



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, AGEING,
COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2011-2012](#))

Members:

DR C BOURKE (Chair)
MR J HANSON (Deputy Chair)
MR A WALL
MS Y BERRY

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 14 MARCH 2013

Secretary to the committee:
Mrs N Kosseck (Ph: 620 50129)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

APPEARANCES

Community Services Directorate.....	1
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Amended 9 August 2011

The committee met at 1.04 pm.

Appearances:

Burch, Ms Joy, Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Disability, Children and Young People, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Women, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Racing and Gaming

Community Services Directorate

Howson, Ms Natalie, Director-General

Sheehan, Ms Maureen, Deputy Director-General

Nolan, Ms Christine, Executive Director, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

Paull, Ms Jillian, Senior Director, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

Pappas, Ms Helen, Director, Care and Protection Services, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

Wyles, Mr Paul, Director, Early Intervention and Prevention Services, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

Manikis, Mr Nic, Executive Director, Policy and Organisational Services

Winter, Ms Jancye, Director, Office of Multicultural Affairs

Baker, Ms Fiona, Senior Policy Officer, Office for Women

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon everyone and welcome to this public meeting of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services inquiry into annual and financial reports for 2011-2012. Today the committee will be examining the following components of the Community Services Directorate annual report: Office for Children, Youth and Family Support, Office for Women and Office of Multicultural Affairs.

We intended to commence with the official visitor but she is not here. If she comes, then we shall deal with that later, under the Children and Young People Act. We shall deal firstly with Children, Youth and Family Support. We are going to break for afternoon tea at about 3 pm.

Can I also confirm, have you read the privileges card on the table before you?

Ms Burch: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Do you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Burch: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Before we proceed to questions, minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Burch: Yes, thank you, if I could make a brief opening statement in regard to the Official Visitor and the Public Advocate. The Children and Young People Commissioner, which has been set up under the Human Rights Commission, provides regular feedback or reporting to the education committee. Whilst it is not this

committee, there is a process for that to come into the secretariat arrangement. I am also happy to table, if we can source a copy, a copy of the milestone report. That also has some commentary from the Official Visitor as well. So I will leave that in your hands, chair, if that is of any use to you or not.

But I do want to make a few statements. This afternoon we will be talking about multicultural affairs, women and care and protection services, if I could work in that order. We continue to support our multicultural community and the Office of Multicultural Affairs has been guided by the ACT multicultural strategy. We continue to support minority groups to be more active in the creation and delivery of programs and events.

The 2012 global cricket challenge was delivered in partnership with ACT Cricket and seven of the Canberra's ethnic communities. Now in its third year, this weekend we will again be taking over Manuka Oval, this time for the 2013 cricket challenge, and I do invite any member of the committee, if they want to be part of the 400-strong interested cricketers in Canberra, to attend.

Last year I also had the pleasure of attending the 2012 ACT multicultural awards and dinner, another initiative I introduced as minister, in partnership with the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum. We have also worked to support emerging ethnic groups, for example, Sudanese White Nile catering, a social venture, and we use them regularly for our citizenship ceremonies. Of course the best celebration of how Canberra caters for multicultural matters is the National Multicultural Festival, and last month's event was clearly very much a success.

As Minister for Women, I am pleased to advise that work on identifying and addressing gender issues is progressing across government. In the coming months, I will also release the first ACT women's plan progress report, which uses data provided by ACT government directorates and other sources to report on progress of the economic, social and environmental objectives of the plan. Significant strategic developments will build upon the initiative, such as the ACT prevention of violence against women and children strategy.

In relation to care and protection services, which we are getting to first off, the ACT government is committed to achieving better outcomes for children, young people and their families. And for some time now the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support have been focused on strengthening the system which protects children and young people from abuse and neglect. That was why in early 2012 the office commenced an extensive program of continuous improvement called refreshing the service culture, which aimed to achieve sustained quality in service delivery and practice. The directorate is well progressed with these reforms and most are underway. I think they are due for completion and for embedding in some time this year. It is worth noting that the Auditor-General report of last week also acknowledged the benefits that these reforms are having and will have, once completed.

The positive results have also been noted by the independent Milestone Review Panel. As I made mention, we are happy to provide a copy of the reports, which are monitoring the implementation of the public advocate's review. The first and second milestone reports are positive and note the progress made by the office. I look forward

to getting on with that reform agenda.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the staff here and thank them for their commitment over the last 12 months, but there are many more staff within CSD that get about very challenging business each and every day and do a very fine job on behalf of Canberrans.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I will kick off with the questions. In the annual report, on page 6, it talks about the implementation of OurPlace accommodation for young people who are homeless or at risk. Can you tell me a bit more about how and where OurPlace works?

Ms Burch: I think you will find that might sit within the Housing portfolio, but if I can just say, with my hat on from until about four months ago, there was significant work being done across the youth sector in a range of established programs, but certainly some innovation came through just to address those very vulnerable groups.

THE CHAIR: What is the articulation between your current directorate and Housing?

Ms Burch: We know that a number of young folk may come through our home care or care and protection services. One of the key elements they need as they transition from out-of-home care is access to stable accommodation and employment and education. Certainly our youth transition team, which has been in place just on 12 months or so, are showing great success in making those connections. If necessary, they will work for young folk with either private providers or other non-government organisations or through Housing ACT as a network.

It is probably a collective view that social housing should be an option, but not the only option, offered to young folk as they move out of home care. Some of the NGOs are putting in quite some innovative work around model landlords for group housing. We all shared housing when we were younger. So that certainly is one of those innovations within the non-government sector.

Ms Nolan: If I might just add to what the minister has said and say we are so lucky being in one integrated Community Services Directorate where we also have housing, as well as child welfare services, because we get fantastic support from our colleagues in Housing ACT. They have a specialist youth housing program and pretty much what we ask for, we get. So we are very lucky compared to some of my colleagues interstate where housing is in a separate department and they have to negotiate across departmental boundaries to get the kinds of supports that we get.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, you mentioned the Milestone Review Panel. Can you tell the committee a bit more about the work of the panel?

Ms Burch: Following the two public advocate reports that we asked to be undertaken last year—and one of those recommendations is about how you oversight the implementation of some of our responses and activities—we established a Milestone Review Panel that had on it the Public Advocate, the Official Visitor and a member

from the CSD independent audit committee. So they have been receiving and going through the various activities and program developments over time. They have produced a three and a six-month report. That is my understanding.

Ms Nolan: Yes.

Ms Burch: And they are committed to two more reports. They meet again in about a week. They had a 12-month brief of oversight. That six-month milestone report really did articulate the progress that has been made with implementing those recommendations. This is a very challenging environment, and none of these reforms will be easy or quick to implement. Some of them are, but some of them certainly have more longer term change elements. And I was heartened to have both the Public Advocate and the Official Visitor recognise that reform is afoot, that, all things being equal, those reforms are heading in the right direction and that, once completed and implemented, they will have a significant benefit.

I might get Christine Nolan to talk more to it. As I understand it, they are available on our CSD website as well.

Ms Nolan: Yes, they certainly are available on the website. We had a very positive comment in the first report and again a very positive comment in the second report, where the Milestone Review Panel were actually stating that they believe we are making a difference in achieving outcomes for children already, at this point, and not just progressing the actual project milestone. Six of the 15 projects are very close to completion. We are looking at doing project finalisation documents for some of those.

Just to give you a couple of examples, if you will bear with me, of the sorts of projects, one is the supervision project where we have had a specialist training officer on secondment to care and protection for a year, working with our team leaders and our ops managers, anyone that is involved in supervising other staff within care and protection, around strengthening their supervision practices. And that has involved a whole array of activities including live supervision sessions, observing supervision sessions and coaching people on the spot how they might have done better in terms of reflective practice, encouraging our staff in reflective practice. So that project is coming to an end.

MR HANSON: Can you explain what reflective practice is?

Ms Nolan: It is actually thinking carefully and intelligently about what we are doing with families and children. So it is trying to stop the rush from issue to action, step back and actually think about what is the full suite of possible approaches we could take in this situation, what is really going on with families, how might we best respond. I might hand over to Helen Pappas, our Director of Care and Protection Services, if you would like some further thoughts on reflective practice.

MR HANSON: Yes. I had just not heard of it before. I am curious.

Ms Burch: It is certainly a social welfare approach to how do you make decisions and how do you reflect on your practice so that you are constantly really reviewing and comparing your decision to contemporary practice.

MR HANSON: All right.

Ms Burch: It is not an Army term, I give you that.

MR HANSON: We probably do the same thing; we just call it something else.

Ms Burch: Yes.

MR HANSON: It is the latest buzzword.

Ms Nolan: Yes.

Ms Pappas: Essentially the purpose is—because of the complex nature of the work that caseworkers face on a daily basis, it is an opportunity for caseworkers to soundboard with their manager, who is one step removed from the day-to-day activity of their work, to be gently challenged—“Is this actually what you should be doing? Have you thought about what else is out there?” It just gets caseworkers out of that busyness and that crisis work and into thinking about how they are interacting with the kids, how they are managing the families and what level of risk they are carrying in their caseloads—just managing that in a way that is supported. That is essentially its purpose.

THE CHAIR: Did you have any supplementary questions?

MS BERRY: No; they were all answered, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Thanks, minister and staff. Yesterday the Commissioner for Children and Young People was before the JACS committee and made some comments. I am not sure if you have seen those comments, but I will just reflect on them from an ABC article. He said:

Care and protection complaints currently account for about 50 to 60 per cent of my workload but I just do not have the resources to deal with them effectively. I will not be simply turning those people away; we will be encouraging them to go back to the department and work closely with the directorate to encourage them to improve their internal complaints-handling mechanisms. But I am not convinced that is going to bear much fruit.

Mr Roy said that he has only one staff member to help investigate complaints. He said:

... it has been a very difficult decision. The children and young people in the care and protection system are particularly vulnerable ...

And so on. You have seen those comments, I guess. What is your response to that, minister?

Ms Burch: I might go to Ms Howson to reflect on what we have put in place. We

have certainly improved our complaints-handling mechanism, and there is a very positive relationship and open communication between the commissioner's office and CPS or CSD generally. The other comment I think the commissioner made was that a number of people would go to him around decisions that had been made within care and protection. This was identified as something that I identified through various conversations I had with folk. We have established an independent decision review process as well. The commissioner is also one of many oversight bodies available for vulnerable children. There is a suite of oversight bodies. If I may, I will go to Ms Howson to provide some more detail and give you that practical interlay between them.

Ms Howson: Thank you, minister. The children's commissioner had spoken to me a little while ago about this position that he was taking. It is one that we welcome, because we feel very strongly that to have a complaint resolved as close to the source of the issue as possible is best practice in complaints management.

One of the things that are important to us is that we encourage our clients—our young people, children, foster carers, kinship carers, whoever they may be—to come to us in the first instance with their concern. Then we can resolve their issues as quickly as possible. There are also then tiers within the directorate where those complaints can be reheard, if you like, if the complainant is dissatisfied with the way in which we responded to that complaint.

I think the thrust of what the children's commissioner will be doing is in line with best practice complaints management. It will effectively address his workload issue. From what he has told me, over half of the complaints that he receives have not exhausted the internal complaints process within the directorate in the first instance. He is encouraging people to come back to us first; we will act to resolve the complaint. Ms Nolan has actually established a complaints unit within the Office for Children, Youth and Family Services—but not within care and protection, if I could make that point. That unit has been up and running since last March, I think, and is receiving complaints. The majority of complaints that it is taking are resolved within a few days, because we can very quickly go back to caseworkers or find the information that is relevant and deal with the issue.

MR HANSON: You comment that it reflects best practice. This does not indicate what he was saying. He is basically saying that he wants to investigate these issues, but he cannot because he is not resourced to do it, so he is pushing these complaints back to the directorate. He is clearly not convinced that you have the internal complaints mechanisms that are effective. I will quote again:

I will ... work closely with the directorate to encourage them to improve their internal complaints-handling mechanisms. But I am not convinced that is going to bear much fruit.

I am struggling to see how someone that wants to investigate complaints but cannot do it because the government is not giving them resources, who is saying that the directorate does not do complaint handling very well and, despite his best efforts to get you to improve, he does not think it is going to bear much fruit—it does not sound like best practice.

Ms Howson: I cannot comment on the children's commissioner's assessment of our complaints process; that is for him to comment on. What I can say around the best practice question is that it is in fact best practice to have complaints resolved as close to the source of the issue as possible and in a timely fashion. It is then important to have an escalation process for complainants. If they are dissatisfied with the treatment of that complaint, they can go to our centralised complaints unit within the whole of directorate to have their complaint reheard. The minister has already mentioned that there is a decision-making review panel with independent membership that a decision can be referred to by a complainant. That decision will be reviewed and advice about the merits of that decision will be provided to Ms Nolan in her capacity as the executive director. And then, of course, the children's commissioner is still available to the complainant once they have exhausted the internal mechanisms.

MR HANSON: Have you had any conversations with him as to why he would think that your internal complaints mechanisms need improvement? Have you discussed that with him? What are his issues? Do you know?

Ms Howson: We have a very good relationship with Mr Roy; and we work, I think, very cooperatively and constructively around the issues that he raises with us to improve that process. I recall that yesterday he actually made some very positive comments about the nature of that relationship and his confidence in being able to make that work with us. But I do not have a copy of the transcript in front of me to be able to draw attention to that. I might ask Ms Nolan to make a comment, because I cannot read her writing.

Ms Nolan: You cannot read my terrible writing. I just want to add, Mr Hanson, if I could, that in fact the Auditor-General did have a bit of a look, and certainly I was present in the joint discussion with Mr Roy and Maxine Cooper around the complaints issue a couple of weeks ago. Her comments in her report on care and protection is that she believes the complaint-handling arrangements between the commission and us are strategic and practical, to quote her exact words. She commended Mr Roy and me on the arrangements when the three of us were most recently together discussing them.

MR HANSON: From what you are saying, it seems that he is comfortable with the relationship that you have but not necessarily that your complaints-handling processes are—

Ms Burch: Some of these matters were part of our reform processes. There is the independent complaints process, the decision-making review committee, which is just 12 months into play. If you look at the milestone report, it is recognised that that is starting to take traction and have a positive improvement. Before they were there, there was often an unclear line of, first, communication and contact—who complained—

MR HANSON: He made these comments yesterday, and you are saying—

Ms Burch: Yes, but I am just saying that if you—

MR HANSON: it was a problem but it is not now. But he made these comments

yesterday.

Ms Burch: If I may finish, Mr Hanson, if you looked at the milestone review, you would see that it makes comments that change is happening and that it is going in the right direction. I also will refer to an oversight group, which is the Official Visitor, the children's commissioner and the Public Advocate, that made recommendations around the Bimberi review. Is that public? No; it is coming to the committee. It is my understanding from conversation that in that he also articulates the sound, solid process. We could have this conversation for the entire afternoon if you like, Mr Hanson, but what I think you need to take on faith and trust is that we are doing best practice complaints management through the independent complaint process, through the independent decision-making review—

MR HANSON: But that is not the opinion of the—

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson, please let the witness finish her statement.

MR HANSON: You are saying that, but it is not the opinion of the commissioner.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson, please let the witness finish her statement; then you can ask the question.

Ms Burch: I am quite happy to have a conversation with the children's commissioner on this, but when I speak to him he does not raise these concerns with me. And it is my understanding that he has not raised them directly with the director-general in the sense that he feels that our processes are not standing up to standard.

MRS JONES: Minister, with regard to this same topic, do you worry about those who have not had their issues resolved within the directorate—that they will have nowhere to go? My understanding is that the commissioner is not going to be taking these cases up any more, and therefore—

Ms Burch: Sorry, Mrs Jones, I am jumping in.

MRS JONES: Just to finish that question, what advice would you give to people who have exhausted the internal complaints process? That will happen from time to time.

Ms Burch: It will and, as Ms Nolan made mention of this morning, in areas of care and protection and out-of-home care there are very fragile and conflict circumstances, and people will make complaints. There is a process that goes through, and it can come back and recycle on that until a decision has been reviewed. Not everyone will agree with the decision, but if the process is fair and reasonable, that is an element that we need to stand behind—to make sure that the process of complaint management is fair and reasonable. That, in many ways, is separate from the actual decision or the outcome of the complaint process.

Mr Roy made comment, and again I do not have the transcript in front of me, that he feels that he may not manage, but he also said that he will not turn these people away. That is my understanding. And there is a public advocate process. There are other mechanisms on offer for children and young people—

MR HANSON: If I could just—

THE CHAIR: No, Mr Hanson. Please.

MR HANSON: I can add some clarity to what the minister is saying.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson, you can ask a supplementary when the witness has finished her evidence.

MR HANSON: Sure.

Ms Howson: Mrs Jones, if you do not mind, I will add to that. If a complainant is dissatisfied with the treatment of their complaint through all our internal mechanisms, they can go back to the children's commissioner; and my understanding, from what Mr Roy has explained to me, is that he will then take those complaints. He is trying to, if you like, triage the complaints that are coming into his office in order to better manage his resource allocations and prioritise.

MRS JONES: Yes.

Ms Burch: And then there is the Ombudsman.

Ms Howson: And then we have the ACT Ombudsman, who will take complaints from any member of the public that has an issue with our process.

MRS JONES: Okay.

MR HANSON: Have you had any conversations with the Attorney-General to look at the resourcing of the commissioner to make sure it is adequate? Do you think that this is a satisfactory situation to be ongoing or do you think that there needs to be a further allocation of resources?

Ms Burch: I think Mr Corbell commented yesterday that all of the commission's funding and all agencies' funding are part of the budget process. Budget constraints are a reality across a whole range of agencies. That is why we have looked at—whether it is the disability commissioner, the Children and Young People Commissioner or the Public Advocate—how we can improve our system to make it more open, more transparent and fairer for these systems and processes to occur. So if people are choosing to take the next step and to go to a commissioner, the normal avenues have been exhausted and there is a clearer process. Everyone should not feel they just need to go straight to the young people's commissioner.

MR HANSON: My question is specifically around resourcing. Are you comfortable that that level of resourcing is adequate?

Ms Burch: I think it is hard to say that anyone would be comfortable that every agency has adequate resourcing across all areas of their business, Mr Hanson. As we go through the budget process, all of these will be contested and raised, I have no doubt.

MRS JONES: With regard to additional child protection workers, as appears on pages 72 and 73 of the annual report, how many additional workers will the \$5.3 million that is available fund? What will this bring the total number of workers to, should all current staff remain? Have you been able to achieve your recruitment goals to date?

Ms Burch: Certainly we have had good success in recruitment. We were significantly down in staff some time ago and I think we undertook a second international recruitment round. Christine Nolan can go to the actual numbers but it is my understanding that we are effectively at contingency and at a full complement or thereabouts—just short.

Ms Nolan: Sliding at the moment.

Ms Burch: Sliding at the moment.

MRS JONES: It is a tough area.

Ms Burch: Yes, it is tough work. The other element of this, apart from positive recruitment, is about retaining them and supporting them for longer. Certainly, with respect to our exit rate—people leaving—they are not leaving as early as they were.

Ms Nolan: We have 176.8 staff all up in care and protection. Of those, we have something like 127 front-line staff. There are a range of clerical and other staff supporting those front-line staff. We got a very good outcome from our overseas recruitment action. It was our third trip overseas and we attracted 38, from memory, staff from the UK. They were largely experienced people, middle-aged people, people that were actually taking demotions from more senior jobs in the UK in order to come here to work for us, because of the very severe economic crisis facing the United Kingdom at the time—and that still is, I guess. People were looking for opportunities in the longer run, not just for themselves but for their children. So we have been very lucky in that sense. We did slightly over-recruit at that point because we know that inevitably people will need to move on and get out of front-line jobs in particular after a number of years to avoid burnout.

We have had a very low staff turnover rate over the last year. For the three quarters for which I have results, across the office it has been five per cent, 5.5 and six per cent—in that vicinity, around the five to six per cent mark. That is probably unprecedented nationally and historically. Most child protection services experience a turnover of front-line staff up around the 20 to 25 per cent mark. So we have done really well, but, as I have just indicated to the minister, we have had a number of people leave in the last couple of months. We advertised again in January on a national basis to try and fill those positions as quickly as possible.

MR HANSON: Do the staff that you bring in from overseas have a period of obligation—two years obligation of service or something like that?

Ms Nolan: Yes, they are bonded.

MR HANSON: For how long?

Ms Nolan: My understanding is that it is for 18 months.

MR HANSON: So when you do your retention statistics, do you factor that in so that you are only looking at those staff that have gone beyond the 18 months or are you including those within the mix?

Ms Nolan: We have done separate analyses, certainly, of the retention from the earlier waves of UK recruitment. The turnover stats I was talking about are across OCYFS. So they include things like youth justice. For example, my memory of round 1 of the UK recruitment is that we have still managed to retain something like 40 per cent of people. It is really quite startlingly high. But I can take that question on notice if you would like some more detail about retention rates from round 1 and round 2 of UK recruitment.

MR HANSON: Sure. Do you think this is because you are doing something differently or is it simply that the employment conditions in the ACT are such that across all sectors of the community at the moment retention is up because people are not leaving the federal public service, they are not leaving the ACT public service, they are not leaving jobs because jobs are not out there? Have you mapped that comparative to retention rates across all sectors to see whether it is more to do with the fact that people do not want to leave their job rather than a change perhaps internally?

Ms Nolan: I have not mapped that across all sectors. I think there will probably be a little bit more lead time until we can see what the real impact of that is. But I do believe that is contributing to our retention rates. I also believe generally that people are pretty continuously seeking, across a number of employers, high skilled human services professionals. There are jobs available fairly regularly. But I do think the general economic climate is putting the frighteners on people to some extent about the options, say, in the commonwealth, with job losses there at the present time and perhaps more to come.

Ms Burch: 20,000 to come.

Ms Nolan: However, I do think there—

MR HANSON: That might be a good thing for us, based on this.

Ms Nolan: there are some positives about our—

Ms Burch: Do you think the loss of 20,000 jobs is something to laugh about and that it will be good for Canberra?

THE CHAIR: Members, this is—

MR HANSON: I think you are—

THE CHAIR: Order!

MR HANSON: speculating—

THE CHAIR: Order!

MR HANSON: and muckraking, minister.

THE CHAIR: Order! This is not a conversation.

Ms Burch: I apologise, chair.

THE CHAIR: Questions, answers.

Ms Nolan: Coming back to the question of bonded staff, with the UK recruitment the current cohort are less than 10 per cent of my overall staff establishment. So the bonding may be having some effect on the turnover outcomes at the moment but fairly minimally given that 90 per cent of staff are not bonded.

MR HANSON: So conditions in the public service federally and what is happening federally at the moment, with efficiency dividends and so on that are being applied by the federal government, are probably having an effect on local employment conditions?

Ms Nolan: Can I—

Ms Burch: I will take—

MR HANSON: I see you nodding.

Ms Burch: I will take this answer. I think you may be speculating and muckraking, Mr Hanson. I would say, going back to the core of the question, which is about what we are doing to support the recruitment and retention of our staff, I am quite happy to have any one of the officials here outline what we are doing. As Christine has indicated, we have strong training and support. If you want to respect and have regard for your workforce, it is about supervision, the training you offer them and making sure that their workplace environment is positive and supportive.

We have also implemented a retention payment for our front-line staff in recognition that this is probably the toughest bit of business you can do in human services. Anything we can do, we have put in place. I think that is the core to it, and any sort of brush you would like to put on to it, that no-one else has anywhere to go, is disrespectful to the people that get up every day and do a hard job in one of the toughest environments.

MRS JONES: What is the total cost, compared to recruitment of Australian workers, of bringing overseas workers, per worker or something like that? Have you got a figure like that?

Ms Nolan: We will take the exact costs on notice. For example, we were providing a relocation expenses package for them of up to \$12,000 per person. Of course we had

to send a team to Britain and interview people.

MRS JONES: And advertising and that sort of—

Ms Nolan: There is quite a lot of work obviously in getting people here with visas.

Ms Burch: We can give you that detail. It is also about the longer term workforce strategy. I am not quite sure whether Ms Howson can talk about that. It is about how we get smarter with our local national recruitment, how we attract from interstate and then how we set up early planks of recruitment through connections with universities that are training our social workers.

MRS JONES: It is tough, yes.

Ms Howson: We have done quite a bit of work on what we are calling our workforce development strategy, which is tackling the more systemic approach to recruitment and retention of staff, particularly in our professional areas. There is an extreme amount of competition for qualified social workers and psychologists across a whole broad range of spheres. As the minister has pointed out, the work in this area is very difficult. We generally find that people will sustain about three years in this sort of work and then will need to step away from it for some time.

MR HANSON: I remember we discussed this in a committee last year or the year before. There were some cultural issues that were different between the UK and Australia, and that was causing some issues, particularly in working with Indigenous children. Can you extrapolate? Have you done things to remedy that in terms of training or supervision?

Ms Nolan: Yes, of course we have. It is quite a fresh environment for people coming from the UK to here. Generally they will not have had any exposure to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They often have had a lot of exposure in very multicultural Britain to working across cultural boundaries. In fact we have had a number of British social workers coming to us from Jamaican, African or other kinds of backgrounds. So people are bringing a whole lot of strengths in terms of their cross-cultural working.

Interestingly, the feedback I have had verbally from our ATSI unit has been that some of the British people have been incredibly interested and keen to learn more about Aboriginal culture. As part of their induction training—of course, we have a package of training that we put them through when they arrive—they have, I believe, a two-day Indigenous cultural training experience. But, of course, that is just the beginning and they really need to commit themselves to continuing to work up their knowledge over time and with experience, in understanding the history of colonisation and dispossession here for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how we best engage with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and community stakeholders.

THE CHAIR: Minister, following up on a theme there, could you tell me about your directorate's progress within the ACT public service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategy, which has the goal of doubling the number of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT public service by 2015?

Ms Burch: Certainly, we have made a very strong commitment to reach those targets. We have a very strong program. I might ask Mr Manikis to come forward. We have a very strong program of making sure that the workplace is, indeed, safe and welcoming. Inductions through traineeship programs, I think, are another very important element of this.

Mr Manikis: Thank you for the question. On that issue, there are several initiatives that the directorate participates in. Some of these are whole of government and some are within the directorate itself. The most obvious one is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traineeship program, which is a whole-of-government program which is coordinated by the directorate, by the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. It is a program that is a collaboration, I guess, in terms of its funding. It gets funded by DEEWR. There is a lot of in-kind funding and a bit of funding coming from ACT government resources as well.

It is a program that places around 20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a one-year traineeship program. They achieve, at the end of that, a certificate II in government business. That training is delivered by the Canberra Institute of Technology for us. At the same time, those 20 students are placed in real jobs, fair dinkum jobs, jobs that have got a salary. Their traineeships start from day one in a real job. So we are not raising their expectations for a job at the end of it—they do the hard yards and then they need to go out and get a job; we do not do that. They are there with a job.

The obligation is on the participants, each one of those 20 students, to study hard, participate in the traineeship certificate training, spend a day a week doing that and four days in the workplace. At the end of it, they do get a promotion and a permanent job. They are on probation for the 12 months and they get a permanent job at the end of it. That is the traineeship program and that has been working reasonably well over the past little while.

We are also looking at cadetships and that is coming up in the future. We are also assisting and providing support to the Indigenous centre for excellence, which is located over at Erindale College. As a directorate, we are providing them with advice and support. That is really around having their years 10, 11 and 12 Indigenous students come together in a specific location at Erindale College and providing them with the exposure to further education or employment pathways. We do draw a lot of applicants from that centre for the traineeship program. That is the source of where our participants come from in the main.

We also have a program called CHANCES which provides training and employment assistance with computer desktop training, that sort of stuff, twice a week for a group of about 15 Indigenous students or people who find themselves in pretty adverse situations. That is a program that is another great collaboration, we believe, between our directorate, the community sector, through Northside Community Service, as well as Capital Careers Pty Ltd, who provide the training for that program.

What we have got there is quite a number of programs. In going forward in this space,

what we are looking to do is to join them all up or create some pathways along the way. Perhaps the people that do the CHANCES program, which is a 15 to 20 week program, two days a week, get sufficient skills and become sufficiently competitive to be able to get into the traineeship program, which will take them along the next stage.

If we start from the beginning, from Erindale College, the kids coming out of years 10, 11 and 12 can commence the journey through that pathway. So the Community Services Directorate has played a very active role in this space to date. The target that has been set for 2015 is about 407 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. We are tracking reasonably well, although we did not meet our target at 30 June this year. We missed by a handful. But we do acknowledge that and we will be looking to put some more initiatives in place within the ACT public service to bump that along because the commitment still remains to meet that target in 2015.

Ms Burch: Just to add to that, I am not quite sure if you have had Minister Rattenbury before you with the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. He may be able to go to some more detail, but I will ask Ms Howson to talk about what we do with that ATISIS unit and how we are embedding that program across quite specifically care and protection and out-of-home care.

Ms Howson: Dr Bourke, we have set ourselves a stretched target for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within the Community Services Directorate. At the moment we are concerned that we are plateauing. We are not continuing to grow the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that make up our workforce. So we have just recently made a decision to restructure some of the ways in which we are addressing this issue internally. We will be creating a special unit looking at relationship management and cultural competency.

That will embellish, if you like, the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs group and also draw on the expertise within the Office of Children, Youth and Family Services in order to upskill, if you like, the complete workforce across CSD and make CSD a much more attractive place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to come to work.

We also, through this model, expect to be able to develop some different service approaches for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community that our colleagues across government can learn from. That unit will be headed up by an executive. Again, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person will be appointed to that position. That is an exciting development that we are all looking forward to.

We are also taking the opportunity to invite some of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff now to work in mainstream positions within the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support and work side by side with other professionals in order to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Canberra community.

The other thing that we have the opportunity to do, which we take advantage of, is through our contracting arrangements with the private sector, particularly through Housing ACT. For example, I mention the Spotless contract. Spotless provides all of our repairs and maintenance work across the Housing portfolio. They are locked into

targets as part of their contracting arrangement for the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. So we are trying to exercise the very practical options that we have alongside improving our internal culture to ensure that we not only retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but can attract more people to come and work with us.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, how many Indigenous staff are in the directorate?

Ms Burch: I do not know off the top of my head, I have to confess.

THE CHAIR: Take it on notice then.

Ms Howson: Do you know that number?

Mr Manikis: Not off the top of my head.

Ms Howson: No. We will have to take it on notice.

Ms Burch: Before we go to the next question, I have just been advised that Narelle Hargreaves is not able to attend today due to family illness. We understand that that message has been put through but I am not quite sure if it has been received. She sends her apologies.

MS BERRY: You have mentioned the targets for Spotless, the service that is employing Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. Do you have the number of people that they target for employment?

Ms Howson: Six.

Ms Burch: Again, when you have Minister Rattenbury before you, he might be able to give you more detail on that.

MR HANSON: We will see if he can come up with that number as quickly as you guys did. That is a compliment, by the way.

MRS JONES: An awkward situation; everyone is assuming and looking for the slap!

MR HANSON: I say nice things sometimes.

Ms Burch: Few and far between, Mr Hanson.

THE CHAIR: Ms Berry, your substantive question.

MR HANSON: Where it warrants it, minister.

THE CHAIR: Ms Berry, your substantive question, please.

Ms Berry: We have been hearing a lot during some of the committee hearings, and on this committee, about the over-representation of Aboriginal children in our protection

system. What is the extent of the problem in the ACT?

Ms Burch: Sadly, it exists in the ACT, as it does in other jurisdictions. Whether it is in care and protection, out-of-home care or in youth justice, of which mention was made this morning, it is important to note that it is, I think, about 14 times more likely for Aboriginal children to have substantiated cases of abuse. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children are in care and protection orders at a rate of 83 per 1,000 children compared to 49 ATSI children for 1,000 nationally.

So we are over-represented. I will go to Helen or Christine to provide more information on this. It is about getting in with that early intervention and family support. I often have the conversation about how we are identifying our numbers and why they are so high. Some of that is because we are a city state. Is it due to the fact that everyone is captured within the one system? That could be something. But either way, there are far too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids in our system.

Ms Nolan: Just under a quarter of our children in care, in out-of-home care, are Aboriginal. I think I did the calculation yesterday and it was 23.9 per cent. But, of course, it changes a little bit every day. The good news about that is—

MR HANSON: Sorry, 23 per cent of the total number of children in care are—

Ms Nolan: Children in care, yes, are Aboriginal.

Ms Burch: Aboriginal.

Ms Nolan: Yes, just to be clear. The good part about that news, even though it is obviously a really significant over-representation, is that we are travelling on a flat line at the moment. We are not actually trending upwards, which is what is happening nationally, where the trend line is going upwards. The trend line is going upwards in a number of other states.

I was the director of policy and practice development in Queensland six years ago in the department of child safety. At that stage, about a quarter of the children in care were Aboriginal. It has gone to 37 per cent currently in the space of six years. That is one of the foci for the current commission of inquiry going on in Queensland. We are holding the line in a sense. We are not travelling upwards with a whole number of other jurisdictions in terms of an increasing proportion of Aboriginal children being in care.

That is not to say that it is good. We would be really keen to bring those numbers down. I think we do have a phenomenon here of being a small compact city state where we have really strong reach out to the community. We also have a very well educated, caring, progressive electorate who are very concerned about children. Just for interest, we actually have child concern reporting here at twice the national rate. We actually are an affluent community. You would think we would have less reporting. Actually, Canberrans are reporting children that they are concerned about at twice the national rate. Some of that will inevitably flow on into these statistics about Aboriginal children.

There will be no answer to the over-representation problem until we really make some more progress in closing the gap. It is not the only factor but there is a very strong association between disadvantage and poverty and children coming into care. It is just one of those realities of child protection work. Some very wealthy children get taken to care; very few, however. Most children that come into care are from poorer backgrounds. Of course, there are some very disadvantaged Aboriginal people within this city as a result of the history of colonisation and dispossession. We have a number—

MR HANSON: Can I just interject there? I have got a supplementary.

THE CHAIR: No. Just wait until the witness finishes, please.

MR HANSON: Okay.

Ms Nolan: We have a number of initiatives that we have in place where we are trying to make sure that we are targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander vulnerable families to try and keep kids out of care. We have our AT SIS unit. As our director-general just talked about, we are doing a bit of a refresh on that approach. But that is fundamentally trying to assist O CYFS with the agenda of keeping Indigenous kids out of care. We have also got our west Belconnen child and family centre that was opened about 18 months ago. That has got a particular focus on trying to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in that part of town.

It is led by an Aboriginal manager. The last time I saw some stats, it is having success at engaging a disproportionate number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients into that service compared to their presence in the community. That is really positive. There is an array of specific initiatives which Mr Wyles, who is the director of early intervention and prevention services, could possibly speak to. He could tell you about some of the practical things that have been happening in some of the different centres to try and make sure we are reaching out to vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

MS BERRY: That would be good. That was my supplementary, chair—to ask about some of those initiatives.

Mr Wyles: Ms Nolan is correct in saying that west Belconnen has a real focus on support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. A good example of that is that last month I attended the launch of a group program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families that Rob de Castella was running which really focuses on a range of things, including diet and exercise, for those children. West Belconnen has developed a range of things; I did actually bring some giveaways if the minister and Ms Howson are happy to—

Ms Burch: It is not to influence you in any way, shape or form.

THE CHAIR: Are you tabling a document, minister?

MR HANSON: Really? How disappointing!

Mr Wyles: In fact, I understand that Dr Bourke launched the soul food—

THE CHAIR: Yes, and ate some too.

Mr Wyles: at west Belconnen last year. It was really an initiative with Indigenous families where, following some group work, some women, with the centre manager, developed a booklet that helps families put together some fairly quick, reliable meals. It is a great initiative, and we have had a big call for those books. Some of the other things we have done at some of the other centres include developing a useful contacts card for Indigenous families. This is out of commonwealth funding. And there was a project where our Tuggeranong child and family centre worked with Gugan Gulwan and Namadgi School, families in those communities, to come up with this. This was something that was suggested that was quite needed by families in terms of essential contacts for those schools. Also out of commonwealth money, we updated some contacts, particularly for Indigenous families but also for the general community.

THE CHAIR: Supplementaries, Ms Berry? No.

Ms Burch: There is one more.

MR HANSON: Are you going to do a taste testing for us? I thought you might have brought some of this in.

Mr Wyles: Sorry?

MR HANSON: Elizabeth's tuna patties.

THE CHAIR: Do you have a supplementary, Mr Hanson?

Ms Burch: Next time it is on, we will invite you out.

MR HANSON: I did have one.

Ms Burch: If we may, just the last thing—

Mr Wyles: This moves to multicultural. The director-general launched this a couple of months ago. It was an initiative that west Belconnen undertook with south Sudanese women and Companion House. It was out of a playgroup. Then a music teacher was engaged and some traditional songs were developed and sung in that language but also in English. It was a fantastic thing. We have had lots of calls nationally for this CD.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson, your supplementary, please.

MR HANSON: It goes to the point you made that it is not just about whether people are Indigenous, or Sudanese perhaps; it is about the low socioeconomic status of these people. When you look at the 23.9 per cent or whatever percentage it was of Indigenous children in care, have you been able to work out how much is due to cultural reasons and how much is simply socioeconomic? Or is it too difficult to determine? Are you then trying to target the cultural aspects of it or is it simply the

socioeconomic and education? Does that question make sense?

Ms Nolan: Yes, it does, Mr Hanson. It will be a mix of issues. For different families, different things will be more salient. Obviously, for quite a lot of Aboriginal kids in care, they are coming from several generations of broken families in terms of the stolen generations. They have had family disruptions over a number of generations. You see that intergenerational cycle of trauma coming back around again. It is hard to disaggregate what is responsible for what, but there is certainly a very strong association between poverty and child protection clients. Not all poor people end up with their children in care, and not all children in care have come from poor families, but there is a pretty strong association; it makes you more vulnerable.

Other things can make you vulnerable, though, too. We have quite a lot of kids that have come from really quite middle-class backgrounds but there has been a mental illness problem there—they have got a mentally ill mum or they have got parents who are drug users. Mental illness, drug use and domestic violence are the sort of unholy trinity of care and protection nationally—driving the increase in kids coming into care nationally.

Ms Burch: And the fact that it is so hard to unpick is why you need to have that environment that is safe for Aboriginal folk to come into and why we need to have those responses and interventions quite early to really avert them, divert them away from care and protection.

Ms Nolan: And also to be providing a really positive view and experience for Aboriginal kids in care about their Aboriginality. One of the really good things we have done over the last year is to get the proportion of our Aboriginal kids in care with cultural care plans right up. At the moment, 95 per cent of them have cultural care plans. It is just trying to make sure the people's self-esteem and sense of belonging and identity are supported, through linking them back to other people from their own cultural background.

MRS JONES: Just a supplementary if I may, chair?

Mr Wyles: Can I just mention another issue that I think is really important in making some progress in this area. Wherever possible, we are placing Indigenous children with their extended family. Some of that has been through case conferencing early, often in child and family centres—getting the right people around the table and, wherever we can, placing those children with approved kinship carers.

MRS JONES: I have a supplementary to that. I will direct the question to the minister or whoever you think might answer it if you do not want to answer it yourself. The comment was made there that we cannot expect to see a smaller percentage of children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in care and protection until closing the gap is achieved. I just want some more clarification. Since at least 2007 there has been broad public awareness that we face a crisis amongst our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country and that there need to be actions and steps taken. I am wondering whether this closing the gap is something that you expect some other part of government is going to do or whether it is a part of your work. It seems very non-crisis style language to say that when that is achieved

we will be fine, but what are we actually doing about it?

Ms Burch: In the sense of whether it is non-crisis, it is in an environment where day to day we have the fact of a responsive, complicated, almost crisis, system. But closing the gap is terminology that the whole of government uses. Again, I would refer you to the relevant minister for more detail, but for us here it is about making sure that we do all we can to provide support and assistance to those families in need. In education, it would be around educational opportunities. In health, it would be about improved health outcomes. For us within CSD, it is around our child and family centres.

Whilst Mr Wyles spoke about west Belconnen, and so did Ms Nolan, I know that both Gungahlin and Tuggeranong run fantastic groups—strong mums groups and strong dads groups. It is all about getting in early and giving them a very safe space so they can learn the skills that are offered. If they have come from a family where they have not experienced positive parenting themselves, how do they then be positive parents for their own children?

It is that early work under the umbrella of closing the gap. We are very much in that space and are making a difference. And it is not just us. You are right; it is a national thing where our whole society needs to step up. Sadly, and I am not being flippant, it is not an easy fix. It is a long-term commitment from society, from each and every member of society, to go through and make that difference.

MRS JONES: Just to clarify then, would it be fair to say that it is something that you are working on actively?

Ms Burch: Absolutely.

MRS JONES: Not something that you are waiting on somebody else to solve?

Ms Burch: No. We have all got a role to play, and if you asked any minister before you they would say that.

THE CHAIR: A substantive question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Thank you, Mr Chair. We recently had an Auditor-General's report on the care and protection system. I would like to go through some of the issues arising from that.

Ms Burch: Not from the annual report, Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: No, but this is obviously during the period of the annual report, this investigation. The Vardon report came out in 2004. We have had a couple of Public Advocate reports since then. The Auditor-General says:

Whether the Community Services Directorate is providing “adequate and immediate support to children and young people deemed to be at high risk and vulnerable” was not able to be determined due to issues reported on in this audit.

We have a situation going from Vardon in 2004 through to a report released only recently, and the Auditor-General is saying that you cannot even tell if CSD is doing their job properly or not, because of all the issues raised in the audit. That seems to be a concern. Why is it that, with all these various reports, the actions taken and the resources put in, at the macro level we are still seeing concerns like that raised by the Auditor-General—that she simply does not know whether you are doing the job or not? I am not saying you are not, but she is making comments like that.

Ms Burch: In relation to the Auditor-General's report, just to refresh people's memory, we commissioned the Public Advocate to do a review back in 2011. The first report from the Public Advocate had a series of recommendations. In discussion between the directorate, the Public Advocate and the Auditor-General, the decision was made that the Public Advocate would progress part 2 of her report and the Auditor-General would do other aspects of the original review process. This report was circulated last week, as I understand it. Certainly there are comments that there is still work to do; there is no doubt about that. But there are also comments in there that the reforms that we have put in place are heading in the right direction and, once implemented, will address many of the issues raised in the report.

There are two aspects of this. Let me go to the chase; then I will ask Ms Howson and Ms Nolan to talk to them. There was some commentary, and certainly the media was running it, that we did not know where the children were. We believe that we did. The system indeed knows where the children are. When I spoke with the executive about that comment in the report, the advice to me was—we run an electronic system, a CHYPS system, and then a paper-based system. With those that we are directly responsible for, kinship care, we knew where they were, and the information was correct. For those that are managed through foster care, through external agencies, on either the electronic system or the paper-based system, there were some elements of information that were not contemporary and were not up to date; it could have been a phone number or it could have been a change of school from primary school to high school. When tested, the director-general, as the territory parent, would make contact with the external agency in a phone call, and a few minutes later all that information was found. So the system, between the director-general and between the external agencies, does know where the children are.

But that said, we need to look at how we get that updated information easily. How do we make it easy for those external agencies to import into that system? There was certainly some comment in the report about whether they could have direct access. We know there is some work to do in CHYPS, but I think the community should have confidence that the team at care and protection do know where our children are and are providing good care for those children at risk. These are the most vulnerable in our community; we should be doing all we can, and I believe we are doing all we can.

We could implement every one of these recommendations and come back in 12 months time under scrutiny with the finest microscope and still find work to do—as would any system in any jurisdiction. I might ask Natalie Howson to talk to the report.

MR HANSON: You said there were two issues that you were going to address.

Ms Burch: I will talk to this and I am happy to get back to the other one.

MR HANSON: Do this one and—

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson, wait until the answer has been given; then you can ask this question.

MR HANSON: I was just trying to help the minister.

THE CHAIR: I am sure she does not feel the need for help.

Ms Burch: I will vouch for that.

Ms Howson: Mr Hanson, the thrust of the Auditor-General's advice to me was that I need to have a much more effective information system that can be readily accessible both to myself and to my staff in order to be able to confidently answer those questions. So the comment about being at risk was simply very much around the weaknesses within our information management system.

Having said that, the minister has already outlined that the true test of the system is that it goes beyond the electronic information system in and of itself. It is an important tool to support staff to make good decisions and have access to the information they need to do their job. Nevertheless it is a tool and we do work with out-of-home care agencies that hold information. The Auditor-General found that all of their records were accurate and up to date. Where we found a very small number of incidents—I think it was less than 10 incidents where there was an incorrect phone number or, on one occasion, an address that we could not find in our system—a phone call to the out-of-home care agency would resolve that issue readily. Of course, we could do that at any time of the day, seven days a week.

The other information that was wanting was currency around the school that some of the children were attending. That is something that we need to improve on. Again, where you have out-of-home care organisations managing the direct and day-to-day relationship with foster-care families and the children in their care, we have to manually transfer information from one system into ours. The opportunity for human error clearly arises, and this is what manifests.

The Auditor-General recommended that we work towards establishing an electronic system where out-of-home care agencies can input data directly so that we eliminate, essentially, the multiple handling of information and avoid that opportunity for human error.

MR HANSON: That brings up a specific question about CHYPS because the Auditor-General was pretty scathing about it and said you need to have a system that can do stuff and it is dubious whether CHYPS does it; it needs either an upgrade or replacement. Have you considered what your approach is going to be towards CHYPS?

Ms Burch: We are going to be getting on and implementing it, but CHYPS is a number of years old and it has had some modifications over time. Anyone who has worked with complex systems would know that they get less user-friendly as they are

modified and the older they get. So a first immediate piece of work is that we can improve CHYPS to make it more user-friendly and certainly have information more readily transferrable. Then there is the longer term view about what is the next new system that we use electronically.

The other comment she made is that it does not meet record requirements, and it does not, because it pre-dates that. But our core system is a paper-based system which does meet those record requirements. So over the longer term we probably do need to consider a replacement system, but that would be over the longer term and it would clearly have cost implications as well. But there is some work that we can do immediately.

MR HANSON: The Auditor-General also found that CHYPS functions are not being optimised and a lack of staff training in the use of CHYPS. Are you rectifying that one immediately?

Ms Howson: That is right. They are the immediate steps that we are taking. Ms Nolan can talk on that more specifically.

Ms Nolan: I think there is some debate between the Auditor-General and ourselves around the training issues because for some of the years where she looked at how many sessions of CHYPS training people were attending we actually had very few new staff coming in. So that is one of the issues. We also have a couple of people who will come and sit with you at your desk and do the training one on one with you. Susan White will do that for staff where we have people coming to our organisation one at a time, spread out. She looked at the training enrolments and I think to some extent that is run in another way. It is not always relevant depending on the period of time. But our staff have to use CHYPS and our undertaking is that we will train them in it, and it is mandatory training already for staff. There was another part to this question.

MR HANSON: It was about optimisation and training.

Ms Nolan: The optimisation. It is interesting that she has made that comment because already we have had going for a number of months a one-year project to optimise both CHYPS and YJUS, to turn on as much functionality as we can in both of those systems. YJUS is the other system that supports the youth justice side of the equation. In creating our integrated management systems for both Bimberi and now for care and protection we are having Shared Services build us a clever—hopefully it will be very clever when I see it—interactive portal over the front that is going to try and make up for some of the deficiencies of those two systems. So it will pull information from both systems where a child is in both systems. It will integrate the information. It will do automatic peopling of core information into forms. It will allow us to have some automated work flows, which CHYPS does not allow us to have now. We will also be able to encompass the tools and tips for staff in terms of a bit of a toolkit.

The Bimberi one is under development as we speak and we will need to start work on the care and protection portal as well. It is kind of like an overlay we are building over the top. We are hoping that will take us through the next few years. I was in Queensland, as I said, at the time that Queensland built a whole new system from the

ground up and it was a pretty painful and expensive process, I have to say. So even if we had the money and we started right now on getting a new system developed, it is going to be several years before that is fully implemented.

MR HANSON: Why don't we just import one from another jurisdiction? If Queensland or other jurisdictions are doing this, why don't we just go and try theirs?

Ms Nolan: That is certainly, Mr Hanson, what we would be looking to do. We did import CHYPS from the Northern Territory in 1999. They were using it. So we would be doing the same thing. We would be doing the rounds. Certainly my recommendation, having been involved in a ground-up build, would be to try and look for something we could customise. Of course, every state has different legislation and differences in policy and procedure, even though there is a general core commonality. So we would have to see to what extent we could get something and adapt it efficiently, and that is quite a big project in its own right. But we are really keen to make a start on it if we possibly can because it does take a while to get stuff in place.

Ms Burch: Just over 50 per cent of our out-of-home care are in kinship and the rest are with foster-care agencies, either within residential care or within home based—predominantly home based. We have probably got very high home-based placements through foster and kin.

MR HANSON: Your second issue, minister, was about visitation?

Ms Burch: Yes.

MR HANSON: I have heard some comments you have made about that but you have now changed your policy so that everyone does get a visit. What is happening?

Ms Burch: What we found when we asked about this was that every child in care has an annual review. So there is an annual review process and those annual reviews are forwarded to the Public Advocate. So it is part of the process, whether it is internal or an external agency: where is the child? What are their needs? Are there any complex matters that need attention? And the plan is put in place.

At times a carer could say, "This child is in long-term placement with a stable family," and some families will say, "We don't particularly want a knock on the door by care and protection workers." So a sensible decision is made—ad hoc, unstructured—to say that child will not be visited. But it is also fair and reasonable for the agency not to have any ad hocness about that. That is a terrible use of language and I do apologise. We will immediately put in place that there is an annual visit. But 95 per cent of our kids are visited anyway. Again, you are talking about very small numbers of children and young people that have been in very stable long-term placements.

Ms Nolan: The issue, Mr Hanson, is arising not so much with the children that we case manage directly but with a proportion of the children who are in foster care through the foster-care agencies—Barnardos, Marymead, Anglicare and Communities@Work. We outsource the case management of the child to those agencies as well as finding and supporting the foster carer. It is not in all cases of kids

in foster care; there are a number that we are actively managing ourselves. But particularly for long-term cases, where kids are in long-term stable placements, the foster-care agency has permission to also do the casework on the child. Helen is telling me it is 120 children who are in care and who are in that stable placement.

My view about this is that we will take on board what the Auditor-General is saying. We will introduce a visitation policy and we will visit at least once a year, even for those children who are already being visited by the agencies on a regular basis.

MR HANSON: In terms of some of the service providers, the Auditor-General found that “monitoring the provision of out-of-home care by community service providers is poor”. Do you agree with that statement?

Ms Nolan: The monitoring by us of the providers?

MR HANSON: Yes.

Ms Nolan: I think we have not been doing enough in that space. There is always a battle around resources, isn't there? Do we put it into the front-line work with the children and families? How much do we drag back into the backroom of the organisation in terms of things like monitoring, funding contracts and other backroom-type activities? It is a tension all the time.

MR HANSON: The Auditor-General talked about audits that you are meant to conduct or that you do conduct.

Ms Burch: We have a contract with the external providers and part of that contract is that they meet our standards and service agreement. So there is a standard of out-of-home care: “We will fund you if you meet this standard.” There has been, until now, an internal self-review process that they meet those standards and they provide that commentary and report to the department.

We instigated, about 12 months or 18 months ago, a process of external audits across agencies. Most agencies do the right thing and their self-reporting is of a fine quality. Again, these agencies are looking after very vulnerable kids. So, again, it is fair and reasonable that we have an external audit process that goes through those. I think there have been a couple of audits. We are only talking about a handful of external organisations as well.

Ms Nolan: We are talking about a total of seven organisations.

MR HANSON: Can you list them?

Ms Nolan: Yes. Barnardos, Anglicare, Communities@ Work, Marymead, Premier Youthworks, Richmond Fellowship, and CREATE. CREATE is not a provider of out-of-home care but it is in the out-of-home care system and we fund it. We have commissioned IAB, a firm. Peter Muir, who is a former director-general in New South Wales, has been doing a fantastic job moving through the agencies and doing a very intensive audit process to complement the self-assessment work that agencies had been doing previously.

The Auditor-General said to us that that self-assessment work was not really enough. I am in agreement with her; that is why we commissioned, 12 months ago, the other audit process and why we have committed ourselves, in response to her report, to moving forward with creating a strong, robust, internal quality accreditation and monitoring unit within the Community Services Directorate but separate to the office. So they will be able to be independently minded in auditing the services that we choose to fund and accrediting them.

THE CHAIR: We will stay on the topic but we will have a few other supplementaries.

MS BERRY: Minister, I am just having a look at the media release. You say that the Auditor-General's report "raises a number of new issues which the Government will work through". You continue:

The Government has agreed or agreed in principle to all the recommendations in the report, which will inform the reform package currently underway.

Changes the Government will begin implementing immediately—

which are some of the things that you have talked about today—

include introducing a requirement that all children in care be visited at least annually by Care and Protection staff, and additional record-keeping training for Care and Protection staff and staff of non-government out-of-home care agencies.

I guess that confirms the answers to the questions that Mr Hanson has been asking today referring to the recommendations in the Auditor-General's report: the government will be acting on every single one of them.

Ms Burch: Absolutely, and a number of those are already captured in the reform process that has been implemented and that has been underway for the last 12 months. I think you mentioned three that were agreed in principle. That is because it is just about how to do something, not about whether we agree whether something should be done. We have said, "Yes, we agree, but we feel that we can do it this way." Christine Nolan might be able to give an example of that.

Ms Nolan: One of the examples where we have agreed in principle but raised some considerations is around the recommendation that we develop a whole-of-government information sharing system about vulnerable kids. There is a range of challenges. I think we would agree in principle that we need to share information about kids at risk where we can, but there are legislative constraints both in our own act, which we administer, and in general privacy legislation. And there are resourcing and technical problems about having a whole array of disparate systems in different directorates being able to speak to one another. We are agreeing in principle that we need—

Ms Burch: That we need to share that information, but it is about how we do it.

Ms Nolan: Where we can and how we do it, yes.

MR HANSON: I guess that goes to the point that is raised there:

ACT Government directorates and entities need to improve their coordination and sharing of information ...

Ms Nolan: That is the one.

Ms Burch: There is that. And separate to the Auditor-General's report, Natalie Howson has been taking the lead on working with vulnerable families at a director-general level. Across Health, JACS, education and CSD, there would be common families that we know that are struggling through school attendance, health matters and that. Ms Howson might like to talk about that. That is where you get the whole-of-government response to these families.

Ms Howson: This was one of the initiatives in response to the Public Advocate part 2 review. We established a directors-general coordinating committee to look into how we might better support the families that we all have a relationship with. It is not unusual in Canberra that we talk about the fact that we do know a lot of the families that we are intersecting with, that are intersecting with our service systems. It seems quite ironic that, while we all know them—and, because we are a small jurisdiction, we often know them very personally—we cannot do more for them.

So as a group of directors-general we are, if you like, trialling a different approach where we are starting with these families. We have identified a group that have agreed to work with us on the basis that they do have a relationship with so many of us and are, quite frankly, sick and tired of having multiple government officials in their face, if I can put it that way. The project work is about how we develop what, in service delivery land, we call a codesign model with families, starting with what they consider to be the priority issues for them. It might be a housing issue; it might be something to do with assisting them to get the person to school. They call the agenda; we do not call it on their behalf. And we are testing ourselves around our flexibility to be able to respond to their needs in their time.

Part of that process is actually negotiating a consent-based model of information sharing. If you like, it will be a bit like a concept of an information passport that each family will hold. They will use that information with government agencies in order to access services. We are very optimistic about where this might take us and how it might inform some very innovative changes in our service delivery model on a whole-of-government level.

THE CHAIR: Hang on, Mr Hanson. Mrs Jones, do you have a supplementary?

MRS JONES: No, I have got a substantive.

THE CHAIR: I am just working on supplementaries on this issue, because I know everybody has got some stuff they want to get out about it. I will take a supplementary then. Could you highlight the ways in which you coordinate with the education department to address issues with children of families at risk, and how is that coordination working with students in non-government schools?

Ms Howson: The coordination with education happens at multiple levels. One of the things that is very refreshing at the moment is from the top down. The director-general and executives have been negotiating our priorities in terms of the things that we can dedicate resources, time and energy to to get good outcomes. That authorising environment is very important, for all staff within our directorates to understand that we think this is important and we give people permission to actually cooperate and collaborate. I might ask Christine to talk about what is happening in a more practical way at each other level.

Ms Nolan: There is a range of initiatives and coordination mechanisms that are in place at a variety of different levels. I might ask Mr Wyles to speak about a couple of them, including a very exciting new initiative we have been doing with education around parent-child interaction therapy. Over to you, Mr Wyles.

Mr Wyles: One of the ways in which we are working with education—we are about to commence it in the coming month—is focusing on best practice in this space. This is a model called parent-child interactive therapy, which is international best practice in the United States. We have partnered with school counsellors in the Tuggeranong region. We are rolling out two days where therapists, school counsellors, the child and family centre at Tuggeranong and Marymead schools—child psychologists essentially coach the parents of children who are starting to exhibit problem behaviour. They are often children who in some cases may have experienced what in the American literature they term maltreatment or abuse and neglect. This is a model that is quite useful for not only parents but also foster carers and kinship carers. Essentially the therapist coaches the parent, through a one-way screen, through an earpiece to ensure that positive behaviours are reinforced and negative behaviours are ignored.

It is quite an intensive program. It is over 12 weeks, and there is homework for both the parent and the child. We are really focusing with education on early school years, so just preschool and kindergarten wherever possible—children in those environments who are, I suppose, seen as starting to exhibit some defiant behaviour, some negative behaviour, and some parents who really need some of those skills to assist them to maintain a strengths focus on children and positive behaviour and reinforcement. We are very excited about that. That will start next month, and we will run it for a year.

Ms Nolan: Could I add a few comments, Mr Chair? There are actually a range of forums. There is one that meets regularly around particular problem children where there is a common interest between the school and CSD. The name of that meeting is CHYN.

Mr Wyles: The child youth network.

Ms Burch: Self-explanatory.

Ms Nolan: The other thing I wanted to talk about is that there have been some really exciting developments in the last year or so. ETD came out with their youth commitment; they have established engaging youth boards based on four education regions, as I would call them, coming from a bigger state—parts of Canberra. There is a board for each. We have chosen to align our own regional break-up, our own networks, on that same boundary with our children, youth and family services

program which we have been refreshing.

So we have created an essential intake service called the child, youth and family gateway for our refreshed children, youth and family services program. That has four network coordinators, and the regions align with the education region. The network coordinator attends the youth commitment and re-engaging youth boards. Referrals, hopefully, and coordination are flowing backwards and forwards through education at that network level between education and the Community Services Directorate.

MS BERRY: Could I seek a bit more clarification on the program that you were talking about, the parent and child—

Mr Wyles: Yes, interactive therapy.

MS BERRY: I am pretty sure I saw a program on it on television, so I got a bit excited when I heard about it here. What was the time frame?

Mr Wyles: We will start next month. Two weeks ago we sent our staff to training in Queensland. Griffith University oversight the program in Australia. That was five school counsellors—four of our own staff and a Marymead psychologist. We will start next month. We expect that referrals will largely come from schools in the Tuggeranong region—

Ms Burch: And run for 12 months.

Mr Wyles: Yes. We will evaluate it so that we can be really clear about its success and possible rollout through further partnerships.

MS BERRY: How many participants are you expecting?

Mr Wyles: It is quite intensive. I think we are going to four or five sessions each day, Monday and Tuesday, and they will commit to 10 or 12 weeks.

MS BERRY: That is good; thank you.

Ms Nolan: There are a range of other initiatives where we interface with education at different, less client-focused levels. The Australian early development index is probably another good example where all children entering school, I believe it is, are tested for their developmental readiness. That is represented geographically. It is a national process that is rolling out. We are about to go through the second stage.

Mr Wyles: There was an initial report on the AEDI in 2009. It is essentially a checklist that teachers perform in a child's first year of school. The take-up rate in the ACT is exceptionally high: 99.6 per cent of all kindergarten children in 2009 had that checklist done by teachers. Children are, in a sense, rated against five key domains—their physical health, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and communication and general knowledge. The year 2009 was the first benchmark, locally and nationally. The second data collection was last year, and that second report for the 2012 data will come out in the next month probably, launched by Minister Garrett. That will give us a good indication of how we are tracking

against those five domains. Generally, from the 2009 report we did pretty well against national averages.

It will also increasingly help us target our policies and programs to particular areas. The commonwealth have been working with a private company to develop websites where schools will be able to click down from the state region to a local level to identify how many children above a certain number are, for example, developmentally vulnerable on one of those domains. That will really help us with education to target programs to particular areas.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Jones, your substantive question?

MRS JONES: Yes, thank you. In the report on page 72 there is some information around youth and family support. Minister, can you make sure I am in the right area? I am interested in the contracts that Parentline have been engaged in. Is that in that service area?

Ms Burch: Yes.

MRS JONES: Great.

Ms Burch: Parentline did have a contract; that was terminated in December last year.

MRS JONES: I will go to my question. Prior to the contract of the Information Engagement and Coordination Service, had Parentline held any other contracts with the ACT government? If yes, what were they? And how did the service go? Was it effective at the time, and when did that previous contract end—previous contracts?

Ms Paull: Parentline have been a part of the Canberra community for a number of years. I think it is 34 years or a period of about that time. They were providing a range of services, including telephone counselling services, at the time the directorate decided to start exploring how we might better offer family support programs and also youth support programs. They were involved in a consultation process with the community for a period of around 18 months.

The directorate at the time were very actively engaging with all of the not-for-profit providers to talk with them about how we might best offer services for the most vulnerable children and young people and their families in our community. We then had a process of writing a model, a framework, and we went out to consultation again with the community sector, and Parentline was very involved in all of those consultations. Then we released a request for tender process and Parentline were one of many agencies that did tender. At the time the services that were provided under either the family support services program or the youth support program were amalgamated. That was part of our consultation process for some time.

MRS JONES: When Parentline were engaged in this new area of work, what consideration was given to the breadth of new work that they were undertaking and how that would be undertaken? Is it fair to say that the breadth of work within the tender was perhaps beyond the capacity of that organisation? Do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms Sheehan: There was a very extensive assessment of the risk of the procurement of a new service to an organisation such as Parentline that had done one part of a service delivery, which was telephone counselling for parents, but not the totality of providing information and referral services across a broader sector. So the tender assessment panel which assessed all the tenders did a risk assessment based on the information provided in the tender documentation. The assessment was made at that time with respect to Parentline, based on the information it provided on key staff that would provide the service, the service model itself and the policies and procedures that it could develop in order to support that new service model with those key staff, that in that scenario the risk to the territory was acceptable for awarding them the contract. Of course the proof of the pudding is in the eating and as it transpired Parentline was unable to roll out the service in the way it had presented its abilities in the tender.

MRS JONES: Is this something that is being experienced across a number of tenders? Is there an ongoing conversation with Parentline about their going back to the original style of service that they were able to provide before or is it just being left?

Ms Sheehan: It has not been a problem that we have generally experienced in the Community Services Directorate—that, having awarded a tender and having done a risk assessment of an organisation substantially expanding its service, in the event it is not able to deliver in the way that it has presented itself in the tender. I think that is a testament to the thoroughness of the risk assessments that are undertaken. Of course, sometimes, in the end, an organisation cannot deliver, and that is what happened. Throughout the process after the contract was awarded and in the start-up phase, the directorate worked very closely indeed with Parentline to get it up and running in exactly the way that Parentline had said they would like to run the service. So we worked with them on how to establish memorandums of understanding with the other organisations in the network, how to establish the intake service, what policies and procedures are needed, what would be the communication plan that would be needed, and so on.

In the last few months we were meeting weekly with Parentline to support them in a way that they had said they would like to be supported in order to provide that service in the way that they wanted to provide the service. So far from just saying, “That’s too bad,” and leaving them to their own devices, we gave them a great deal of support.

MRS JONES: In that period up to where the contract was terminated?

Ms Sheehan: Absolutely, yes.

MRS JONES: And beyond, is there any intention to re-engage with them?

Ms Sheehan: We have been engaged with them even past the point where the contract ended, to work with them, because they still do receive funding from the commonwealth government and they do operate in one of the ACT-provided community hubs. We wanted to make sure that they had continued support from us to look at other options—for example, working with other organisations co-located with

them in the community hubs, looking at like-minded organisations that could provide them with support. We did continue to offer to provide that support to make connections, to facilitate meetings. But at that stage Parentline preferred to rely on their own historical networks to look at what their next steps might be.

MR HANSON: In terms of the services provided by Parentline both pre and after the change of contract, who is doing that body of work now?

Ms Sheehan: That is being done by the gateway service, which has been referred to on a number of occasions here. The gateway service is still providing that essential information referral and intake and it is now provided by a consortium of very experienced providers who are already in that children, youth and family support network. Those providers are Barnardos, which is the contracted party and the lead in the arrangement. We have Belconnen Community Services, Woden Community Services and the YWCA. I think the committee would understand the experience and the breadth of experience in children and young people services that we have with that consortium.

MR HANSON: You are going to let Parentline stay on where they are in the hub?

Ms Sheehan: Parentline can certainly stay on where they are in the hub. It is a matter for them to decide if that is what they want to do.

Ms Paull: As Ms Sheehan stated earlier, we have been in constant conversations with Parentline for 14 or 15 months. We have been having conversations with them for many months. Since we took that very difficult decision to terminate the contract we have been in constant communication with them to negotiate how we might support them to support their staff through a very difficult time. Part of those conversations is currently about how much office space they are occupying at the Weston hub, I believe it is called, and we are still negotiating that exact detail as we speak. That is happening this week.

MR HANSON: How many staff from Parentline will be losing their jobs as a result of this?

Ms Paull: I do not have that exact detail. I am happy to take the question on notice.

MR HANSON: What was the amount of funding in the contract that they have lost?

Ms Paull: It was \$796,000 in total.

MR HANSON: Per annum?

Ms Paull: Per annum, yes.

MR HANSON: Parentline are obviously not satisfied with what has happened. There was a protest that they had outside the Assembly a couple of weeks ago. They have been to see me. They are not happy with the way, I suppose, the whole process has been rolled out in terms of the contract and the termination of the contract. Are you satisfied that the actions that have been taken are the right ones and that Parentline has

had an equitable and just treatment from the directorate?

Ms Howson: My colleagues have worked in the ACT government for longer than me but it is a very rare occurrence to terminate a contract. It was something that we went into with a high degree of sensitivity about the impact of taking a decision like that. I am absolutely clear that the staff that have been speaking to you this afternoon did all they could to support Parentline to a different outcome than the one we reached. What we wanted to do was make sure that that service could work, and the extension of support from the directorate, I feel, was genuine and constructive. I feel that we did all that we could to have a different outcome in the end but we ended up where we ended up.

THE CHAIR: Minister, coming back to the Attorney-General's care and protection system report, could you outline the change agenda that is in place under the refreshing the service culture plan?

Ms Burch: The refresh the service culture plan—I think Christine Nolan dreams about it regularly, she has been so closely aligned with this—is definitely a reform process we have put in place following the Public Advocate's report. It covers a range of things. It is about looking at our management systems, looking at our staff recruitment—really going back to the core of how we provide the best suite of responses from the first time that someone takes a phone call for a child concern report. How do we triage those? How do we assess those? How do we then put in case management and decision making about children coming into care? There are about 15 projects I think—discrete pieces of work—that were under that. I understand that certainly the milestone review report makes some comment on those projects. I will let Christine Nolan talk about this. Hopefully, you do not dream about it too often, Christine.

Ms Nolan: No. I can talk in my sleep about this topic, but there are 15 projects. I think there are actually 18 or 19 when you go down to subproject levels. I will not run through all of them but I will talk about some of the most important projects that we have had. One of them was an organisational re-alignment within the office as a whole—OCYFS and particularly within care and protection.

We originally had very few resources devoted within care and protection to our policy development. That has led to some of the criticisms about a number of policies being out of date. So we have created a central policy data and research area within care and protection to try to separate that activity from day-to-day activities and quarantine resources to make sure that we got on with that work of having sound policies and procedures in place.

We also split the role of senior manager, care and protection services, into two senior managers. One is senior manager, protection. That manager manages the front end—the intake and the appraisals and children who have just come into care quite recently or who are on short-term orders. Then there is the senior manager, care. That person manages the children that are on long-term orders—orders longer than two years. They also manage out-of-home care funding and commissioning of these out-of-home care providers. Previously, that sat somewhere else altogether in the office in a quite separate area. It was felt that it was really important to bring the funding of those

community-based services together with the actual children who are on those orders so that we know we have a really tight nexus and that our funding is meeting the children's needs. That is working really well. I think that is what Helen would say about that.

The other thing that we have done is create a quality practice and compliance branch. We now have four senior managers in care and protection. We have the senior manager, protection; the senior manager, care; a senior manager, legal services for our court unit; and a senior manager, quality practice and compliance. That is intended to ensure that we are constantly working to improve the quality of practice, but also auditing and undertaking other activities to maximise the chance of compliance.

We had a senior director and they had gone to another role. We brought back in Jillian Paull. We employed Jillian Paull as a senior director and put her in charge of driving an over-arching quality assurance project for the OCYFS. So that was the organisational re-alignment. It was very important.

The next thing I wanted to mention was the development of an integrated management system for care and protection. We had already gone quite some way down this path at Bimberi. We had found it a really fantastic approach. It ensures that you have a very coherent and aligned set of arrangements for managing your organisation—starting with the strategic framework, moving through policies and procedures that are accessible and easily useable by staff, having risk registers, compliance approaches, and so forth. It all aligns into one powerful set of messages and procedures that guide our business.

We have started developing an integrated management system. That is the process that we are using to refresh all of our policies and procedures. We are looking at every single one of them in a logical order. We are seeing whether they are still the policy stance that we want. We are further specifying what the business processes are, writing practice guidelines for staff and developing checklists and other tools relevant for different parts of that. We will have finished that process of refreshing and developing new policies where we need them by the end of this year. Then, as I mentioned, we are building this new electronic portal to put over the top of all that to make that material really accessible to staff.

We are developing a five-year forward out-of-home care strategy. That is going to ensure that in the future we have the quantum of placements we need and the quality of placements we need, because out-of-home care around Australia is really struggling at the present time. It is very hard for anyone to get enough foster carers. I just read a newspaper article about a week ago that WA child protection staff had been reduced to taking children home with them in some instances in order to have a placement for the children.

It is hard for everyone. It is an expensive business. We really need to look and try to make sure that we have got some of those arrangements right. That strategy, which will have finished by the middle of next year, will actually guide our next round of procurement in terms of purchasing out-of-home care services. The placements module—the out-of-home care module of the integrated management system and the out-of-home care strategy are happening side by side today. They are a very

interactive, iterative process. If we decide to go one way with our strategy then we will need to reflect that in our policies and procedures. So they are really big, really important projects.

While we are on out-of-home care, it is probably worth mentioning that one of the smaller projects was establishing a reception centre so that we were not struggling, as we had been, for emergency placement. We got a house from wonderful Housing ACT. We have had something like 24 children, plus a family, go through that house in the last year or so since it was established. It started operating in December 2011.

We prefer kids to go into a family-based placement, into foster care. We have got very good success rates compared to national rates in terms of keeping kids in family-based care, but where we are really stuck is on a Friday evening and we have not got anywhere for a child to go, or we got a large sibling group. It is very hard for a family to suddenly absorb six kids in one go. We can put those children into the reception centre. We manage the reception centre. Our placement officer manages that. We use Drake staff on shifts to staff that. We have selected and trained Drake staff and Drake is now approved as a suitable entity under our legislation to provide that assistance too. When we do not need the centre operating, we do not have to be paying for it. When we do need the centre operating, we have got a system that can enable it to snap into action.

Some of the other projects under that include the supervision one we mentioned this morning—setting up a kinship care support team. That has been a raging success, I have to say. We had a ministerial roundtable for carers on Tuesday night. We invited every single foster carer or kinship carer in the territory to that forum. We had a great evening, didn't we, minister? We talked about what carers' needs are and how we can best support them. I have had very positive feedback, including from the Foster Care Association yesterday. Certainly, there has been a lot of good feedback about that kinship care support team. It is a dedicated team of four people going out and visiting our kinship carers and making sure that they are getting what they need to support our children.

Establishing the complaints unit and the decision review panel that we talked about earlier have been other projects under this framework. We are just about to roll out decision-making training to most of our 400 staff and also a number of staff from the out-of-home care agencies. We are trying to get everyone really on the same page about what is involved in quality decision making, including the recording and communication elements of that.

We are having a look at our legislation. We are not doing a total overview of the legislation because it is quite new legislation, but we are having a look at some key aspects of it that have come up in these reviews that we feel, or people have suggested to us, it is pressing to look at—

Ms Burch: We are looking to bring them in in March—next week.

Ms Nolan: Yes. We have had child protection case conferencing wrapped up as a project. That has been really good. This is getting people into the room with an independent chair—all the people that are concerned around a family early in the

piece. We believe that that is leading to fewer children coming into care, particularly in the teenage age group. Where mums and dads are saying, “I have had it with this little so and so. I want to sign him into care”, we are asking, “No, is there somewhere he can stay for the next night or two?” We commit to convene a child protection case conference within 48 hours. We are getting the people from children, youth and family services community agencies in to help as well and trying to wrap support around that family to keep that child out of care.

Sometimes when kids come into care, things go great. Sometimes, particularly with teenagers, it gets them on to a very unfortunate trajectory. They may need to change schools in order to get a placement. All sorts of things can go wrong for them that we would just prefer not to have to happen at all if we can keep them at home. That is a bit of an overview of a range of—

Ms Burch: I told you she could talk in her sleep.

THE CHAIR: You have mentioned a triage process and overhauling that. Could you briefly describe what you are proposing there, please?

Ms Burch: Yes, briefly, this is the triage for the intake triage system? Yes. It is an important piece of that reflective practice. Helen or Christine, can you answer that?

Ms Nolan: I am just a little bit unclear about the question. Is that the child protection—

THE CHAIR: You referred to the triage process at the start of your answer. I was interested as to what you were actually referring to because on my—

Ms Burch: When you get a care report, how do you go through that?

THE CHAIR: I am mindful of the Auditor-General’s report which focused on the high number of reports compared to other jurisdictions.

Ms Nolan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: In particular the UK, and proposed training for mandatory reporters.

Ms Burch: Yes.

Ms Nolan: Yes. Sorry, I am just a bit slow on the uptake.

THE CHAIR: That is all right.

Ms Nolan: Yes, we have been really concerned about the volume of child concern reports that we have been receiving because every year it grows. It is quite frightening to think of it continuing to grow at the rate it is. On average it takes us about three hours to look at each of those child concern reports. So we have got to be on the phone to the person trying to get as much detail as we can from them about their concerns. We have to interrogate our own rather clunky information system to see if we have had previous contact. We might ring the school or someone else. Then we

have to have the person talk to their boss and make a decision: will it be no further action, will it be some sort of support intervention, or will we go to a full appraisal? In the long run, if that keeps growing, we are really going to struggle.

While it is not a formal project, we have been doing some work looking at what might be the options for managing that in a slightly different way in the future, including triaging some matters to the community sector. Jillian Paull has been doing that work. She is going to be taking some people from the gateway down to Victoria and Tasmania with her within a fortnight or so to look at the systems in place in Tasmania and then the Child FIRST system in Victoria to see whether it would be possible to actually deflect some of those child concern reports to the gateway, to non-government agencies, so that families are not getting perhaps a knock on the door when they do not need one, but are getting a really supportive, positive engaging response from a less threatening community agency who could help them and our staff are not so much in the situation they are in now of trying to find the needle in the haystack in terms of which cases amongst the 13,000 cases actually need statutory intervention as opposed to no intervention or that might benefit from some other family support. Am I answering your question?

THE CHAIR: I am actually satisfied with the answer. I am conscious that it is time to break for afternoon tea, which I propose that we do now.

Ms Burch: Can we provide a correction to an answer given before?

THE CHAIR: Yes, you may.

Ms Paull: I wanted to correct the numbers that I provided about Parentline funding. Rather than saying “about this amount”, it would be helpful if I gave you the exact numbers. Parentline signed a service funding agreement to the value of \$776,150 per annum. They signed that effective from 1 March 2012. It was to run to 30 June 2015. We also provided to Parentline, along with some other organisations, some funding for one-off establishment costs. For Parentline, we provided them with \$37,364.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. When we return we will move on to those sections of the annual report relating to the Office of Multicultural Affairs, followed by the Office for Women.

Meeting suspended from 3.10 to 3.24 pm.

THE CHAIR: Let us get back into it. We will be considering output class 3.2, multicultural affairs, and then women. Minister, did you want to make an opening statement?

Ms Burch: We will go straight to questions. I made some opening comments earlier.

THE CHAIR: Minister, on page 55, under “Future directions”, you mention reviewing the register of multicultural advisers. What is the role of the register and the advisers and how are they chosen?

Ms Burch: The register is just something we have had going now for a number of

times and it is as it is. People can self-refer and ask to have their names put on it. It is administered and facilitated through the Office of Multicultural Affairs and, through various processes where we may be looking for an adviser or a member to be part of a process that is concerning multicultural affairs, we would look to one of these members. Mr Manikis or Ms Winter?

Mr Manikis: I will take this one. This is a paper-based register of people that are interested in serving on our boards and committees. The Office of Multicultural Affairs, along with the Office for Women and the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, from time to time has had referred to them requests for suitable people from those constituency groups to serve on our ACT government boards and committees, and the role there is to put forward the names of interested parties to the relevant directorate that is responsible for putting together or constructing a committee for cabinet consideration.

What the register of multicultural advisers is supposed to do is contain a repository or a place where there are the resumes of people from the multicultural community who have expressed an interest. We promote this out into the community groups, and people from time to time come to us and say: "We'd like to serve. These are our qualifications." Sometimes they specify certain areas, whether it is an education portfolio committee that they would like to serve on, a legislative committee or an education committee. We hold their names on that register, which is, as I say, paper based at this stage.

We are looking at the possibility in the future of having this as part of a diversity register, but that is something down the track. That is where technology will be able to assist us as well, but at the moment we are making do with files.

THE CHAIR: Minister, what is the policy purpose of this register?

Ms Burch: It is ensuring that we reflect the diversity of our community. As Mr Manikis alluded to, there are some committees and board reps or membership reps of groups. As he was talking, I was trying to think of one. Given that it is half past three, I am very disappointed that I could not, but often through the—

THE CHAIR: Take it on notice.

Ms Burch: Yes. But often, through cabinet and other arrangements across government, we would seek to have a representative body that is reflecting our multicultural community or it could be a gender balance within a committee. The same register applies for the Office for Women. But I am quite happy to come back to you if we have any information about any committees that have drawn on this register.

Mr Manikis: Just to add to that, one of the recent ones we have been able to contribute to is the name of a person for the new Racing and Gambling Commission, for example, which came to us and asked us for suitable members from the multicultural community that may wish to be members of that commission. We were able to draw from that register a suitable candidate that had a bit of legal background, had an interest in that area, and we were able to put that forward.

Similarly, we get quite a few requests from other committees around having some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on boards and committees, and not necessarily just the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-type committees around the place. It was specifically more the mainstream committees who were very keen to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation, and from time to time we were able to contribute there as well.

THE CHAIR: How many people are on the register?

Mr Manikis: At the moment, we have five applications, people that have expressed interest. Whilst we promote it from time to time throughout the year, I understand that at the moment—and we did have up to about 80 at one point a few years ago—when we went to do the refresh about a year or so ago, we have got five at this point in time that are current.

THE CHAIR: Do you have any plans to promote it further?

Mr Manikis: To promote it further?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Manikis: Indeed, yes. Not only that, we do have plans to try to get it in a database sort of thing so that we are able to not only increase the numbers on that register but also make it easier to use.

Ms Burch: When you are promoting it, it is about what you attach that promotion to. So in the lead-up to the multicultural awards ceremony towards the end of the year or around the time of the National Multicultural Festival, that would be the obvious time to do it, when there is a lot of promotion about multicultural community engagement across government areas.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. A substantive question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, I note from volume 2 of the report, page 328, that the directorate provided \$2,500 to the Australian Mon Association. On your behalf, I recently attended the launch of the fantastic *Mon Story Australia*. Minister, in what other ways has the ACT government supported the Mon community through this directorate?

Ms Burch: The Mon are one of our new emerging communities here in the ACT. They have been supported through various multicultural grants, as I understand. They certainly were part of our National Multicultural Festival. They were provided with support to come along, whether it was through costumes or hiring a stall—and Mr Manikis can talk more to that—and also, as I mentioned earlier, a global cricket challenge that is coming up on this weekend.

I remember our first, where there were young Indian and Pakistani folk that clearly knew how to play cricket and to bowl a cricket ball. I obviously do not know how to play cricket. And then there were some young folk from the Mon community in shorts and thongs. One had never held a cricket bat before, but after only a few minutes

instruction he could certainly hit the ball with the best of them. So it is about direct grants, but it is also about being very aware of them as a new and very small community and giving them all those opportunities to come in and be part of that broader Canberra society.

Mr Manikis: Just to add to that a little more for you, the Mon community certainly is one of the newest—not the newest but a relatively new, emerging community. I think the first people arrived here probably about six, seven, eight years ago, and those leaders started off being—and I remember them quite well—almost disoriented, not very well supported. But they have quickly, with the support of some of the multicultural service providers here in town who embraced them and certainly in those early years provided support to them, played pretty starring roles in service-providing organisations. If you look at Companion House or the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services, you will find some of those earlier Mon settlers here in Canberra, those arrivals, playing prominent roles in those organisations.

They do tend to drag their community members into those community service providers' activities throughout the year. We do support them through an array of multicultural grants, and they have been applicants for quite some time, the last five years or so. They do participate in the festival, which of course gives them the opportunity to raise funds for themselves. They do that with relish, and after each festival they come in and report how they have raised funds for their community from that event and are able to pay their bills, because they do get space in the multicultural centre at the community rate. They pay, I think, a cheque once a year for the rental space, which is a notional amount.

So they are a community group that has grown. We have seen them grow, and they are almost self-reliant now. They do enjoy showcasing their culture. The national Mon day is a big part of their calendar and they are highly participative in community activity and supporting others so that there is this chain of support that is starting to occur, not just with their own community members but also supporting more broadly the new arrivals through their various roles in those organisations I mentioned before.

MRS JONES: Just as a supplementary, if I may, we have spoken about the Mon community. They are fairly new and emerging. Can you tell me how many different ethnic and cultural communities we have listed as represented in the ACT and how they are classified, for your own purposes, as emerging or established? And even if you cannot give it to me now, can you get it back to me on notice because I would like to understand better the full breadth of what is here in our community?

Ms Burch: I am happy to. I think there is—

MRS JONES: And maybe your main contact, who you generally go through, so that if there are some synergies across—

Ms Burch: There are around 200 languages that we speak here in the ACT. Mr Manikis can come back with the number of organisations that have set up space within the multicultural offices over in the Notaras building. I do not know how you break from a new, emerging community to an established community but certainly it is important to be mindful that the Sudanese, the African communities, are probably

some of the new ones that have come in after the Mon community. And it is telling when you see their leadership grow up and become connected and then the next generation are coming through.

MRS JONES: There are more-established communities that have clubs and things and I want to try to understand the full breadth of what is here.

Ms Burch: Yes.

Mr Manikis: I will provide something in writing but, in a nutshell, our immigration policy at the national level at most times dictates the make-up of our arrivals here in the ACT. We have an influencing role in that policy through the national forums that we sit on. From time to time we get consulted by the federal government in relation to that, whether it is the migration program or the refugee program, as to where the numbers will fall. All jurisdictions get consulted. But over the years, as the minister has rightly pointed out, we have had the Greeks and the Italians through the 50s and 60s. Then we had the Indo-Chinese in the late 70s, with boat people coming in from that part of the world. Then we had the Balkan war, so we had that group that joined the second wave of Croatians and Yugoslavs. The first wave was back in the 50s and 60s with the Snowy Mountains scheme and the request for labour.

MRS JONES: A nation of migrants.

Mr Manikis: Yes, it is a nation of migrants, but there have been these waves. Those waves, as I say, are largely influenced by national policy and the make-up of the migration program. Where we are up to at the moment is that there is an emphasis on bringing people from African countries over here, for good reason. We are seeing an increase with about 800 Sudanese here in Canberra; and from Kenya, Sierra Leone and Ghana, there are quite a few people. When does a community group mature enough to be labelled as established? With Greeks and Italians, you would not say that they were new and emerging. We should not ever forget that there are still issues in that community.

MRS JONES: Absolutely.

Mr Manikis: From a service delivery point of view sometimes it does become immaterial whether or not they are new or established groups because there are issues across the whole spectrum.

MRS JONES: Of course. It takes a few generations.

Mr Manikis: It does take a few generations.

Ms Burch: It does. With respect to your comment about the older, longer established groups having clubs, that is a bit of a historical artefact as well. That is where a lot of our sporting clubs became established too, with communities of a kind coming together and creating their own safe space to hold strong their community. As generations change and their interests change—we see this play out with a number of clubs—it is about what is the next iteration of that community hub. I do not see on the horizon the newer communities seeking to establish a club as, for example, the

Croatian or the Serbian community did.

MR HANSON: I have a question regarding International Women's Day. Minister, when did you find out that the Office for Women had not opened the application process for the awards?

Ms Burch: The last week before Christmas is when I found out and I did go to have a look at this. I know I signed the brief on 21 December, which is effectively Christmas Eve, if we think about when Christmas was on. It was disappointing to me. When the advice came that the nomination process was not opened—sometimes, Mr Hanson, you have to just take a deep breath and make a decision. Either decision is not ideal. I took the decision at that point to do justice. If you want to do a process that is right and respectful, you needed more time to start effectively. But if I signed that brief off it would have been January before it commenced, and that would have provided a month for going out, calling for nominations and bringing them in. I made the decision, rightly or wrongly, that that was not respectful enough for the intent of the grants.

I took a deep breath and said, "Let's take this opportunity to review and refresh the women's grant process." We had done a similar thing through other women's grants on women's awards. We had done a similar refresh and rethink around our women's grants program, and that will result in targeted grants for the prevention of violence against women. So that is what we have chosen to do. Historically, the women's awards have run for 17 years and have, in the main, gone to women within the community welfare sector. I thought that given that we were in a new century it was right and fitting to look at the scope of those grants. How do we also recognise and value women in academia, in business, in construction, in employment, in industry?

It was a disappointing decision. I made my disappointment known at the time and I have made it known since it got publicity. It is disappointing that it did get that publicity because it was on International Women's Day, when we should have been celebrating International Women's Day and not drawing attention to that slip-up. It has been described as a stuff-up. I did not want to labour the point because the staff in the main do a fabulous job. Sometimes it happens. You have to take a deep breath, make a decision and see how it rolls.

MR HANSON: Have you inquired into why this went wrong? We have been doing it for 17 years. What happened?

Ms Howson: The minister certainly has inquired with us about why we found ourselves in that position.

MR HANSON: I can imagine.

Ms Howson: It is an unfortunate coalition of circumstances where we had some significant changes in a number of players in senior management. We were regrouping after the establishment of the new government and we took our eye off the ball, quite frankly. Our advice to the minister was not timely and it made it very difficult to proceed. Sadly, the nomination process for these awards has been what we consider less than satisfactory in that we were not attracting a depth of quality

nominations. That has been evident over the last few years. We did offer the minister the option of not proceeding, particularly because we were exacerbating the circumstances of undermining the quality of nominations, having to call for the nominations throughout what is essentially Canberra's holiday period.

MRS JONES: In the reassessment of the awards, minister, you have already mentioned that you would like to see these awards potentially go to women in academia, construction and other areas of the workforce. Has any consideration been given to women whose work is not public, is not on display for the whole world to see, women who are on the couch breastfeeding, who are having more than one or two children for the future of this nation, who are doing it tough, who are living on one income, with one breadwinner in the family? These women often go through a lot of very great difficulty in just doing the basics. Is there going to be any scope in the new awards for those women to be recognised too? I think it is something that we perhaps lack across the board—a recognition of that hard work. Those people can tend to feel quite disenfranchised with modern society.

Ms Burch: I agree with you in all aspects. It is part of why I have asked the Ministerial Advisory Council for Women to have a look at this and at what is the scope. I have made mention of that because there were a number of people at the cocktail event that you were at—I hope you enjoyed it, Mrs Jones—at CMAG. Looking around the room, you could see women from all walks of life. You are right; it includes—

MRS JONES: Not so many mums with babies because it is hard to get them in.

Ms Burch: I know it is. Whilst Barnardos might run the Mother of the Year Award, and there are others, I think there is scope to see how we attract women. One of the conversations I have had with the ministerial advisory council is about how they go out and have that conversation with mums at home. It is all very well to have a formal, open consultative process—come along to a meeting room at 6 o'clock at night—but if you have three kids or even one kid and you have to get dinner and everything else, 6 o'clock at night is not going to happen. I would like to see how we go out and talk to mums—child and family centres, for example.

MRS JONES: The Breastfeeding Association.

Ms Burch: CWA, a whole range of groups. During last year, in the earlier part of last year I made a point of going out to different playgroups and women's groups in the child and family centres, just to have a talk. They were not in my time, when I had my youngest at 19, but mothers groups—you are nodding; you know exactly what it is.

MRS JONES: Lifesavers.

Ms Burch: I went in to that group and there were 20 women with young ones from a couple of weeks up to a couple of months. They were forming really strong friendships amongst themselves. The conversation I had with them was very different to the conversation I would have in a room full of professional women. In short, yes, I think we do need to look at that. Whether we disaggregate the awards and have a space for those women—

MRS JONES: Dob in another mum who has done it tough because women sometimes do not get sick leave, work late, get up in the middle of the night, and that is a great service to the community as well.

Ms Burch: Yes. There are other awards but it is about what we need to do with that. I would like to reiterate that it was a mix-up. I just found the focus on the mix-up on International Women's Day took away what we should have been celebrating. I have actually asked the media, given that their interest in the awards of the last few years has been scant to zero—

MRS JONES: We will make sure it is big next year.

Ms Burch: that they come back with renewed interest next year. In relation to the grants for the prevention of violence against women, the inaugural round of grants is open now, as I understand it, and we will be providing an award for people or organisations that are doing extraordinary work in the prevention of violence against women. That will come up in November when there will be 16 days wrapped around the time of White Ribbon Day when we are all as a society looking at how we stop violence.

MRS JONES: Regarding the ACT women's return to work grants, what are the requirements to apply for return to work grants, how are recipients assessed and how are the grounds advertised? As an active woman in the society in this city, I have never heard of them before and I have had trouble going back to work after having babies.

Ms Baker: The return to work grants program is administered through the Women's Information and Referral Centre. As part of that there is an online presence on the website and that is advertised there. There is a lot of outreach that the coordinator of that program does, particularly to the child and family centres, to emerging refugee communities, and it is promoted in a variety of ways. The eligibility is targeted to low income women and that is means tested. It aligns with the part A family tax benefit. That is how it is assessed, so not everybody is eligible. And it is on household income.

MRS JONES: On the same topic, minister, I understand the very real need for us to target these kinds of things to people in the lower socioeconomic area. But there are a lot of women suffering from postnatal depression because they do not know how to get in to earning part-time income. Is any thought ever given to not means testing every availability for women that re-enter the workforce? They might also need less money and a higher success rate. We could target a higher socioeconomic group as well and make it perhaps so that they have some resume writing services. The defence force paid for me to have my resume rewritten at one point because my husband had just been posted here, and it changed my career. It utterly changed my career. That would not have been a high expense item.

Ms Burch: No. What I would say is that we opened up the return to work grants. They were quite limited. I had a conversation with a woman who was 45, who had been a stay-at-home mum and recently found herself separated. In the first tranche of grants she would not have been eligible, so we made those changes and said that if

they had been in a caring role, which is far broader, they can apply.

We are happy to have a look at how we do that, but what I am picking up is again the question of how we promote the other services that we do, through WIRC, which is the Women's Information and Referral Centre. If you do not have the calendar, I will get you the calendar that they produce for six months of activity. They put it out twice a year. It is an extraordinary amount of work that they do. And it is exactly that—bringing women in and updating their CV or showing them how they can update their CV. Perhaps Ms Baker can talk about some of the programs that are offered from WIRC. But what I am picking up from you is still that it is about how we get out to mums that are disconnected from—

MRS JONES: It is tough.

Ms Burch: From a lot of the agencies that we work through. Point taken.

MRS JONES: Yes. They are generally successful people, but they are still frustrated often. I have met a lot of them doorknocking, and if I can take that sort of information I will also be able to help with getting this information out into the community.

Ms Burch: I might ask Ms Baker to talk a bit about it, and we will get you a calendar for sure, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Please.

Ms Baker: The “What’s on for women” calendar includes what the Women’s Information and Referral Centre offers—personal development, financial literacy and thinking Thursdays on a range of topics, advertised in whole-of-government and through the women’s services networks. The Women’s Information and Referral Centre also invites funded community agencies to promote their courses through that calendar. It is, as Minister Burch said, an amazing resource. Child and family centres and counsellors use this quite often as a bible: “This is what you can do. This is where it is.” The Women’s Information and Referral Centre perhaps needs to use online methods more, perhaps social media. I am an older person, but I have seen how much younger people use these strategies and I think there are a number of opportunities that we could look at in that social media area.

MRS JONES: As a supplementary there, has the Women’s Information and Referral Centre ever thought about completely rebranding themselves? For a lot of women, it sounds like a service for people who need help. A lot of women who are quite capable women would not necessarily even go to find out, because they might be afraid. They are already struggling at home, and they might not want to be cast in a light of need. It could be more about going up higher—some terminology about going up. It is neutral, in a way, for government language. Has there ever been any thought given to that? I am sure there are historical reasons why it is what it is.

Ms Burch: It is what it is because it is what it is and it has been for many a year. But the point is taken. As we move through lots of our structures, the work will be around for over a decade. It is about how you refresh, how you get a language that actually reflects what it is and that resonates—

MRS JONES: And that advertises.

Ms Burch: with the next generation of women.

MRS JONES: Yes, absolutely.

Ms Burch: Point taken.

MRS JONES: I have one final supplementary on that point regarding workforce participation, grants and so on. Minister, have you ever given any thought to ways that the ACT government can, through the work you do, create incentives to business to open up workforce placements that are flexible and part time? In Canberra, for a lot of women in my age group or just younger, if they have not had a permanence in their job before they have a baby, it is almost impossible with a baby in tow to then go out and find part-time work. There is also very limited part-time work in this town for people who do not have permanency of tenure. I just wonder if any thought has been given to that or if there are any opportunities to have a workshop or some groups to talk about small business seeing the value of mums and part-time workers. There are obviously some workforces which are generally targeted to that, like nursing or teaching, where those things are common because they are a major women's workforce, but in other areas, like in business or in accounting—

Ms Burch: Broadly, yes and no. We work with a number of organisations—whether they be women's health matters, the YW or various other groups—that say, “How do we progress the advancement of women in employment?” Some of the thinking behind that also feeds into the microcredit program in recognising that women with families need more flexibility and want to be financially independent. So whilst they may not be able to turn up Monday to Friday—

MRS JONES: Nine to five.

Ms Burch: or nine to five, they might have an aspiration for a catering firm or whatever. There is child education; we have seen dressmaking and a whole range of things come through microcredit. That has been quite successful. And there are a lot of older women, a lot of migrant women and a lot of younger women with young families who want that flexibility as well.

I am quite happy to raise that notion with the ministerial advisory council and say, “What can we do about that?” When we look at impediments to returning to work, it is around child care as well. There is a fabulous group down my way that I think is a sister from the Majura mothers group. There is a Brindabellas women's group. They get together with comradeship and friendship, and they do an activity as part and parcel of that. They all say, “If we did not have child care right next door, we would not be able to come and get together.” I know you have made reference to family day care, and I think we need to do some more promotion of family day care so that women know that there is that flexibility out there.

MRS JONES: And childcare swapping with other mums and lots of things which women have not necessarily thought of. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, did you conduct a survey of people attending the latest National Multicultural Festival?

Ms Burch: Not personally with my own pen in hand.

THE CHAIR: Your directorate.

Ms Burch: We certainly do. We do that each and every year. You get a sense of the feel of the people, but the survey has validated that it was very successful. I might ask Mr Manikis to talk to that.

Mr Manikis: Once again, this year we have conducted a formal survey; the results of that will be known in the next month or so.

THE CHAIR: Did you also get some feedback from stallholders?

Mr Manikis: As far as feedback from stallholders is concerned, we have certainly had a great deal of feedback from a number of sources, but specifically from stallholders—I will ask Jancye Winter to answer that.

Ms Winter: We have had many complimentary emails coming in from stallholders since the festival was held. In conjunction with that, we fund the Canberra community consultative forum to hold two feedback sessions. They will be held in the next couple of months to seek feedback around the festival. One of those forums will be for the general community to give feedback about what they see as future directions for the festival; the other will be for the stallholders themselves to provide us with feedback.

THE CHAIR: Minister, is there any evidence of a sense in communities outside Canberra that the Multicultural Festival is a national event?

Ms Burch: I am increasingly getting that sense—that it is becoming part and parcel of the national forum. I think that part was from the—is it GoConnect?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Burch: GoConnect last year on SBS did some film and some footage on that; they promoted it through—is it free TV?

THE CHAIR: Internet.

Ms Burch: Internet TV—ITV or something like that. But also, in the last festival we had the multicultural commissioner from South Australia in town, and she was very keen to have a look at how they can replicate our festival in South Australia. I did not want to disappoint her and say that only Canberra can do it as well as we do, but we have heard that she has since established a unit within the office for multicultural affairs there with a view to planning a multicultural festival for South Australia based on the model that we have, which is around community participation, with local acts being supported by local embassies and other groups—importing what they consider to be their show acts, so to speak. It is very comforting to know that South Australia is

following in the ACT's footsteps. Given that it is the festival state, it is very comforting.

MRS JONES: With regard to the stalls at the Multicultural Festival, I did not want to make a big thing out of it but I wanted to ask this. A number of stallholders—at least a few of them—said to me that they were inspected up to 11 times on Saturday. I understand that at the festival the year before they had an issue with an outbreak of unhealthy food, so I understand why it was taking place, but one poor guy was trying to sell deep-fried sweets; he had no drinks, no meat, no nothing, and he was inspected 11 times in one day. Was that unintentional, accidental, a bit over the top?

MR HANSON: They were tasting his sweets, were they? They were good?

MRS JONES: I am sure they were good.

Mr Manikis: You are right: the year before we had stalls—I think it was just one; it might have been two stalls out of the 335—that were responsible as a source of food poisoning. Last year as well, in the 2012 festival, we had a deep engagement with the health department, ACT Health, in terms of health inspectors. They do assist us in the organisation and the planning; we bring the stallholders in around December each year and lay out the obligations. We let them know that there will be health inspectors on the site. I think we had eight health inspectors in 2012, and that was increased to 15 health inspectors for 2013.

This is an event which prides itself on food and entertainment, and we have got to get those two things right. We have had feedback from some multicultural community food stallholders who really do not mind the inspections happening. We have had others, one or two, who have—it is not so much in the terms that you have put it, that they were over-inspected, inspected 11 times. I will not pass judgement on that, because I am not sure what the health inspectors at the time were doing, what was going on there. If that was happening to every single food stallholder, I am confident that we would have heard about it. If it was an isolated case, which it sounds like it is, it is something where it could be anything that would have motivated that sort of behaviour.

I am not saying it is good or bad. All I am saying is that we just do not have the information for the motivation.

MRS JONES: Maybe you could take on notice to get a bit of information back to me about the decisions that were made around that so that I can represent back?

Ms Burch: We are happy to provide what we can, but we may need to talk with the public health office unit because that sits within their realm. Certainly the office can come back with what they can.

MRS JONES: Thank you; that would be great.

MS BERRY: I was happy to see that Companion House received a grant from the Office for Women to run a program for Sudanese women in west Belconnen to help with leadership skills and protect their cultural practices. Are you able to expand on

this program and do you know how many women were able to participate?

Ms Burch: I might ask Ms Baker to come back up and, whilst she is settling in, I again reflect on a group of south Sudanese women that are managing the White Nile catering group. I know you have all been to a citizenship ceremony, and they are—

MS BERRY: Just about scone-ed out.

Ms Burch: Just about, or lamington-ed out. But that is a great way for the office to support that very small social enterprise to get a little bit of a leg-up.

Ms Baker: Thank you for that question, Ms Berry. This small project attracted \$4,000 from what is called a capacity building category of the ACT women's grants. The quantum of that grant program is \$100,000. With a very small amount of money, they developed a CD, which has a number of outcomes, I guess. So the process in itself is building their confidence and their leadership skills. It is also embedding their culture within the next generation.

I do not know whether anyone saw it on TV, but they have had a lot of inquiries from schools and other organisations to buy that CD. And that is great because then it is sharing the cultures too. So they are certainly able to apply for another women's grant. The women's grants are one-off funding. That is what the Office for Women does. It administers that program. We do not really administer ongoing funding, by and large.

Ms Howson: I could add, though, that the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre have a continuing relationship with the Sudanese community and they have essentially adopted that centre as their community meeting place. So women with their children meet, I think it is, weekly. It might be a bit more or less frequent than that. But I have been out there a couple of times and there would be somewhere in the vicinity of 30 women and their children using that centre after school through into the evening, clearly connecting. Of course, all the service providers are hovering around and making themselves very accessible to be able to support those women and their children.

MS BERRY: As a supplementary, how many women participated in that?

Ms Baker: The funding agreement was for up to 20 women but I guess the group grows week by week.

THE CHAIR: Other supplementaries.

Ms Burch: Before you go to that, can I just make an offer—and I think I do this at every annual report hearing—to ask the agency to coordinate with one of our child and family centres a suitable date and put an invitation out, particularly to the newer MLAs, to come out and visit. I think Mr Hanson went out to visit one a number of years ago. You can get to see first-hand the work that they do.

THE CHAIR: I have a supplementary there. Minister, what programs do you run or fund that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in particular?

Ms Burch: Mr Manikis or Ms Baker may go to that. Again, Shane Rattenbury may have more detail, but for the Office for Women I know it is important that we support all women, regardless of their faith, age and cultural background.

Ms Baker: Again, through the ACT women's grants program, last year we funded the nannies group. I do not know whether people are aware of that. That is a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders, and they meet. I think the women's grants program has supported them with, again, small amounts of money maybe three or four times. They definitely got one in 2011-12. I do know that in partnership with the YWCA of Canberra we have funded a young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership program. So those kinds of things are happening and—

Ms Burch: And also, if I may, two directorates, ETD and CSD, had an early childhood scholarship program. That is supporting Aboriginal women that are coming in and predominantly getting a cert III and then supporting them should they wish to get a diploma level to be early childhood educators. It gives them employment opportunities, and it certainly increases our Aboriginal participation in the workforce.

Mr Manikis: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership grants which have been going for a couple of years now also support, in the main, potential leaders. I think in the latest grants, most of those dollars went to young Aboriginal women here in the ACT.

THE CHAIR: But, minister, neither of those last two programs you have mentioned are women specific?

Ms Burch: No. In regard to the scholarship program, if there were Aboriginal fellows that wanted to be early childhood educators, I do not think we would bar that because that would be a great role model for Aboriginal families as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. A substantive question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: In relation to the ACT language policy, on page 52, it says that the language policy explicitly expresses the ACT government's four commitments to language in the ACT. One of those commitments is that all Canberrans will have the opportunity to acquire English language skills. Minister, how many migrants in Canberra are currently accessing language skills provided by the ACT government and where are those programs provided, at CIT, by whom and where and how much?

Ms Burch: We would have to come back to you with the numbers—and Nic Manikis can go into more detail—but there are a range of English language support programs. It is for those that are coming through the migrant, refugee and settlement support, which is funded through Education and Training. They provide a home tutor program. The Gungahlin Regional Community Services also advertises an English conversation group. We have made a commitment to establish a unit at Wanniasa.

We know that there is a similar unit supporting primary school kids, in the main, that are coming through with English as a second language. I am trying to think of the suburb where that is. There is the Dickson one. We will bring it back for you. But it is also at CIT. Education and Training offers, at both a primary and secondary level,

adult education providers in the community and offers conversational support as well.

If you are a migrant, you have access to a particular level of English support and, at various elements of visa and status, you also are eligible for different language support. I am happy to bring back a suite of what we are capturing, as much as we can, across those programs.

MRS JONES: Do we do any data collection on outcomes? I am particularly asking because I met a number of women while doorknocking during the campaign who want to improve their English. They often do not have a car, they are living out in the suburbs, some have been in Australia for some time so they might not qualify for a tutor in the home. It would be really great if there was some sort of centralised piece of information about all of those services that could be disseminated because I want to see more women able to speak the language and access this great society.

Mr Manikis: The Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services have some terrific programs, both English language teaching and conversation class. So it is at different levels. At any time if you go over to the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre, where that organisation is based, you often see groups of 10, 15, 20—and mostly women too, I might add—in the classrooms over there during the day. The conversation classes are normally run by volunteers. We do provide funding for the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services to undertake some of those activities through our grants that we give them. I might add, under the women's grants as well, they have accessed funds for women's English writing classes as well. So I think the courses are out there. You are right; I think it is a matter of getting that information to the people that need it, I suppose.

MRS JONES: And is it all centralised? Is there stuff going on in the far edges of the new parts of the city where you have got a large proportion of people who may not be mobile and are terribly far from home? They are often more traditional families where, if there is a car, the husband will probably take the car and then they have only got the ability to catch a bus and this is possibly even during school hours.

Ms Burch: I know Gungahlin CIT offers language. We hope, once we redevelop a learning centre down at Tuggeranong, that we will be able to offer it there as well. But I think it is also about how we promote, through the office, more broadly around particularly those conversational-type bases. And we put a lot of effort into new arrivals and refugees. But if you migrated here 30 years ago and raised your family and in many ways were quite isolated within your home unit, you could find yourself a 50-year-old male or female with quite limited skills.

That is where I would like to look to—groups, whether they are the local senior groups, having a clear focus on that inclusion for multicultural communities. I know from conversations with an earlier president down at Tuggeranong seniors, an over-55 club, that one of her goals—she has since moved on; so I need to tap the new president on the shoulder for him to pick it up—was about how you bring in those older people in the community that would benefit from being part of groups such as the seniors club.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, members.

MRS JONES: Sorry, one last supplementary.

THE CHAIR: No, it is after 4.15, Mrs Jones. You can put it on notice. Before I adjourn, I would just like to remind members that the committee has resolved that supplementary questions are to be lodged with the Committee Office within four business days of receipt of the transcript of this hearing. The committee asks that witnesses respond within 10 working days of the receipt of those questions. Answers to questions taken on notice are to be provided five business days after the hearing at which they were taken, with day one being the first business day after the question was taken. The committee's hearing for today is adjourned and the committee's next public hearing on annual reports is at 9.30 am tomorrow, Friday, 15 March 2013, with the Minister for Health.

The committee adjourned at 4.16 pm.