

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE A.C.T.

Members:

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

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 9 JULY 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 1.05 pm.

LULU RESPALL-TURNER,

MARIE-NOELLE CURE and

KATJA STANKOVIC

were called.

THE CHAIR: Before we begin, I'll read a formal statement, but don't be put off by it. You should understand that 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 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.

Would you like to make a quick opening statement? We've got your submission. If you talk to that, then we can ask you questions. We might keep the opening statement as short as possible so that we can ask as many questions as possible. That would be great.

Ms Respall-Turner: I'll start. My name is Lulu Respall-Turner. I'm the Vice President of the Multicultural Women's Advocacy, which is the only local migrant women's lobby group in the ACT. Our organisation started informally in the mid to late 1980s and went through a series of name changes.

The group advocates and supports both newly arrived and long-settled migrant and refugee women from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Many women felt in the 1980s that their issues were not being heard enough, although there were a number of ethnic community organisations already in existence and there was the Ethnic Communities Council.

The women who started the group felt that the issues that mattered most to them or issues that were gender focused were buried under all the other baggage. They felt—and we still do feel—that as women from non-English-speaking backgrounds we're either lumped together with mainstream women's groups as women or we are taken care of under the banner of multicultural groups or multiculturalism. We struggle in between, and in the process our voices are not heard enough.

Obviously, there are a lot of gender-related issues that we share in common with all women in the ACT—issues such as child care, education and employment. However, a lot of the cultural specific dimensions of such issues are forgotten or not given enough attention. That's why our group exists.

We are struggling as a group, because we don't have resources. We would very much like to have engaged in good data-gathering research. What we don't have at the moment is an accurate profile or picture of the situation of migrant women from non-English speaking backgrounds in the ACT, because the research statistics do not bring out gender

disaggregated data on the multicultural communities here. It's just not deemed important by a lot of the researchers.

I think in order for us to go forward and propose strategies we need to engage or at least encourage agencies and perhaps the education or research institutions in the ACT to look more closely at gender issues affecting migrant and refugee women from non-English-speaking backgrounds in the ACT. That falls under one of the points we brought out in our submission, which is the need to establish mechanisms for gender collection of research data relevant to migrant women in the ACT.

At present our group does have a couple of women or maybe more who are quite able to do some research. In fact, Katja here has done some research on women's refugees. But obviously, without money and without the resources, we cannot follow through any of the research so far initiated. I have to mention that Katja did this from her own resources. Marie-Noelle has also engaged in research to do with the court system and victims of crime.

Ms Cure: I do it with my place of work, but of course it touches on the issues of this group.

Ms Respall-Turner: High on the list is that we need to get an accurate profile—not just numbers but a report or at least a scoping study on the situation of migrant women from non-English-speaking backgrounds in the ACT. Then we can perhaps determine where gaps exist in services available to them.

Mrs Stankovic: I might touch on health care for migrant women. Recently I was involved in a project called Women Talk. I was the project manager. It was funded by Healthpact. During the whole period that I organised the project and researched it, I found a lack of health services for migrant women—not so much in the health services which provide direct help to women as in the health mechanisms. I'm talking about health care interpreters.

For example, I know that the Migrant Health Unit provides health care interpreters. They employ only a few women—I think three or four—who interpret in seven languages. We all know how many languages are spoken in the ACT. It's far more than seven. I know that one of those interpreters interprets in three languages. She represents three ethnic groups. She can't be everywhere.

A good example of a health care interpreting service is that which is provided by the Illawarra, Greater Murray and Southern health area. The health interpreters on their list represent more than 42 languages. They're not employed by anyone on a full-time basis; they're all on-call interpreters paid as contractors. The service doesn't have any responsibilities towards them, but they're available every day, 24 hours a day, for health interpreting, and they are paid only for the time they interpret.

I wonder why the ACT doesn't have something like that at present. At the moment, for health interpreting, they contact TIS, which moved to Sydney. They don't take into account whether it's a woman or a man. Can you imagine a migrant woman from any part of the world going to have a pap smear and a breast check and a man coming to interpret? That happens a lot of times. First, the woman doesn't get interpreting. Second,

she's embarrassed, and that creates a lot of problems. I think the ACT should have something similar to the Illawarra service.

Health interpreters are valuable. You wouldn't believe it but there is a huge group of health interpreters in Queanbeyan and Canberra who work for that service. So they are available already. All somebody needs to do is hire them. They don't even need to provide them with any training. They're all trained.

I want to talk about the bilingual community educators groups and a little bit more about the Migrant Health Unit. When I was hired to do this project, the first point of contact I thought about was the Migrant Health Unit. I thought if anybody knows what's available in ACT for migrant women it should be Migrant Health Unit. Unfortunately, I did not get any information from them or any support. I was very disappointed. The only thing they provided me with was the opportunity to come and talk to the bilingual community educators, but I didn't get any information.

I know for a fact that the first group of bilingual community educators were trained in 1993, because I was one of them. They keep training those groups. They keep getting funds to train groups, but what are those community educators for if you're not going to use them to educate communities?

The educators get trained and then after one year they don't get anything. They lose hope and they find something else. They move on, which is fair enough. Then a new group is trained and another new group is trained. It's just a waste of time and funds to train more and more new educators if there are no jobs for them.

When I say job, it's not a full-time job; it's not a permanent job. We also do contracts to go and educate ethnic communities. The only education I can think of which was provided was on breast screening and cervical cancer. They just keep doing that. How many times do you need to go and teach women that they need to examine their breasts and do screening? What about diabetes, drugs and alcohol, occupational health and safety, mental health, employment, providing basic information on health services in the ACT?

I was also really disappointed with cross-culture mental health. One of the workshops I did was on mental health. I approached them and asked if some of them could come and run the workshop for me. The answer was, and I quote: "We don't want to do that because of the issues that might come out." That's the point of doing it, isn't it?

Ms Cure: Would you like to say what the name of the workshop was, the subject?

Mrs Stankovic: The subject was unfulfilled expectations. Everybody who comes here comes with an expectation of a better life, of a better future. When women come here, they're stuck; they can't move. Women with huge work experience or careers come here and they can't find jobs. They're isolated. They stay at home or are forced to do jobs like cleaning or being a shop assistant. I can tell you that their self-esteem is absolutely zero.

I wanted to get a group of women together and have somebody from the cross-cultural mental health service come and give a group talk. That's all I wanted. They refused to do it because they said they wouldn't be able to deal with the issues which came up.

The first thing I thought was: “If you’re not able to deal with those issues, you shouldn’t be here. You shouldn’t be doing this job.” They promote that they educate on mental health and they do workshops on mental health. I wonder what kind of workshops they are. They didn’t want to do mine. I had to hire a private psychiatrist. She came and did the workshop. We were very happy with her. It wasn’t that hard, but she did it. As a matter of fact, she promised to do a follow-up free of charge, because she realised that there were a lot of unresolved mental health issues amongst migrant women.

THE CHAIR: Can we just stop there. We’ve only got 10 minutes left, so we might let some of the committee members ask some questions. The time is very short. I’m sorry about that. In your submission you mention a need for more culturally appropriate child care. What do you mean by that?

Ms Cure: As you said, there isn’t very much time so I will tie it up with a subject that I have on previous occasions spoken to you about. From my work experience—and of course I can only say this very briefly now—I have become aware that there are times when women are not able to access some services. For example, if women have been victimised or subjected to domestic violence and they need to attend court to get restraining orders or they need to search for work or there are other issues relevant to their coping, they are unable to do that because they do not have the facility to put a child in care at short notice, and that’s very difficult.

It’s even difficult for me where I work to provide them with the help—to take them to court, for example, to provide them with court support. I don’t have people who are trained to assist people who have English as a second language. So it’s a multi-problem of child care and providing them with the support that they would need in meeting their needs.

THE CHAIR: So it is access to crisis child care?

Ms Cure: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I’m just trying to understand whether you’re saying that child care options available now are not culturally appropriate.

Ms Cure: That would be one issue. Everyone has problems with child care. There isn’t enough child care available, but there’s certainly not enough culturally appropriate child care and emergency child care.

Mrs Stankovic: I know that Tuggeranong Community Service has a child-care service in Cooleman Court called Resourcelink. I know they have bilingual child support workers. Those support workers are hired on a contract basis, but only when a child enters the services for the first time and the child doesn’t speak the language. That’s when they engage a bilingual support worker to come and work with the child for one week, two weeks or three weeks, but three weeks is the maximum. Then the funds stops. That’s what they allow for—only three weeks. As far as I’m concerned, because I’ve been engaged in those services as well, it’s not enough.

Mrs Cure: So we need long term.

Mrs Stankovic: Longer term.

Ms Cure: But also short-term and emergency are not available either.

MS DUNDAS: Do you think the answer is more funding to have bilingual child care workers for a longer time, or do we need to resource up a new set of people and have them specifically allocated? Are the people there and they just need more funding, or do we need something totally new to meet the need?

Mrs Stankovic: As far as the health service is concerned, my suggestion was to have more funds for health interpreters, to engage health interpreters on a contract basis as needed. You don't have to employ them full time.

The ACT needs to have a big list of health interpreters available 24 hours a day, and you need to have men and women as well, because you never know what you're going to need. Child-care services are a separate issue. You can't mix those two.

Ms Cure: I guess it comes down to a matter of extra funding, but how do you go about that? Do you fund a new organisation or do you have the careful employment of bilingual people who are culturally sensitive in various places? It comes down to an issue of employment.

Mrs Stankovic: Of employment of migrant women.

Ms Cure: Employment of migrant women—more faces to be seen. I will quote from my place of work. The victim services scheme, for example, has five or six staff. Not one of them is from a non-English-speaking background. When they did their survey, it came out that they weren't catering to the needs of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. That is only one example of an area that is providing a service to the Canberra community and yet hasn't even thought about people from culturally diverse communities. So we need to think about this issue of access and equity in employment. It seems to have fallen by the wayside.

Women from culturally diverse backgrounds are no longer getting positive discrimination in the workplace. It used to be 5:1 but now it's not even 5:1. There used to be a saying: "We must employ someone from a culturally diverse background to balance out." But now that is totally forgotten, so we need to revive that.

Mrs Stankovic: Resourcelink have a lot of workers, and they specifically work with migrants. There's only one non-English-speaking background woman working there—only one out of 10 to 15.

Ms Respall-Turner: One barrier that holds up the interpreters' pool of women especially is the cost of being accredited, especially for services in the court and legal system and for medical services. I think one important barrier is the cost of getting accreditation. It costs a lot, and your average migrant woman doesn't have \$400 or \$500.

Mrs Stankovic: I'm a health interpreter and I work for Centrelink. I have no accreditation at all. I don't have to prove to you that I can speak English. I can assure you that I can speak my language. I have no job. I am unemployed. I've been unemployed for 10 years. This is all I do. I work voluntarily. I do get hired from time to time. I don't have \$500 to pay for that, absolutely not, and I don't get engaged as an interpreter as often as people who do. I'm only a backup. If they can't do it, they call me.

Ms Respall-Turner: A while ago I sent an email suggesting that funds be made available to subsidise women especially who want to train as interpreters and get accreditation, but nobody in the multicultural office paid any attention, unfortunately.

MRS CROSS: Whom did you approach?

Ms Respall-Turner: This was an offshoot of my submission to the federal Attorney-General about interpreting and translating services. I sent a copy to Mick and Sam Wong, at that time the chair of the Multicultural Council, and they did give an answer and said that it was being taken care of. But there was nothing more. What I really was asking for was an evaluation of the standard of access to interpreting services, the need for getting more people, women especially, accredited and the cost of translating services.

MRS CROSS: And the answer you got was that it was being looked into?

Ms Respall-Turner: There was no answer. The answer came in a meeting when they said it was already part of the program or structure in the court system. I think they were referring to the legal aid grant the federal government gives to state courts. But what I am interested to know is the level of access and how much women are accessing legal aid. How well is legal aid helping women from non-English-speaking backgrounds? I can only speak from anecdotal accounts given to me that the legal and court system is proving to be traumatic for women from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Ms Cure: I work with victims of crime. I'm not advocating for that group right now. I'm advocating for MWA. I can say for a fact that we are funded to provide services to victims of crime in the court, but we are not able to cater for non-English-speaking background women, because the funding only covers two members of staff—one professional to run the service and one administrator.

I am trying to recruit volunteers to do that work. We do it on a volunteer basis, but we need funding, for example, for leaflets to reach women and appropriate training for these women to be there and support women when they go to lawyers and when they go to court. I can say for a fact that the funding is not there.

THE CHAIR: The Multicultural Women's Advocacy don't have office space?

Ms Respall-Turner: No. I was going to speak to that. There is a model in Sydney—Immigrant Women Speak Out. Right now we are not a service organisation. We're really here to raise policy issues and advocate for women. We don't have a space in which to work. The office could also act as a drop-in centre for migrant women who need help, information, referral and those sorts of things that are culture specific. An office for us would mean that there would always be someone there to handle inquiries. There would

always be someone there to refer women to appropriate services and agencies, and there would be someone there with knowledge about where to get interpreter or translating services. At the moment there isn't. Women have to go to mainstream agencies, and sometimes it becomes very daunting, especially for new settler women. There are very few local, community-based services. So it becomes rather daunting for women who have no knowledge of the system.

However, if there was a Multicultural Women's Advocacy office in the same building as the Migrant Resource Centre it would be helpful. I might add that the MRC does help new settlers, but there is no gender-focused programs, no women-focused programs. Nor does the ACT Multicultural Council have women-focused policy or programs. Therefore, we as the Multicultural Women's Advocacy would like to step in and do some of the work that organisations like the Immigrant Women Speak Out in Sydney do. We cannot. We don't have the capacity. We don't have the resources.

THE CHAIR: What about grants from the ACT government? Do you get any?

Ms Respall-Turner: We get grants for running our newsletter. We'd be lucky to have \$750. We've been getting grants for cultural projects. We've had our exhibitions, and at the moment we are putting in a theatre project. The reason for this is that we are trying to encourage women to express themselves through art or through theatre. I think it is a way of bringing out whatever problems there may be and a way for them to deal with their problems. It is a soft way of doing it. We would like to run self-esteem workshops, but we don't have the funds for that. The biggest grant we've received is from the Healthpact project, which proved to be quite good.

THE CHAIR: But no ongoing operational funding?

Ms Respall-Turner: No, we don't have operational funding. We have put in a submission, but we're still waiting to hear from DIMIA.

THE CHAIR: We might have to leave it there. I'm sorry it was so short.

Ms Respall-Turner: Can I just add one more thing?

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Ms Respall-Turner: This has to do with unemployment. Over half of migrants are women. I haven't got the statistics, but maybe 60 to 65 per cent are women. A lot of these women are women in hardship. It's part of the poverty report from ACTCOSS. Because of the two-year waiting period, they're unable to access education or training for employment. There is a ban on accessing higher education especially.

The other thing that prevents a lot of women from getting into the labour market is that a lot of women who are dependent spouses of working men are not entitled to a lot of the job training run by Centrelink. That is proving to be a great barrier to migrant women from non-English-speaking backgrounds who don't have the personal wherewithal to pay for training courses.

Mrs Stankovic: And help for women over 40.

Ms Respall-Turner: Yes, especially women over 40.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. If we need to speak with you again during the inquiry, I hope it will be all right to contact you again.

Ms Respall-Turner: Thank you for this opportunity. I thank the committee.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

SARA SOUTH was called.

THE CHAIR: You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly and 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 may 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.

When you begin, could you identify yourself for Hansard. Thank you for coming here today. We asked to you to come because in our first day of hearings a lot of the groups that appeared raised child care as an issue facing women, whether it was women going to work, women going to university or women having jobs outside nine to five. Some women are not able to afford child care. The committee is trying to get a handle on what's happening in the ACT and what could be done to remove some of the barriers. We wanted a person who could give us the whole picture rather than a particular picture, so hence your nomination.

Would you like to make an opening statement? Then we can question you, if that's all right.

Ms South: Certainly. My name is Sara South. I've been working in and around the children's services profession in the ACT and New South Wales for 17 years now. My experience and background is basically in long-day care, but I have a degree and a masters in early childhood education, so I have an education background as well.

I wear several hats. I'm currently a user of children's services in the ACT. I have five children currently in child care, or children's services—two in long-day care and three in after-school care, and a school holiday program today. I work currently as an independent consultant, so I am contacted by anyone to advise on, or assist in, any area of children's services in the ACT.

Today I am specifically here in relation to a couple of campaigns that are currently happening in the ACT. There is a community child-care campaign currently happening in the ACT which is being used to raise awareness within the ACT community of the importance of children's services. When I refer to children's services, that covers child care but it also covers services for school-age children. So I'm trying to cover the broad gamut.

I am also very involved in the child-care workers campaign to raise awareness of the need for better public awareness of what child-care workers do. I'm on both of those campaign committees, and they work side by side.

What I want to speak specifically about today is the link between children's services and existing government programs—that is, how access to, and cost of, children's services impact on women's ability to participate broadly in the work force and society in general; how access to, and cost of, children's services in the ACT limit equality of opportunity for women to do so; how access to, and cost of, children's services deny women financial independence and security; and how access to, and cost of, children's

services restrict women's access to a supportive society that enables them to choose active and healthy lifestyles. So it pretty much covers the first points of the terms of reference.

The first and probably major issue facing most families in the ACT is cost and affordability of child care, or children's services in general. The ACT has quite a broad range of children's services available. I won't go into details of what they all cover. I'm sure you know. We have long-day care, family day care, school-age care programs—which may include before and after-school care—and school holiday programs. That probably covers the main ones.

There are different structures and ranges of costs for different child-care services. I'll focus mainly on long-day care, because it's probably the best known one in the ACT, even though we have huge numbers of children in family day care as well. Long-day care centres currently charge between \$45 and \$50 per day for one child in care, which is between \$210 and \$250 a week, a significant amount of money in anyone's terms. For family day care, the hourly rate is slightly less than that.

Linked to the affordability of child care is the federal government child-care benefit scheme, which the federal government proposes will enable low to middle-income workers to afford child care. Child-care benefit has undergone a number of restructures, which is very evident in the media at the moment, given mistakes that were made two years ago. It has never kept up with the actual cost of child care. Child-care benefit currently has a ceiling. The government imposes a ceiling up to which they will pay child-care benefit. That currently is \$2.66 an hour. Most child-care centres charge about \$4 an hour. The difference between the \$4 and the \$2.66 is referred to as the gap fee. That is the fee that all parents pay, irrespective of how their income has been assessed for child-care benefit.

The gap fee for families on full child-care benefit, or 100 per cent child-care benefit, is about half of what their child care costs. I'll give you a financial example. A family on an income of, say, \$35,000 a year, whether it be a sole-parent or combined income, with two children in long-day care, are eligible for about 100 per cent child-care benefit. Their child care would cost them about \$200 a week after tax, so that's from their net income. That leaves them approximately \$300 a week to cover all other expenses they have.

In terms of affordability, it doesn't make a lot of sense for families on \$35,000, which isn't minimum income; it's fairly reasonable. So many families are now seriously questioning the worth of returning to work or working part time, and they're having to look at other options for child care. Anecdotal evidence suggests there's an increasing number of informal care arrangements happening. If families are fortunate enough to have extended family, extended family will look after children. People will opt to take casual or part-time work or shiftwork to enable the other partner, if there is one, to care for children.

The thing that seems to be increasing in the ACT is what's called swap care. I work two days a week and look after your children, and you work three days a week and look after mine, or something like that. There is no cost associated with the use of that care.

Linked very closely to cost—and all of these issues interlink—is access in the ACT to child care. Certainly for part-time or full-time long-day care the waiting lists are excruciatingly long, particularly for children under two years of age, but right across the board. It is almost impossible to get children into an occasional care or long-day care centre. If you can, you can't get them in for the days you require, and that makes it terribly difficult.

Associated with that, and because there are such long waiting lists and occupancy is so full, services are very inflexible in meeting families' different care requirements and needs. The services need to balance financial viability with the flexibility to provide the care families want.

Gone are the days in most service when you can have half-day care. It's just not available anymore. I can understand why services can't be flexible. Obviously they can't be if they're full and they've got someone who will take whatever they've got to offer.

Access is available at places that offer adjunct care, which is available in places like sporting centres and facilities. Occasional care is often used almost like family sanity care. It enables families to utilise more flexible care arrangements to deal with their day-to-day things like going to medical appointments. Adjunct care is used increasingly for healthy lifestyle choices. Women can go to the gym because adjunct care is located at the gym at a fairly reasonable cost.

THE CHAIR: Do you know if adjunct care has to be licensed?

Ms South: Yes, it does. The other area that creates barriers for women accessing child-care services or children's services is the child-care professionals who work within those services. The whole child-care profession Australia-wide but also in the ACT is in a very serious staffing crisis at the moment. There's an inability for services to attract and retain all staff in children's services, but especially experienced qualified and experienced unqualified staff.

I believe this is because of the appalling levels of pay that child-care workers receive—I'll talk about that in just a moment—also the very limited or non-existent career path for children's services professionals. The working conditions within children's services are still quite appalling.

You're aware, I'm sure, that the ACT government has funded a project on work force planning issues for child care in the ACT, which was launched some weeks ago and is just getting the structure together now. That project is going to examine the reasons why the child-care profession is in such a staffing crisis.

They're going to look particularly at the extent to which the supply of staff meets the needs of the sector. Many of us are already saying that we can tell you what the outcome of that will be. It's very evident that it's in crisis. People are exiting working in children's services in droves, especially qualified child-care workers.

I've got some pay figures associated with this crisis. A level 1 child-care worker, which is a entry level child-care worker, someone with no formal qualifications and no previous experience, would enter work in a children's service at \$11.53 per hour, which equates to

about \$22,000 a year. That's entry level. The unfortunate component of that is that the child-care industry is still an industry that pays junior wages, and junior is until 21. If you were under 17 years of age and you work in children's services, you get about \$11,000 a year gross.

Level 4 child-care workers are the people we make completely responsible for the care and education of our children. They are team leaders. They are responsible for supervising staff, writing educational programs for the children in their group, delivering them and evaluating them. Currently they get \$14.90 an hour, which is about \$29,000 a year. This amount takes into account the \$18 living wage increase that was paid in May. It already includes that increase.

THE CHAIR: Could we get a copy of that award?

Ms South: Certainly.

MRS CROSS: Or even the notes you have there.

Ms South: Yes, certainly. Conditions of employment for child-care workers have always been seen to be very tough, and they still are. Because there will be community consultation with children's services workers, I think this government inquiry will find things very similar to what I'm going to say. I have previously done some research working with children's services workers to find out how they feel about things.

The most common statement made by children's services workers at the moment is that they feel undervalued within the community as a whole. They say things like: "I'm still viewed as a babysitter" or "I don't do a professional service" or "People don't understand what I do." They feel that the general community values them like that. But often they also feel that the management of their service and the parents using their service undervalue what they provide and have no idea what it requires to work with children.

These services are mostly open 10 hours a day. Obviously, the staff aren't on the floor for 10 hours a day. Many of them are within the service building for nine hours a day, which is quite a long time to be surrounded by up to 90 children.

Child-care workers say that they find their work with the children and especially with the families, stressful. There is no career path for them. If you graduate with a diploma of children's services, your entry level of pay is \$14.90. Within two years you get to \$15.38, and that's the end. There's nowhere else to go.

Children's services professionals, with their levels of salaries, can't afford formal child care themselves. On very low incomes, they fall below the bottom threshold level for child-care benefit. The child-care benefit threshold starts at \$30,000. A fully qualified child-care worker working full time is below that rate. So the option to have your own children in formal care is not affordable. That's all I have to say at the moment.

THE CHAIR: Thanks. Excellent. It's a bit hard to say what you would like to see the ACT government do, because we're having that review at the moment.

Ms South: I have an opinion, though.

THE CHAIR: Maybe it's not so hard then.

Ms South: It's not so much what the ACT government can do. It's more what the federal government can do. It is time, I believe, that the federal government started taking responsibility for the care and education of all our children, not just when they start primary school. The federal government funds education from age five or six, depending on what state you're in. Children don't get educated before they turn five? Is this something I've missed? Latest research indicates that the most important aspects of children's learning and development occur before they go to school. Yet the government is not prepared to put funding into where it really counts.

To show you how that funding is done I'd have to sit down with a whiteboard. Child-care benefit doesn't work—or it doesn't work in the structure that it's currently in. It works for some families. The increasing gap fee means that people on low to middle incomes are dropping out of formal child-care systems completely. Many of those children are the ones that require care and education in a formal setting.

I believe it's a federal government responsibility to provide the funding to provide care and education services for the whole of Australia, not just for the ACT. The ACT government, if it wishes, could fund them. But funding is the issue. Parents cannot continue to fund child care. If you've got two children in care and you're paying \$400 a week at the bottom level for your children in care, or say \$200, that's a lot of money out of a very minimum salary.

THE CHAIR: From the point of trying to raise the profession and get acknowledgment that our children deserve qualified and adequately paid or, dare I say, well-paid professionals to look after our children, the cost of child care discourages people from using the profession and will encourage more backyard arrangements. Is there a view in the committees you're on about some types of care such as swap care you mentioned or the increase in nannies? Is there evidence to show that they are on the increase, or is it just anecdotal?

Ms South: It's only anecdotal at this stage, and I guess I can only refer to the people I know—and I know a lot of people—in children's services. When families are exiting their service, they say, "What are you going to do with your kids?" The parents say, "The lady from down the road is going to come to the house and we will pay her cash." It's anecdotal. You're quite right. I think there is evidence that there are increasing numbers of informal care arrangements.

I think there's increased mixed mode care, too. Where families once had their children in full-time long-day care, partly because of cost and partly because of inability to access the care they require, they have two days here, one day there and one day with this grandma and one day with that grandma, which is not necessarily in the best interests of the children. I'm not sure that the ACT inquiry will gather evidence on that.

THE CHAIR: It would be hard to gather. Thank you very much, Sara, for your time.

JOSEPHINE De FLUMERI and

BRENDA THOMPSON

were called.

THE CHAIR: Before we begin, I will read out the standard statement I make at the beginning, which just says that you should understand that 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 are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for 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.

I welcome you to the committee hearing. Thanks for coming along today to give us some information. Maybe the best thing to do, if it is all right, is for you to make an opening statement and then we can ask questions. Maybe you could tell us a bit about the service, what you do, how you do it, how long you have been around and that sort of thing and we can take it from there.

Ms De Flumeri: My name is Josephine De Flumeri. I am the manager of the Women's Information and Referral Centre. The aim of our service is actually to empower women to make informed choices and enable self-determination through the provision of information and associated support. Our centre is located across the road in what was called the FAI building, now the Eclipse building, and we are part of the ACT library and information service in the Department of Urban Services.

Our service provides information on any issue to women in the ACT and region. We provide information through the telephone, face-to-face, email inquiries, fax inquiries and through our website. We provide referrals to specialist community agencies and services.

We produce a publication called *Calendar for Women*, which is free to individuals, women and organisations in the community, including professionals and counsellors. This is the publication, if you want a copy of it. I can give you some of these brochures, which would be useful for you as well. They give you an outline of our services.

Calendar for Women is a very popular publication within the ACT. We produce about 2,500 every semester. We produce it twice a year, January to June and July to December. It provides information on courses for women, groups, workshops, employment training, recreational and social activities, and events in the ACT community and region. We collect information from other community organisations about their activities and put it all into one publication. It is a very good resource not only for professionals but also for women who want to attend a group in a particular area on a particular issue and can find everything they need in the one publication. That is one of our key publications.

Another publication that we produce once a year is a program for International Women's Day activities. Again, we follow the same process. We find out what different organisations and services are doing for International Women's Day and we produce a program of activities and do a large mail out.

We support women through a support group for survivors of domestic violence and also a support group in partnership with Rape Crisis—the sexual abuse support group. The DV group runs over about eight weeks every term of the year. The sexual assault group is an ongoing group; the domestic violence support group is a support group that goes over a period of eight weeks, then has a break in the school holiday period and starts again the following term. We support women in that way.

We also have access to computers and the internet for women. We applied last financial year for digital divide funding and we got a little bit of money to conduct information sessions for women from culturally diverse backgrounds, indigenous women, and isolated and economically disadvantaged women to teach them the basics of using a computer and the internet. We have purchased two computers to enable us to do that. We have now got the computers. We are actually going to start the training and do the advertising for that.

We have a library with books, newsletters, brochures and videos. Our books are very specialised. They cover issues such as parenting, personal development, financial matters for women, loss and grief—the kinds of issues that women ring us up about and want supportive resources with such issues. We also have a website that we are in the process of developing. In about two weeks it will be finally developed. It will have, of course, our *Calendar for Women*. It will be much more expanded from the website that we have now. It will have information on women's services in the ACT, support groups for women, support services for families, support for lesbians, support for men, support for young children, and support for youth. We will try to make it as comprehensive as possible and give women the opportunity to access that information through our website as well as face-to-face or through the telephone.

Basically, that is what we do. The people who use our services are usually women in the ACT and region, women's organisations, people involved in issues concerning women, such as partners, family members or employers, people undertaking research into women's issues, and government and non-government community services and organisations. They are mostly our client group. In the last financial year, 2001-02, the centre received 5,600-plus inquiries over the telephone and walk in. That is not including any outreach or support groups; for our basic inquiry line there were almost 6,000.

THE CHAIR: I do not know whether you have it there, but is there some way to tell us what was the most sought after information?

Ms De Flumeri: Yes, I have prepared that, too. The major issues concerning women, from our statistics, are: course inquiries, 500-plus; counselling issues, 429; accommodation, 337; legal, 311; domestic violence, 310; relationship issues, 213, which included separation for the last three months because we changed the process of taking statistics; and separation issues, 170 on their own. They are the six key issues, but after that is health. I do not have the number on that, but mental health issues, pregnancy and

abortion were pretty prominent in the health area. As I said, I just put down the six most requested inquiries to get information.

THE CHAIR: Would we be able to get those numbers. Sorry, they have been read into *Hansard*.

Ms De Flumeri: I can provide that information to you. You are quite welcome to take a copy of my notes, if that is what you want.

THE CHAIR: I just was not quick enough in writing it all down. I started with 500 and then stopped and just got the headings.

Ms De Flumeri: I have added information, a little blurb on each area. Whether you want that information or not is entirely up to you.

THE CHAIR: Thanks. We would appreciate that.

Ms De Flumeri: You have got a little bit more elaborated information. The inquiries we get are not just basic. On accommodation, we have put down in there that some of the issues are around access to refuges, private accommodation, ACT Housing, et cetera. We have given you a little bit more information; it isn't just about a broad area.

MS DUNDAS: Which kinds of women are utilising your services? Do you know whether they are from migrant backgrounds? You have identified the needs in IT services of culturally diverse persons, but what kind of demographic are we looking at in the average woman who walks in or finds you?

Ms De Flumeri: That is interesting, because we don't keep those demographics. One of the reasons is confidentiality. We don't ask those sorts of questions of women. Whenever women come in to see us we actually have a sheet on the background. We don't have their names, but we are starting to collect a statistical analysis of the clients that come in face-to-face as to what background they might be from or which area of Canberra, et cetera.

We don't ask the women what background they are from or where they are from, but, judging from a lot of the inquiries that we get, they are not specifically migrant-type issues or whatever; they are general issues that go across the whole board. Usually, the women who do come to us are the more disadvantaged group of women who have less ability to access other resources, such as getting information through the internet or whatever. We are actually considered the first point of contact for lots of women who want information.

And it isn't just women; community organisations know also that if they want information about other services, we would be the place they would first come to, because we get inquiries on all issues, not just a specific area. They aren't always from individual women; they could be from service providers on behalf of their clients, professionals, et cetera. We don't often ask them whether they are there as a professional or as an individual, so that that isn't very clear. We have not spent a lot of time on collecting that information because it is very time consuming and you want to spend it more with the clients.

MS DUNDAS: But within that, do you feel that there are areas of unmet need in the people who are ringing up? Taking course inquiries out of the list, there seem to be a number of people inquiring about counselling services. Do you identify that as people who are just looking for information or that there is an unmet need in the performance of counselling services, and what other gaps do you see not only in your own service but also in the services available for women and your clients?

Ms De Flumeri: We can only go from the statistics that we have got on the inquiries that come to us. With the counselling-type issues, the need for low-cost/no-cost counselling services for women was an issue that was brought up probably about 12 months ago with the Women's Advisory Council and some money was allocated to the Women's Health Service to run Women's Words. We were quite instrumental in providing background information to help that service obtain its funding for low-cost counselling services and we refer lots of women to that service. That was something we took some involvement in, and a key inquiry for us is around low-cost counselling services for women. Some counselling services are specific to a particular need, domestic violence, sexual assault or whatever.

There are lots of inquiries around women's life stages—they might not be able to deal with a particular issue in their life, something traumatic is happening in their life and they are depressed, don't know where to turn for help, et cetera—and short-term, low-cost/no-cost counselling is very helpful to get them through that period. That is quite often what women ask for. We rarely get inquiries asking for professional counsellors where they have to pay. The inquiries are about where they can get counselling that will not cost them much and will help them with a particular issue.

Another key point is that we get lots of inquiries about legal issues and separation issues. Of course, we pass on any legal issues to professionals, such as the Women's Legal Centre, but there is also a lot of need around having support for women going through separation. It is a period in their life which is not just to do with what they do with the children, et cetera. That is an issue, a major issue, but they are also losing a lot of their links and support within the community as a result of that separation.

Last year we ran a pilot relationship separation support group and it had very positive outcomes. We are in the process of running another one. We think that that is a very important gap that is not being filled.

Relationship Australia run a separation support group in conjunction with a separation support group for men, so the men in that relationship are going to one group and the women are going to another group. Ours is for women only who are going through that process and want to know things like what legal services are available, how the family services system works, how being in another relationship affects the children and so forth, and how to build networks to get support through this period, et cetera. It is about bringing the women back into the community to access other services, to feel a sense that they have got support in the community and they are not isolated.

Accommodation is another key issue. Lots of women are asking for accommodation and it has been very difficult to get them accommodation. Women also are saying that they feel that some of the ACT Housing accommodation is not appropriate for them because

they had little children and there may be violence around the area, et cetera. That is what they were telling us.

MS DUNDAS: You said that you don't keep statistics but, anecdotally, are most of the women using your service with children?

Ms De Flumeri: Anecdotally, yes, they would be mostly women with children, but not exclusively.

MS DUNDAS: For whatever reason—maybe it is because they don't have the need—you do not have a high influx of young women calling you? I know it is all anecdotal.

Ms De Flumeri: Yes. Because we don't take people's age, we can't classify women as young. We don't often get women under, say, 18. They will access a lot of the youth services rather than us, but we certainly accept them and we do assist them. It is usually women over 20 and up to 80, 90 whatever. The age group varies quite considerably, so we do not have a pattern of saying most of the women would be between 30 and 50 or something, because women come from all ages.

MS DUNDAS: You provide a referral service at that point.

Ms De Flumeri: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: Are your staff trained counsellors?

Ms De Flumeri: We do not provide counselling as such, but all our staff have a background in social welfare, counselling, or community health education, so we are all professionals.

THE CHAIR: Can you tell me what the office is like? You are getting at least 20 approaches a day, based on the figures that you have given us. What sorts of resources do you have to meet that?

Ms De Flumeri: We have only three staff.

THE CHAIR: Full time?

Ms De Flumeri: We have two full-time staff and two part-time equivalents of one full time position. We are extremely busy with calls, inquiries, organising support groups, going out and doing outreach as well as publications, and keeping our information resources up to date. We have a display of brochures, pamphlets, newsletters and we keep them up to date. We have a notice board with posters and flyers of the latest groups that might not have made it into our *Calendar for Women* so that women can access the latest information. Our staff each keep a folder of information about accommodation, new programs, groups, whatever.

MS DUNDAS: Do you find that most of your client contact is through people coming into the office or is it more electronic?

Ms De Flumeri: No, by telephone. Most of the inquiries are by telephone. Clients by phone in the last financial year were 4,268; and visits were 1,182 visits. So in comparison it is 1:4 more or less.

MS DUNDAS: Just to follow up on that, over the history of the Women's Information and Referral Service there has been a lot of discussion about its location. Do you think that you would like to be or there would be need for you to be in a more visible, accessible place? Do you think that you are missing people because they are not dropping in?

Ms De Flumeri: Yes, that issue has been discussed before and we were going to go in with the Civic Library in the new Link building, but that didn't eventuate. The answer to that is yes, we would get more women in if we had more of a shopfront location. However, if we are shopfront, we don't really want to be shopfront on our own, because we work as a service, just three women, and quite often there may be just one woman in the office and, knowing Civic as it is, leaving one woman alone in a shopfront women's service would not be good for the staff.

THE CHAIR: You would have to get resources to match the location.

Ms De Flumeri: If we were with the Civic Library, we would have the support of the bigger library services, relief from other staff as well and the opportunity to feel part of a bigger organisation. However, to put us in a shopfront, just the three of us, as an independent service on its own, I don't think that it would be good for our clients to be seen to be coming in from the street only into our service. I think there is a safety issue also for our staff, although we have never had a major safety issue.

THE CHAIR: Part of the difficulty we have had with the community is in accessing women who may not be involved in women's organisations, formal women's groups, but who use ACT government programs in some way. We may be reaching them; I don't know. How do you address that in terms of getting your information out, acknowledging that the level of drop-ins to your service is small compared with the phone calls? Do you make sure that your information is widely distributed? How do you take that on?

Ms De Flumeri: We do that in several ways. We network with other community organisations. I believe that we are fairly well known within other government and non-government agencies. We go to network meetings and make ourselves known. We do a free mailout of the *Calendar for Women* to the different organisations. We attend forums and events to make ourselves more visible. We are also a service to them as well as to individual women. We get lots of referrals from community agencies and community workers, so we do network and indirectly reach another audience of women through those organisations.

THE CHAIR: Do you have brochure zone libraries and things like that?

Ms De Flumeri: In the library shopfronts, yes. We even get our calendar out to some private organisations within the Civic area. We can't go everywhere, so we send out calendars to solicitors as well, the Family Court, et cetera. We go around as far as we can with the resources we have, yes.

MS DUNDAS: Can you explain the outreach program that you run?

Ms De Flumeri: The outreach program is probably the area that we have had the least amount of time to get out to do it. We get invitations from women's groups to come and talk to their organisations. We may be invited by another service to go out to a group of women that they might be servicing. Not long ago the Women's Centre for Health Matters invited us to talk about our service and relationship issues for young women who were living in the Bega Flats across the road. We went there and talked about some relationship-type issues they were very interested in.

Quite often we will know about a group of women and will ask them if they would like us to come and talk to them about important issues. Recently, I visited a Croatian women's group and talked about some of the issues of migration and language. They are now coming to visit our centre and are making themselves more accessible. We invited them for morning tea, to come and have a look at the centre, talk to our staff, feel comfortable with the environment.

We are finding ways through being invited and inviting ourselves to different women's groups. We advertise some of our support groups through the media. We try to advertise when there is a feature article in the *Canberra Times*. If we find a spot for us to advertise our services we do so as extensively as we can.

Mrs Thompson: My name is Brenda Thompson. I manage Specialist Information Services for the ACT Library Service. The Women's Information and Referral Centre is one of the areas I manage. I think that people quite like coming in through the telephone or through the internet because of the anonymity, and they can gain information without anyone seeing them or even having anyone know their name.

Ms De Flumeri: That is a very good point, Brenda.

Mrs Thompson: I think the point is that it does not necessarily have to be in a very open public space where people can go, as long as they are able to contact through the web or through the telephone, which people seem to choose. It is their first option and sometimes they can gain all the information they need just from their telephone call or their hit on the internet site.

Ms De Flumeri: That is a good point, because I omitted to add that a lot of the client visits are not just walk-in; they are by women who have issues that are very complex. Quite often they don't ring up with one issue; they may have three or four issues that are part of their problem. We may invite them to come in to see one of our staff, and we do see people. As I said, we don't conduct counselling, but we do support women. We look at the issue that they have presented us with, look at possibly what resources are available in the community and what those services could do for them, prioritising some of the needs that they might have and supporting them with information.

Our centre tries to empower women through the provision of information and giving them the choices they need to have in making decisions about their life and lifestyles and dealing with issues in their life, so quite often they are appointment visits, not just walk-in visits. Women say, "I really need to talk to you about this issue; it is not something I want to talk about over the phone in great detail, but if I come in maybe you could talk

to me.” We talk to clients for anything from half an hour to an hour. We don’t make long appointments and we don’t usually make a second appointment; that is very rare.

THE CHAIR: Brenda, you were saying before that you manage an information service.

Mrs Thompson: I manage Specialist Information Services for the Library Service.

THE CHAIR: Are there other information services not necessarily similar?

Mrs Thompson: No, they are quite diverse, I manage the Legislative Assembly library and I manage the heritage library at Woden as well as the information service.

THE CHAIR: How do people access the heritage one?

Mrs Thompson: They can visit or they can hit the website and take photographs from the website, and then they can ring me and make an appointment to have a search done for them.

THE CHAIR: Is it similar in terms of ringing in and the internet?

Mrs Thompson: No, they are all quite diverse; the three agencies I manage are quite different.

Ms De Flumeri: That is probably why they are specialist information services.

THE CHAIR: There being nothing further, I thank you very much for that evidence; it was excellent.

SUE HALL and

ERUTAN CIELO

were called.

THE CHAIR: I should say that Helen Cross sends her apologies for this afternoon. Before we begin, I'll just let you know that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly and protected by parliamentary privilege, which gives you certain protections, but also certain responsibilities. It means you are protected from certain legal actions, such as being sued for defamation for what you may 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.

Welcome to the committee. Just before we start, can I say that the committee members got your submission yesterday, for one reason or another. It is a very comprehensive submission and I have to confess that I have read the first seven pages, so we may need to read it and perhaps get you back at another stage to go through it. Nevertheless, I thought it would be useful for you to appear today. Please make an opening statement, then we can take it from there.

Ms Hall: As you know, I am Sue Hall, Director of the ACT Office for Women, and with me is Erutan Cielo, who is the Policy Officer in the Office for Women. I would like to place a few things on record. I will probably refer fairly heavily to my notes so I don't miss anything out. First, I will speak about the nature of the government's submission and then about the role of the Office for Women with respect to the issues mentioned within that submission.

The Office for Women coordinated the submission, which provides details of government programs that pertain purely to women, as well as of government programs that are more general but do address issues for women in some way, such as the equity and diversity framework and the family violence intervention program. For each program in the submission, agencies have indicated details relating to community needs, gap analysis, measurement, program effectiveness and any interagency collaboration. The submission you have is organised by agencies with responsibility for specific programs.

We think the submission provides a good overview of the broad range of programs that exist to meet the needs of women. There are a lot of raw data there which we hope will help to inform the committee during its deliberations. Questions relating to details of specific programs should be directed to the relevant program managers, but our office is happy to assist with that.

At an across-government level, we thought it would be useful to categorise the data under focus areas. We have done that throughout the submission, categorising the data into four areas: equity of opportunity, representation and recognition; economic independence and security, continuing education and training; access to, and support of, healthy lifestyles; and violence prevention and personal and community safety. These

four areas link with the committee's terms of reference, and they are also similar to the theme areas of the previous women's action plan.

We have copies of the information that is contained in the submission divided into the four categories I mentioned, regardless of agency. I will table them here. The information itself is no different; it is just divided up in a different way. We did this because you might be interested in what a particular agency does and the range of programs it offers, or you might want to look at all of the programs relating to violence and safety issues. We would be happy to send electronic copies of that across as well.

The Office for Women plans to further analyse those data, and particularly look at proactive and reactive programs. The Office for Women has a whole-of-government policy development and coordination role. In this role we receive guidance from a variety of sources, which would include government policy statements, of course. The Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, which was appointed in March this year, has continual input. It provides advice and collaborates with the office. Obviously, significant inquiries, such as that of this committee, are going to be very valuable in assisting our office.

We would be more than happy to provide further briefings to the committee, in addition to the documents we have previously provided—the previous women's action plan and the implementation report, the demographic profile of women in the ACT, and the submission that you have recently received. Given our links with other states and territories, we would also be happy to provide assistance with obtaining information about models of strategic processes used in other jurisdictions, if that would be useful in any way.

I could talk more about the submission itself, or about the parts that you have looked at, if you have questions. Would you like me to do that?

MS DUNDAS: I have a question about the report and gap analysis.

Ms Hall: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: You mentioned that each department and each project does its own gap analysis. How does your role of providing that whole-of-government strategic direction work with that gap analysis to make it uniform, and how do you then step in, if need be? How does the gap analysis work?

Ms Hall: That is partially why the government initiated this inquiry, to provide advice and recommendations about how best that might be done at a strategic level. The government has also asked for input from the ministerial advisory council on that. What I could say—and I think it's outlined in the previous women's action plan and implementation report to some degree—is that, if there is some broad strategic plan for women across government in the ACT, such as an action plan, that is one mechanism or infrastructure that we can utilise for that gap analysis.

When the action plan was in place—and I suppose it has not gone away—one of the mechanisms that linked with it was regular contact between agencies. There was an interagency committee, and we would have one or two contacts within each government

agency on that committee who had a fairly good overview of programs affecting women within their departments.

MS DUNDAS: Does that interagency committee still exist?

Ms Hall: It does. It has not met formally since the implementation report of the action plan, but we have maintained those contacts informally, and still use them. Some of the personnel have changed. Given that we have whole-of-government reporting to national bodies, it is very important that we maintain and develop those links, and so we have done that. There is contact, and we do find out what is going on.

The previous Women's Consultative Council did have a role to play as well, which was linked with the action plan and with the interdepartmental committee, and that involved sitting down every quarter to look at each of the four theme areas. It looked at what was going on within government programs and whether any gaps in needs could be identified. When Josephine was talking about the WIRC's submission, she mentioned the identified need for a free general women's counselling service. That need was identified through the process I have just described.

The Women's Information and Referral Centre is also able to regularly update the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women on its statistics and the information it receives. That sounds a bit blurred, but those links are all there. The ministerial advisory committee, the officers in the departments and the Office for Women are all working together.

What we in the office are starting to think through—although we are also very mindful that this committee is still to make its recommendations—is what sort of system can we put in place to build on and enhance the previous women's action plan, to maximise the effectiveness of programs and gap analysis. We are also considering which forms of monitoring and reporting are going to best assist that without being so onerous that they absorb all our efforts.

THE CHAIR: Does the office have a view on that already? Is it in this submission, or are you waiting to see what we would like?

Ms Hall: No, we would not like to pre-empt—

THE CHAIR: Other models exist in other states, but is there one that you would—

Ms Hall: There is not one that I would push at this stage. What I would say is that we do have a view that we are very well positioned to develop a strategic plan, and that a lot of the work that was done to establish the women's action plan will be very useful as a basis for that. The final implementation report will also provide guidance. Those documents, our ministerial advisory committee and the findings of this committee, and the models from other states, will really inform the way that we proceed. However, I think it would be pre-emptive to speculate on the results of that process.

THE CHAIR: At the moment, and since the new arrangements were put in place when Jon was elected, do you see the office as being in an interim phase?

Ms Hall: I think that is part of it. We have included the office's major activities in our submission. The current government wants to continue some of the activities what were being carried out before, and also take on some new activities. However, I think it was fairly well signalled that a whole-of-government approach was important, and that part of the reason this committee was established was to provide some advice on that.

With the women's action plan 2000-2001, we had planned to review it—and that was in the work plan—to come up with the next approach, whether it be for 2002 to 2003, or maybe a three or five-year plan. However, if we did that now it would be working at cross-purposes, given that this committee has now been established. That does not mean that we have stopped maintaining our links across government. We still have to report nationally and, obviously, we are still interested in getting information about what is going on.

In collecting the information for the submission you have, we have really enhanced the information contained in the women's action plan, and we are able to start analysing that data. That will really assist us when we get to the stage of thinking about the sorts of models we should adopt, the recommendations that the government will receive from the committee, and what the ministerial advisory council is saying. That council is our link with community, and that link will help to determine how we proceed.

THE CHAIR: At the moment you get to see cabinet briefs, and that is new.

Ms Hall: We see all cabinet submissions. Yes, that process has been tightened up.

THE CHAIR: Other than that, what part does the Office for Women play in influencing departments or similar before a cabinet submission appears on your desk?

Ms Hall: As you say, all departments know that all cabinet submissions are going to come to us for comment. We have worked with the cabinet office to promote the idea through its new handbook that we can assist agencies before they start to develop policy. That is better than having them sending us a cabinet submission and us then writing back at the last minute to say, "Have you thought . . .?" That idea is slowly filtering through and we are now receiving early approaches in a number of cases. That is also true for board and committee appointments to a degree as well.

As well as cabinet submissions and policy development, the Office for Women is represented on a number of committees and boards both outside and within ACT government. In that way we contribute to policy development. There is a intersectorial reference group on women's corrective services, and I am on its equity and diversity framework committee. We are represented on the Sexual Assault Services Advisory Committee (SASAC), and a number of others. In that way we continue to influence policy.

As I say, we have contacts within each of the agencies, and quite often they will contact us and ask for advice or input before they finalise material. We would do the same. Sometimes, if a point of view is being sought that concerns women, but there are legal and health implications, the Office for Women will coordinate a meeting, and we will provide input, along with people from Health and JACS, or other relevant agencies.

That goes on all the time. That is just part of the core business. This work is becoming more common, because there are some business units which might not have thought about these matters in the past, but they are starting to approach us now. We are trying to push that and it means that we are dealing with agencies who are not the usual players.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned the board and committee appointments, and you maintain that women's register, don't you?

Ms Hall: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We had a previous witness, on the first day, who maintained that women are very well represented on committees, especially non-paying committees, but that, in terms of statutory appointments, there was a big difference in the gender breakdown. Do you keep that information?

Ms Hall: I have heard that, but we do not have ready access to those statistics. We have access to statistics on government boards and committees as a whole.

THE CHAIR: But the government makes statutory appointments.

Ms Hall: Yes. I cannot comment on it because I do not have all of the information.

THE CHAIR: We need to find that out, but I don't know from whom.

Ms Hall: We would need to find out exactly which statutory authorities were involved, and whether private industry committees and boards were included, because I do know that anecdotal reports indicate that there is a discrepancy between the public sector and the private sector.

THE CHAIR: I am reasonably sure it was on public sector boards. I think it is interesting, and we need to find that out.

MS DUNDAS: To follow the statistical question, even though we do have that women's statistical profile, which was released, I think, two years ago now, we have had a lot of people saying to us that the social statistical profile that they are looking for is not available. For example, migrant women feel that they do not have enough data to show that they are in an area of need, and young women are not readily identified in the statistics that are available. In the information that is being collected now, day to day, on who is using the services, there just isn't a good enough gender analysis. How do you feel about that?

Ms Hall: That is an interesting one. I know that government agencies have definitely been increasing the extent of gender disaggregation in their data. I think that is actually noted in the final implementation report for the action plan. However, in terms of producing statistics for women from specific groups, that can often be difficult. On government boards and committees, people will generally readily identify themselves as either male or female, but identifying as indigenous, or from a non-English-speaking background, for instance, is voluntary.

The statistics for board membership are pretty good in terms of gender disaggregation, but I would suggest that they don't at all reflect accurately the involvement of women and men from non-English-speaking backgrounds, for instance. That is a problem that was referred to a bit by Josephine from WIRC: because it is voluntary identification, the figures may not be accurate.

MS DUNDAS: Does the Office for Women play a role in keeping an eye on gender statistics and disaggregated components of information? Do you have a collection role?

Ms Hall: We do not have a collection role, but we encourage business units to disaggregate data on gender where possible, and that is becoming a more common practice. I do not want to pre-empt the committee's decision making, but such disaggregation could be a target in any broad strategy for representation and recognition. That would be one example of something for which you could have measurable outcomes. In the past, such measures have been used as indicators.

MS DUNDAS: At the moment, it appears as though you say, "Would you do this, please?" but you cannot say—

Ms Hall: It would be something that could be put into a broad policy framework for women, yes.

MS DUNDAS: Okay, but at the moment the situation is that you say, "We really like this information and we encourage you and support you to provide it", but it is not compulsory.

Ms Hall: No.

THE CHAIR: It is not part of a policy.

Ms Hall: No.

THE CHAIR: At the moment.

Ms Hall: It was part of a policy.

MS DUNDAS: I was just trying to find out what the current situation is, because a lot of groups have asked about it. It could be that this information is being collected, but the results are not necessarily public. It may not be being collected at all. I am just trying to find out why these groups keep bringing it up. Is it because they can't access the information or because it is not being collected?

Ms Hall: Have the groups that have raised the issue actually seen, for instance, the social and demographic profile of women in the ACT?

MS DUNDAS: Yes, they have. That is why I wanted to take this up with you, to see what your feeling on it was. I wanted to find out whether it was that people were not getting access to the information, whether they were not able to access the information in the right way, or whether the information was just not there.

Ms Hall: I think it is possibly a bit of all three. There is definitely a problem with getting data. I think gender is going well, but getting information on other specific target groups is more difficult.

THE CHAIR: We might leave it there. We might have to have you back, though, once we have read your submission. Thanks a lot for your time.

Ms Hall: It was a pleasure.

JOHN MURRAY and

LINDSAY GEORGE GILTRAP

were called.

THE CHAIR: Before we begin, I have a formal statement I have to read. These hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly and they're 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 may say at this 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.

This committee was set up to give government a report in November about the status of women in the ACT. You may have seen the terms of reference about how they access government programs and whether there are barriers. The term of reference that your submission or your appearance this afternoon relate to particularly is the terms of reference about violence prevention and personal and community safety for women.

We've had one day of public hearings when we had evidence about domestic violence and community safety issues for women. Instead of getting it second hand from organisations, which are certainly informed, we thought it would be useful to get a view from the police, who deal with the crime and safety issues in our community, on the major issues affecting women. We will hand it over to you, and then we will ask questions.

Mr Murray: I'll do a general introduction, from which you might choose to explore some issues. In the last two years, we've seen in the Australian Capital Territory a significant drop in property crimes. Break and enters and car thefts have dropped dramatically during that time.

It's not pure coincidence. The fact that we put a lot of resources into policing this through an intelligence-led model was a significant factor in the reduction. Also linked to that was the fact that it was a very heavily linked to heroin addiction. Eighty-three per cent of the people who were arrested were heroin addicted.

Coinciding with that period, we've seen a rise in crimes of violence. The impact on women is significant for a couple of reasons. In the ACT women and young women or girls constitute 43 per cent of the victims of assault and 86 per cent the victims of sexual assault. Overall, women and girls account for 45 per cent of all victims of crime against the person in the ACT.

An interesting dimension of the sexual assaults which may to some be self-evident is that, of the 109 sexual assaults against women during 2001, 75 were committed by someone whom the victim knew.

Can I address something in philosophical terms. In policing, there are obviously two dimensions. One is to prevent as much as you can the commission of a crime. Again, there are two parts to that. One is target reduction, making it harder to commit the crime, and the other is dissuading an offender from an inclination to commit a crime. They are the two broad aspects of it.

The other part of policing is just pure detection, the legalistic approach. Someone has committed an offence; you pursue the offender. That's essentially ex post facto. They are the two dimensions of a policing approach, expressed simply.

You can prevent assaults of a general nature, because you know for a fact that primarily a general assault is going happen in the vicinity of drinking houses, and usually in the early hours of the morning. But those types of assaults are usually committed by males on males. Again, for reasons that sociologists would probably comment on, women are usually involved but on the periphery. They might even have caused the fight to take place or whatever.

Clearly, women figure very highly in sexual assaults. Again, generally they're known to the offender. I go back to the philosophy of policing and my interest in policing. It's very hard to prevent a crime which occurs essentially in a home or between people who know each other. Typically, if a woman is assaulted or sexually assaulted by someone to whom she has given trust, it's very hard to intervene, in a policing sense, to say, "You shouldn't have done that" or "You should be aware of that." But it doesn't stop us. I'll go on to explain why that might be the case.

As a general principle, it's very hard to prevent a crime that's going to happen between, say, a young girl and a grandfather. All the education in the world might help. It might make them a bit more wary. But very often parents don't agree to it, but by their behaviour almost allow it to happen by putting trust in the uncle that's now assumed a position in the house or the grandfather who is left to look after the children.

It's very hard to dissuade, but we attempt to do that through the earliest possible intervention in young people's lives about what their place in society is. We do this through our crime prevention process, which has us go to schools, and through messages through mediums like Kenny Koala that seem appropriate to young women, young girls and young boys. We try to educate them in a sense of worldliness. This gives rise to an education process which says, "This thing is not right. You have rights, even as young as you are, to do this and you should let someone know about that."

As you go through their schooling, you gradually raise the level of the message by how you articulate it. I hope I don't sound defensive here, but that might be as far as you can go in preventing that crime if it's going to happen within the family.

I move to sexual offences of a public nature that can be prevented. We move to a new dimension in crime which in the last couple of years has become prominent, and that is drink spiking. There's an interesting dimension about that. Young women, but especially young men, are disinclined to report this offence, for reasons of embarrassment. But we know it's happening. Traditionally, a policing approach would be—and I hope I'm not being disrespectful of my predecessors here—to wait for an offence to be committed and reported before taking action.

With drink spiking, in the first instance we are trying to become aware of the extent of the problem, because it's under-reported. We're doing that in a few ways. Within the confines of here, I can say that we're using covert methods to try to get an idea of the size of the problem. Most importantly, we're involved in a highly promoted education program, which is already under way, promoting awareness through prospective victims but also the people who serve liquor in these places. We've done that through an education campaign on television and on radio. There are posters in prominent places. We've also had licensees in a group together to say, "We're asking you to join with us in this program to prevent this from happening. But if we notice that within your licensed premises there's a lack of concern or lack of attention to this aspect, we'll come in hard and we'll raid the place and we'll prosecute as many people as we can," which we have done.

That approach has been applauded by and adopted by other police in the country, and we're quite pleased with that. But the worrying thing is that young women are particularly vulnerable to this. What they are now learning and encouraged to consider is that they shouldn't go by themselves but always be in the company of others and that if something untoward is happening to their friend they should get her out of the place and get some help immediately, because the chances are that her drink has been spiked.

That's where we're at now. It's a phenomenon across the country, and it's no bigger or smaller here in proportion, I would imagine.

That's the general philosophy of how we treat policing. In an ideal society, your prevention aspects would be working so well in reducing the target and disinclining potential criminals that you'd have a relatively crime-free society, but of course that doesn't happen.

It just so happens that in the last two years we've put a lot of time into crime detection, with the property crimes, but now through representation to the government we are looking at putting more emphasis on crime prevention with young people. To that end, I put up a proposal to the previous government about having an interdisciplinary or interagency approach to helping and encouraging young people to be diverted from crime.

I will use an anecdote to demonstrate how it's not being done properly now. If you get a young girl—or young boy, for that matter—who is in the care of a mother who's a prostitute and a drug addict, the chances of that child being looked after very well are not very good. The most obvious intervention would be welfare and/or Health. Health and welfare would come in and look at that circumstance from that perspective and say, "The health issue is this: the child is underfed; she is undernourished; she needs care; she needs a drug"—whatever it might be.

The same child goes to school and is then underperforming. Education or the teacher says, "We've got a problem with this kid's learning ability," not taking into account the child's home environment. The same child might then leave school and smash a window or damage a car, and the cops come in and they say, "Hang on, we've got a delinquent on our hands." In all these scenarios there's no collective view. No-one is looking for the problem, and each is looking at it from a single perspective.

My proposal to the previous government, which was accepted by cabinet, was that all of us—Health, Education, welfare, police, et cetera—get together as a collective to look at the problem, to identify the problem at the earliest possible intervention so we can take the appropriate steps. The government changed, and I know that the new government is taking it up and might address it in a different form. I'm looking forward to becoming involved in that through the Chief Minister's office. The move has already taken place through Bronwen Overton-Clarke. She's the administrative person behind that.

Can I just pause there, because I've said quite a lot. Are there any issues arising from that that you want to talk about? I know you want to talk about the Summernats. That's essentially why Lindsay is here, because I'm not sure of the mechanics of it.

MS DUNDAS: At our other public hearing, women talked about violent crimes happening to women and the myths around that. They weren't able to access information about whether or not there was a violent crime or whether it was just a rumour. When there were a lot of police on the ANU campus earlier this year, there was a photo in the *Canberra Times* of the police doing the parade. This was just after the young woman from Nicholls had disappeared. There were a lot of problems in the area with violent crimes. But there wasn't a lot of solid information. We were getting the view from people that they were feeling more vulnerable because they were unsure. What kinds of strategies do you have in place? You don't want to cause public panic, but how do you balance out the need for information and clear reporting? A whole bunch of police on campus is a very scary thing for the young women on campus. Coming into Summernats, you don't want people feeling that they can't go to a venue. How do you provide the balance?

Mr Murray: Can I talk generally to that and ask Lindsay to comment afterwards? If you take that particular case, we at the executive were conscious of the alarm that would be raised because a woman, after the seven days or five days—I can't remember which—turns up dead in the lake. Is the Kathryn Grosvenor murder you're talking about?

MS DUNDAS: Yes, but there was another situation at the same time at the ANU campus.

Mr Murray: Okay. Yes, it does create alarm in the community, especially one which is not used to this sort of crime. Unfortunately, some other cities are. I can't go into the details of the investigation, but enough to say that there wasn't much from that circumstance that we could use to say, "You should be aware of this" or "You should be alerted to that." Quite frankly, there was nothing, certainly early in the piece, that gave us any information which might have been of use to someone who might have been the next victim. It's as simple as that. If there had been, we would've done that. That's our concern. That's our common law responsibility.

I've come from another jurisdiction and I might ask Lindsay to comment on the university campus here. But back in the moratorium days there was a feeling by students, essentially, that police had no place on campus; that through an agreement they were to be there on the invitation of the students or the vice-chancellor. That has tended to remain philosophically in place, although it seems to have reduced a bit over the years.

What has happened from then till now is that the university assumes responsibility for security.

My experience of university is that it is a place where women can be preyed upon, because of the topography, when moving from one building to the next, especially at night. Universities have traditionally used their security people to implement preventative measures or, if something happens, to report it to the police for them to take over the investigation.

If we can summarise that before Lindsay talks about the particularity of here, whenever instances arise where there is room for education, as with drink spiking, it's our duty to move immediately into the mode to say, "We've learnt something from this and we should tell you about it, because it is something you should be careful about."

I think irresponsible comments are made at times in response to reporting of the comments by some that women are encouraging victimisation because of the way they dress or because they choose to walk in certain places. I don't think that's responsible at all. If that has been ascribed to any police people, I wouldn't say that's my idea at all. In fact, I have made that general point.

I will stop there and ask Lindsay to talk about the arrangements for Summernats and other places like that to prevent women from becoming victims.

Mr Giltrap: As you know, Summernats is an annual event. One year is usually based on the previous year's incidents. Any problems that do occur we try to address when we draw up the operational order for the upcoming event. We have a number of meetings with the stakeholders—people from the Liquor Licensing Board and various other agencies, residents and spokesmen for a residents association in relation to noise pollution, et cetera.

The plan is drawn up and we allocate police as per previous years usually, unless there's something untoward and there's a requirement for extra police to be in attendance. The whole event is run by the venue commander. If incidents arise, he tackles them as they arise.

THE CHAIR: I think the year before last there were significant concerns about women attending Summernats. I didn't hear so much about this year's event. Is that because your operation sheet incorporated some of the problems from the year before, or was it just a better-run venue? Was it the drinking tent? There was a tent that people could go to. What was it that made it more successful this year?

Mr Giltrap: One of the big factors was the prohibition on alcohol being taken in. They had allocated camp sites near the Wells Station Road. This year we had a bus. Two members were there for 24 hours. So if any problems occurred there, there was virtually direct contact back to the police forward command post, which was situated at the racecourse. I think one of the major issues this year was the prohibition on alcohol being taken in.

THE CHAIR: And that will be continued?

Mr Giltrap: Certainly, yes. As you know, under the Liquor Act, each year certain areas are gazetted as areas where you can't consume alcohol. That has been brought in progressively over the years. For next year's event we'll look at the precincts of Lonsdale Street. We may say it is a no-go drink zone as well. Each year little things come out which assist with the event.

THE CHAIR: In your view, this year worked okay?

Mr Giltrap: This is the first one I've been directly involved in. From all reports it went pretty well.

Mr Murray: Following the previous year, the one you've talked about, when it was widely reported that terrible things happened, my deputy went to see the organisers and said, "The same thing can't happen next year." I think there was an undertaking to higher accountability by the organisers and there was an increased number of people in security. I don't know the numbers but I know that was an undertaking.

I know also that in or on the periphery of Summernats offences of a sexual nature were nil or almost nil. There was a rape in Civic, or a sexual assault at least, which the media wanted to attribute to Summernats and someone from another city, but it wasn't directly related to Summernats.

THE CHAIR: Is there a female officer women can access?

Mr Murray: It depends on the nature of the event. If a woman wants to report her car stolen, that's not an issue. Again, I might call on Lindsay. I give out the philosophy on these things and I then ask for guidelines to be put in place. I've been working particularly on sexual assault and child sexual abuse. I know that has been reviewed, and we're quite pleased with the way it is. The whole principle of that is that you have your own choice of gender, even down to medical doctor doing an examination. Women are invariably in a position where women are involved, yes. Does that happen in general issues?

Mr Giltrap: I've been off line for quite a while from the operational area, but that was the norm with sexual assault on a female.

THE CHAIR: What about indigenous women? We've had a fair bit of evidence that whilst they're a very small part of the population of Canberra they're quite highly represented among victims of domestic violence or those involved in crime in some way. I think I read that they were highly over-represented among young women on remand. Do you have a specific program looking at that? Do you work with indigenous organisations, Lindsay? You can take the question on notice.

Mr Murray: I wouldn't like to be too general on this. I think we should take it on notice. I'm the co-chair of the reconciliation council for this territory, so I take indigenous issues quite seriously. I co-chair with Matilda House. We're looking at reconciliation as an issue for this territory.

The second thing is that there's an Aboriginal justice group we're involved in. Our superintendent, Chris Lyons, is involved in that. It's all about identifying particular issues in this territory that need addressing and how they might put them into place. Our crime prevention group works closely with indigenous people about how they might do that.

Insofar as the rest are concerned, yes, you're right. Indigenous people are over-represented in the justice system. Insofar as specific needs, indigenous people have privileges that other people don't have, like visitors to the watch-house. They're entitled to a friend for a visitor. If it's to do with intoxication, the cells are the place of last resort. We divert them away as best we can by calling in a friend and saying, "You look after them."

If they end up in the remand centre, it's usually for a serious criminal offence not suitable for diversion, although diversion is an issue that we have a facility for. To be perfectly frank, it's an area I'd have to look at afresh, not just for women but for everybody, because I don't think we're diverting enough people away from the justice system.

MS DUNDAS: What policies, barriers or issues arise with women on remand? We know that they have different needs. How are the police dealing with that?

Mr Murray: If it's remand, it's outside our interests. That's correctional services. By the time they leave the watch-house—

MS DUNDAS: Then we'll take it back a step, to women who have been arrested or—

Mr Murray: In custody?

MS DUNDAS: Yes, women in custody entering the justice system. How do you deal with their needs?

Mr Murray: We'd invite you to look at the lock-up, the watch-house. In world terms, it's pretty well state of the art. It has to be not only a safe environment but also a secure one. It's divided clearly between women and men.

MS DUNDAS: And do you have female officers?

Mr Murray: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: Twenty-four hours for women in custody?

Mr Murray: When women are there, yes. It's never assumed that it will be all right for a male to be there. There's closed-circuit television coverage for safety reasons, and it is a principle for women to be searching and women to be looking after them, yes.

MS DUNDAS: So you are taking those steps?

Mr Murray: They're in place.

MS DUNDAS: Do you see any gaps in that service for women in custody?

Mr Murray: I don't see many, because there's a principle—it's almost self-evident—that if you arrest a woman and if for reasons of safety you want to make sure there's nothing on them that's going to harm them or harm someone else searching is done by another woman, and it's done under privacy arrangements, where you don't have a lot of men standing around gawking at you. It's done in private circumstances. Am I right?

Mr Giltrap: Yes.

Mr Murray: Do you have anything to add, Lindsay?

Mr Giltrap: There should be a guideline in relation to searching prisoners.

Mr Murray: Yes. I can give that to you.

THE CHAIR: That would be useful. You may not be able to answer my next question and you may need to take it on notice also. I'd appreciate a snapshot of the major safety issues facing women. We've heard a lot of evidence. I would say that the issues start with crimes within the home, like domestic violence. You may not be able to answer. That's very hard to measure. I'd like our report to have some solid statements about the police point of view about these crimes or alleged incidents you are dealing with.

Mr Murray: I reiterate what I said before. Women are more likely than men to be the victims of crimes like assaults or domestic violence, and it's usually someone they know—not intimately sometimes but someone they know of. But insofar as providing the bigger picture, I think I should go away and get some statistics.

THE CHAIR: Will that be all right?

Mr Murray: It's fine. You've already had someone speak to you about domestic violence, I think. The model here, the interagency approach we have here, is exceptionally good because of what it does. Through the process, it requires that every case to be treated seriously. That's not the case everywhere.

THE CHAIR: They're the reported ones.

Mr Murray: There's a process in place now that requires our people and other people to take positive steps. There is a pro-charge policy, with forensic tools like the digital camera to take photographs to support evidence, et cetera. There is a joint approach. It is not just prosecution; it's help for the victim and support and encouragement.

MS DUNDAS: You mentioned that you know that a lot of cases of drink spiking go unreported.

Mr Murray: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: Do you feel that that is still the case with violent crimes in the home? Are there domestic violence situations or sexual assault situations that aren't being reported? Are women still too afraid to come forward?

Mr Murray: That's a very good question.

MS DUNDAS: Do you feel? That is how I couched it.

Mr Murray: It would have to be an intuitive response. I would say that there are groups of women in this society and every society in the country who, sometimes through a cultural aspect to their life or a religious aspect to their life, are not only discouraged but physically prevented from reporting incidents like domestic violence.

I am positive there would be cases of imprisonment and even torture that we wouldn't get to hear about. What is that book? Is it *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear You?* A crime of that nature which is constrained by culture or religion is usually only brought to light when there's a serious injury that goes to a hospital or the neighbours have had enough because the screaming is too loud and police intervene. Yes, I think it is a very highly unreported area.

You mentioned indigenous areas. Some research has been done with indigenous people. Yes, there's a high incidence, and there's a high incidence of non-reporting.

MS DUNDAS: And what programs—

Mr Murray: Another good question. The questions are easy but the answers are quite difficult. Through the energies of a man called Chris Lyons, the superintendent, we've embarked on education through a multicultural forum. I'm the chair of the territory ethnic advisory board. I have on that board people from different ethnic groups to try to inform us what peculiarities of their culture or their religion we should know about in policing terms, so that we know how we might have to treat them differently.

We also have through our crime prevention group Chris Lyons's education program, which invites multicultural leaders to come forward in workshops and says, "This is who we are as police. We're not like they are in Vietnam or some other area where they're paramilitary. We're a service-giving organisation sensitive to the plights of victims." It's a two-way thing to inform them that we have a service that might be conducive to them coming to report without any retribution at all and inform them that we encourage them to make us aware of what issues are peculiar to their culture.

It started about 12 months ago. I understand from the chair of the national ethnic advisory board that we're doing extremely well. It is a difficult area, but I think we've covered a lot of ground in a short time. To go back to your previous question, we'll have a higher reporting rate if we're successful at it.

This allows me to comment on another factor. The statistics will show that there's been a significant rise in sexual assaults in the last year, quite a worrying rise. I haven't got the number in front of me, but it's high across the country. We're still under the average for the country but still very high.

It would be easy for me to defend that by saying that the reason is that we have more people reporting, but that's too easy. I wouldn't even want to suggest that, but it could be a factor. If you have a process that's more conducive and more friendly to reporting and

the word goes amongst women that that is the case, more women will be encouraged to come forward, but I don't think it's as simple as that. I think there's another issue, so I've asked the sexual assault people to try to get a clearer picture of the trends and profiles of sexual offences as they're now being reported. That's a longitudinal study.

THE CHAIR: We're running a bit over time, but I have one more question. Again, it's probably not something you'll be able to answer, but I'd be interested in your opinion. We had some evidence from the Older Women's Network that perceived fear of crime was an issue. One bag snatch on an older woman would impact heavily on that community, although it would not necessarily be reflected in crime statistics. Young men are much more likely to be victims of assault than maybe older women, but there is a perception that the community isn't safe. What role would the police have in projecting the image of a safe community? I guess it's PR.

Mr Murray: A significant and very prominent role. One statistic that remains constant, not just through time but through geography, is that the people who fear crime the most are the least likely to be victims of crime. The people who fear crime the most are the elderly people. But we know from crime statistics that they're very unlikely to be victims, or a proportionately high level of victims, in Canberra or elsewhere. Nonetheless, policing should be alert to perceptions of crime. In fact, in New South Wales the minister there publicly declared that one of the accountability aspects for the new commissioner is that he'll have to reduce the fear of crime. It is a significant issue. It's a very important issue.

What I've noticed here is that when we've had an alarm in a pocket of the community or an age or gender demographic we've tried to address it. With older people, we take the mounted police out to an area where there's an old folks home and plonk the horses there and trot them around the place. They tell us afterwards, "We feel much safer." That sounds very simplistic. Nonetheless, it's a perception being addressed by an obvious support factor.

The other thing we're doing is through a process called CLASP. I forget what that means. It's community something something something. It's us, the fire brigade and ambulance using sometimes retired people to go to old people's homes and say, "We're going to look at security. We'll get someone to put a lock in, and here is \$45 towards it from this fund." That's the physical aspect.

But there's a much more important issue, it seems to me, arising from perception of crime, and that's the role of the media. I'm not going to immediately set out and bag the media like everybody does, but I think I am about to get close.

THE CHAIR: They're not here.

Mr Murray: I think I'm about to come close. For example, it is trite to suggest that media sensationalises. We know they do. Take, for example, the homicide we have currently. I know homicide is a rarity in this city, but they're not content to let it go that it's a difficult crime to cure.

I'm badgered almost on a weekly basis to say something new about it. The inference or the message from at least one of the media, television, was to promote the idea that the cops can't fix it, they can't cure it, and by implication this is a dangerous place to live, because the cops aren't good enough to catch these people. I think that's irresponsible. I think there are other areas of media reporting that do look for something which can present a negative trait or impression of people who, in their perception, are the most vulnerable.

Can I give an example of that? I think we're better off here than other places, by the way. In Melbourne, Sydney or Adelaide there's more of this happening. In Adelaide, for example, where I've just come from, they reported that every night a group of lads were stealing cars and setting fire to them to destroy fingerprints.

Not only did that promote car thefts, because young gangs are competing against each other, but the old lady living next to me told me she was absolutely petrified to leave the house. She said "How can you drive your car? You must be frightened that someone is going to throw a petrol bomb on it." I said, "I haven't even thought about that." To her the most dangerous thing was leaving her house and walking past a car that might be set alight. The chances of that happening to her were obviously quite remote, but perception the promoted and exaggerated by the media had a tremendous impact on her.

In your report you might want to consider the role of the media in victimisation and the impact of crime. At the same time, I wouldn't like to be seen to be overcritical of, say, the *Canberra Times*, because I think they've adopted a pretty positive approach. If we were to go back over the last two years of reporting in this city, crime hasn't been sensationalised compared to other places. We're pretty well off.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Thanks for your time.

Mr Murray: I'm going to go away and look at indigenous women in custody and see what guidelines we have and what the statistics relevant to that are. I'm going to look at guidelines for indigenous people but women in general in custody but also look at your essential question—the major issues in the territory that have an impact on the safety of women.

THE CHAIR: That would be excellent.

Mr Murray: I am pleased to do so.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your time.

JACQUELINE PEARCE was called.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for joining us, Jacqui. There is a statement we have to read. You've heard it before, but we have to do it. You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you're protected from certain legal action such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

We've got your submission. We missed you the first time around. Do you want to make an opening statement, or do you want us to start questioning you?

Ms Pearce: If you want to ask questions, that's probably the best way to proceed. If you haven't, I can make a few points. That would be fine.

MS DUNDAS: One of the points you make in your submission is about drug use and women with drug and alcohol dependencies. You go into quite a bit of detail about it. You say that the ACT government is showing some excellent leadership with new initiatives and drug policy but that it is important that gender issues are not lost. Now that we're eight months into a new government, are you finding that we are approaching drug use in the right way? You also state that responses need to be flexible and work with the person rather than for or even against. Are we still in the old mode that drugs are bad and drugs are crime, or are you feeling a shift to the notion that drugs are health and we need to work with people to fix their problems?

Ms Pearce: In the recent ACT budget there were almost no initiatives for women. That includes drugs and alcohol. I think that's significant for a government that states a high commitment to the needs of women. I am one of the vice-presidents at ACTCOSS. We spent a lot of time analysing the budget, and we were hard pressed even to find the word "woman" anywhere in the budget, much less any real and meaningful initiatives that might meet the needs of women and women with children.

Until recently there was only one funded position for women with drug and alcohol issues in the ACT. Recently, another service was funded to provide support for women before and after detox. That's a significant initiative, but it was after a very long period of almost no funds going to gender specific service provision in the ACT. That's a critical issue.

I don't think meaningful data is collected on a whole lot of issues, particularly for generic services and those whose needs they meet. How many men are they working with? How many women are they working with? What's the percentage of young people? What's the percentage across the board of indigenous or non-English-speaking background people? They are not looking at particular client groups and then assessing whether the needs of those people are being met by that service.

In auditing the status of women, it is critical to look at where the services are going. Lots of the non-government services in mental health, even though they're funded to provide services to men and women, are saying, "Generally our services end up going to the men." That may be because they're accommodation services and it's not appropriate to accommodate men and women together, or it may be because there's just not enough beds and they all fill up with men, or whatever. Sometimes internal decisions are made to provide a service to men rather than women. I think those decisions are fine.

Another issue that some of the women I've worked with have faced is that if only male staff members are on then they can't access the service. There's a series of barriers. Until some meaningful data is collected and until we can get some data from services about who the service is going to, I don't think we can even start to make good decisions about what might be needed in the future.

THE CHAIR: In auditing by Commonwealth departments, that information is sought in some instances. Is it not sought in acquitting the grants here? You have to tell government how you spent the money and things like that.

Ms Pearce: I suppose I'm just wondering what happens to that data if it is presented. In terms of the status of women, that's a good place to start.

THE CHAIR: You keep the data.

Ms Pearce: Yes, we keep lots of data on the profile of the women we work with. In drug and alcohol, one of the critical issues we've been raising for years is that women who have dependency issues generally have a range of other issues. All the research and all the statistics support the fact that most of those women have experienced sexual assault, probably as a child and as an adult, and generally there's a range of other critical issues—domestic violence and other forms of violence in families of origin. The list goes on.

Some drug and alcohol services haven't wanted to take those issues on. They don't even want to collect the data about that. They won't ask the questions. They don't work with people as a whole. They section off the dependency issue. They take away the drugs and alcohol, when someone's life experience may well be the causative factor in their dependence on drugs and alcohol. I don't think that works well for women. It probably doesn't work well for men either.

A gender approach to service provision has a whole lot of positive benefits for men and women. I don't think it's isolated to women. Given that this is the Select Committee on the Status of Women, I think it's critical that those issues be addressed. I don't think you can work with drug and alcohol issues in isolation. People come as a package. The work we do needs to be around where people are at any given time. Their life might be in crisis because of their drug and alcohol use, but that may not be the thing they want to look at right there and then. It might be something else that's related, and if that's addressed then perhaps it might be an opening for looking at some of the dependency issues.

MS DUNDAS: In your submission, you refer to sexually transmitted debt for young women who have access to housing. Can you explain the term “sexually transmitted debt”?

Ms Pearce: It’s a term that’s been coined over the years. It’s an issue particularly in public housing, although I don’t think it exists only in public housing. Women may move into public housing, then they end up with a boyfriend and their partner moves in. They might be married or de facto. Perhaps violence occurs. The issue is about who ends up being responsible if the house is trashed or if rent isn’t paid and those sorts of things. Any debt is a barrier to people re-accessing public housing—issues about where the debt came from and whether you’re responsible for someone else’s debt.

One way young women are getting housed now is by getting into any relationship. It doesn’t matter whether it’s suitable or not. It’s just about getting housing. I suppose that’s an extension of that idea. If their name isn’t on the lease, it’s not such an issue. It’s mostly if women have leases in their names and then maybe get a joint tenancy and the whole thing falls apart and they end up with the debt.

THE CHAIR: This is a great submission. It covers a lot of stuff. One thing being raised again and again is that access to child care is a barrier to women accessing anything. With the women using Toora and other services that you’re involved with, what’s your view on the current situation?

Ms Pearce: I think it’s critical to women accessing services. Our new service, the before and after detox support service, is for women and women with kids. It’s an attempt to assist women with children to access detoxes. All the existing detoxes in the ACT don’t accommodate children. Research we did a few years ago identified that as a major barrier to women getting into a detox. This new service has only just got going, so I can’t give you any firm outcomes yet. But the model is to assist women, women with children particularly, to get to detox. We’ll sort out some respite care and then we’ll have a house where they can be accommodated for a brief period after their stay at detox.

Our crisis accommodation services are for women unaccompanied by children, but many women who come to Toora services do have children so, where appropriate, if they want to end up in accommodation with their children, we will put energy into referring them on to a more suitable service or otherwise assisting them with access options, supporting them, and providing child care, if that’s useful. For our services at WIREDD, if women want to access groups and they’ve got children, we’ll pay for their child care. As a basic access issue, the provision of child care is critical. If you’re running groups for women and they’ve got kids and you don’t provide access to child care and pay for it, that’s critical.

THE CHAIR: So you pay for it out of your grant rather than there being a grant for that?

Ms Pearce: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I visited Beryl's refuge a couple of months ago. From their grant, they run a little playgroup for children. It strikes me that if women are leaving a relationship or escaping some sort of violence and accessing a refuge, access to child care for their children should be seen as a priority. Yet that's not necessarily available.

Ms Pearce: No. It's critical for any programs to be looking for funding for that or doing that as part of their service provision. It is an equity of access issue. If there's no child care, it means that a whole bunch of women won't come. What are you going to do with the kids? Leave them at home? No. Women who are living in poverty or who have dependency or mental health issues are much less likely to get family support or partner support.

MS DUNDAS: In our first day of public hearings we discussed women in shelters and the generational problem of a mother who might have been in a shelter with her daughter and her daughter now being in a shelter with her own child. Twenty years after the establishment of the shelters, the generational problem is coming through. How do you think we can address that? Is it something that Toora is experiencing? You don't take children, but do you see daughters of people you've seen before?

Ms Pearce: Yes, more and more. We will have seen the mother and then the daughter and then the kids, if she has kids, going off to other refuges. We're seeing that more and more with women progressing through the system. We need more crisis services. Our turn-aways have gone through the roof. In the last six months we have turned away 300 women. There are no other places for referral anymore.

If we don't have any beds or if we ask women to move on for a variety of reasons, we give them a list of referrals, but one of the workers said today that it feels wrong to do that, because there are no beds anywhere. It's the same for women and children and for single women. It's a total crisis. There are no emergency beds and there are more and more turn-aways. It's getting to absolute crisis point.

THE CHAIR: Presumably those women either become homeless or stay in the bad situation. There are two choices.

Ms Pearce: Yes, that's right. You go home to violence, you go back to a situation that's unsuitable, you live on the street or you live on someone's lounge for a while. People are living in cars. It's all over the place.

THE CHAIR: In your experience, what would be the time to get public housing? Is there a set time? Are these women prioritised?

Ms Pearce: Yes, women generally do get early allocation one or two. However, there are many more hoops to jump through to be eligible now. A few years ago, when there was more accommodation, women in a SAAP service and escaping domestic violence and whatever else got priority and within a couple of months most of those women would be accommodated in their own places. Now the wait is six to seven months.

Our advocacy has had to increase. I don't want to bag Housing officers, but I think there is a general push to try to discourage people from applying for housing. They might be eligible but they will be told, "No. Go and rent on the private rental market." That's not

a possibility for people on low incomes. There are no properties. Market forces are playing themselves out in that area. If you happen to be someone on a benefit—

THE CHAIR: With three children.

Ms Pearce: You can't afford it, and no-one would rent to you anyway. Discrimination is rife in that sector. There seem to be more barriers. They are told, 'Get more support letters, do this, do that.' Even then, there are not many properties around. The wait is interminable. We're noticing that women stay longer. Their lives are already chaotic. They can't wait around long enough, so they're back out there and then they lose their opportunities for housing. The public housing issue is a huge one.

THE CHAIR: Would you say that housing is the biggest one?

Ms Pearce: Absolutely. It's causing huge bottlenecks in crisis services. They're meant to be crisis beds, but women are staying in them for a long period, if they're managing to hang in there. That brings with it its own issues. Living in a house with nine or 10 other women who have serious drug and alcohol and mental health issues isn't anybody's idea of fun. It's a horrible living environment. Often women don't stay, because it's unbearable. Their things get stolen. Everyone is fighting. Everyone gangs up on everyone else. It's full on. They bump into all these people from the street that they're trying to get away from. Then all the business is going on. Someone is trying to deal with their drug use, but the other half of the house is actively using drugs, hopefully not in the house. The environment is not conducive to staying for a long period.

Time and again, I'm reading about community housing being a viable housing option. Certainly for SAAP service users it is not a viable housing option. If resources go into community housing that ought to be going into public housing, it's a wrong. Resources have to go into public housing. Living in poverty or living with crisis, there's no energy for other things like participating in your tenancy or whatever. Maybe a few years down the track. But at that point of crisis women need somewhere to live that's stable and affordable. I'm really concerned. Whilst I'm quite supportive of a diverse housing sector, I have yet to see any statistics that support assertions that community housing meets a diversity of needs. If resources go to community housing and aren't put into public housing, that is very problematic.

MS DUNDAS: If people find safe, affordable accommodation, is there a problem with social isolation, outreach and continuing support for those people so they don't end up back on the streets? Is this one of the reasons why we have the generational turnover? Are they stable only for a short time before something goes wrong and they're back in the cycle?

Ms Pearce: We have been lobbying for a long time for mental health outreach workers, but I think it's broader than that. Often people aren't ready to go from crisis to absolutely independent living. There needs to be a staged transition. Hopefully, over time that might be minimal support; it might be no support; it might be just knowing that if a crisis occurs somewhere along the line there's someone to call on.

Sometimes it's great if people come back to crisis services, because it is assisting them to deal with some more things before they're back out there again. Outreach workers would be a cost-effective way of providing support for people without them having to come back into the crisis service. Women have talked to me about feeling that that's a failure. It feels like a big backward step rather than having someone you can call on and say, "Can we catch up for a cup of tea?" or maybe someone calling them and saying, "How are you going?" or "Have you been taking your medication?" or just saying anything.

Some of it is about basic living skills and some of it might be more focused on checking how someone might be recovering or how they are going with a mental health issue or whether there has been a relapse. It's important to acknowledge that relapse occurs in a whole range of situations. Sometimes a bit of support can either prevent that happening or assist people to move through it without it turning into a huge crisis and people going backwards a long way.

MS DUNDAS: I don't know if you'll be able to answer this. You deal with women in crisis, who are obviously in dire need, but what kind of prevention or empowerment should be taking place so that women don't end up needing crisis accommodation? We can't lock up all the men just because maybe one day they'll be nasty. What can help women before they get to crisis?

Ms Pearce: I come back to your other question, which I don't think I finished answering, about what to do with children and preventing the cycle.

MS DUNDAS: The generations, yes.

Ms Pearce: Working with children is critical. Prevention and intervention cover zero to five and providing support to families. Most of the research says that wherever possible keeping children with at least one parent is important. It is important to put some resources into that end of things.

If only we can encourage governments to do the cost-benefit figures over time. The benefit of early intervention in cost won't be seen till 15 or 20 years down the track. It's not a short-term gain; it's a longer term gain. Twenty years down the track maybe there won't be so many people needing crisis services, and we will have intervened in the cycle. That's a critical area. Family services like Marymead and Barnardos are focused on assisting families to stay together as much as possible. But their resources are so limited and there's little early intervention and support rather than waiting till somewhere down the track when people are caught up in the system.

MS DUNDAS: Was there anything else you wanted to say?

Ms Pearce: Living in poverty takes a lot of energy and survival takes lots of energy. In the statistics from the Poverty Task Group, women were over-represented in some groups, particularly sole-parent households. They gave a solid indication of the percentage of people in Canberra living in poverty, of which women are a substantial group. Pretty much all of the energy of those women is taken up trying to get through from one day to the next. "How am I going to feed my kids? How am I going to make this money last till the next payment?"

I notice that the police were here. I know that some really good stuff is happening, but there should more kick-out orders and more arrests for breaching. Action around domestic violence orders is critical. Assisting women not to have such dislocation in their lives related to violence would be useful and a good use of resources.

THE CHAIR: We're going to get some information from them about what the major issues are. Thanks, Jacqui. We've run out of time. I appreciate your time and the submission. It is excellent.

The committee adjourned at 4.55 pm.