual harassment claim against another student or somebody in academia?

Ms Docrat: That's the role of equity and diversity. We have grievance procedures and referrals. Once you contact a grievance officer, so called, it goes back into the equity and diversity hierarchy, and they deal with it from there. It's a secretive process. I don't know what happens to it. If somebody brings a grievance to me, I say, "These are your options. These are the people I can send you to." I don't deal with it. I pass it on to

Richard or the woman in equity and diversity whose name escapes me. Then it's dealt with from there. There's more focus on a bottom-up approach of having contact people and passing on the information. I don't know what happens to it from there, because I'm not involved.

MS DUNDAS: If a student makes a sexual harassment claim against another student, and it pops out at the end as being proven, do you know of any—

Ms Docrat: I have never heard of it happening, quite honestly. Equity and diversity only became operational at the beginning of this year, and to my knowledge they haven't dealt with anything of that nature to date.

MS DUNDAS: So there could be huge cases—

Ms Docrat: Definitely.

MS DUNDAS: Cases of students harassing students, with no repercussions?

Ms Docrat: As is the case in colleges.

MS DUNDAS: Then they go back into the community with these bad habits.

MRS CROSS: Bad habits, yes.

MS DUNDAS: That's something that we should be doing.

Ms Docrat: There's an attitude at the moment that that behaviour is acceptable.

MS DUNDAS: It's hard to take it out of an ANU context, but do you find that if it's okay on campus to sexually harass people it is okay when you step over the border into the ACT?

Ms Docrat: I think that's a major problem. The majority of socialising occurs off campus. There are specific groups of people who attend specific places, and at any time you'll find the same people there. That's another place where these attitudes are passed on to others who don't necessarily go to uni, or people pick up attitudes from others and take them to uni. It's a huge disgusting, offensive thing that occurs all the time.

MRS CROSS: So there are no clear boundaries and parameters on behaviour?

Ms Docrat: No. There are also university-organised nights. Huge groups of students are taken away from campus and put somewhere else, as if to say, "We're taking this problem. We're taking it over here, and now you can do it over here, because it's not occurring on campus." A lot of people in positions of responsibility—principals of colleges, heads of colleges—will blame that on the responsible service of alcohol, but I think it's the responsible consumption of alcohol. It's men and women who abuse it, by putting other people in positions where they cannot make decisions logically.

MRS CROSS: Are you saying that all the bad behaviour is alcohol induced, or do you see bad behaviour when people are sober as well?

Ms Docrat: There's definitely a large percentage of it occurring under the influence, but it's very rare that there'll be any event or any large gathering of people where alcohol isn't involved. People don't do it.

MRS CROSS: Do you think the rapes that have occurred since Orientation Week have involved a serial rapist, or do you think different people have perpetuated the crimes?

Ms Docrat: My personal feeling is that they are different people, because the rapes occur in different areas at very different times, but I'm not qualified to make that judgment.

THE CHAIR: It's probably best you don't.

MRS CROSS: It worries me even more then, when there have been so many.

Ms Docrat: There have been only five that I know of, so for me it's hard to determine a pattern.

MS DUNDAS: What do you see the ACT government being able to do about the sexual harassment and all those things that have been happening off campus? What would you like them to do?

Ms Docrat: I think there needs to be a physical improvement of the landscape. There has to be better lighting. There have to be points where people, not just women but people in general, can go to access information after something has happened or to contact somebody who can help immediately—after hours especially. There needs to be a general feeling of safety, so that when things like this occur information is easily available. It should be reported by the media if something has occurred. It should not be allowed to get to the stage where it becomes a rumour. Once it becomes a rumour, people are more likely to dismiss it and behave in the ways they did beforehand.

While safety is a personal responsibility, you can't take all the responsibility for yourself. There needs to be freedom of information when things have occurred—less secrecy in general. If I called the AFP for information about an event, I'd like to get the information that can be given—not names, addresses, et cetera. I would like to be told, "Yes, that did happen. This is the area. This is not safe, and we are going to do everything in our power to make it safer." I've noticed a huge clean-up in Civic recently. That just means that the problem has been moved somewhere else. Attitudes haven't changed, so problems don't just disappear. I just don't want them to move to ANU.

THE CHAIR: Thanks, Nadia.

The committee adjourned at 5.42 pm.