



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2012-2013](#))

**Members:**

**DR C BOURKE (Chair)**  
**MR A WALL (Deputy Chair)**  
**MS Y BERRY**  
**MS N LAWDER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**TUESDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2013**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Mr T Rowe (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.....52**

## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

## **The committee met at 1.31 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

Chapman, Ms Sue, Deputy Director-General

Manikis, Mr Nic, Director, Community Participation Group, Policy and Organisational Services

Baker, Ms Fiona, Acting Manager, Office for Women, Community Participation Group, Policy and Organisational Services

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

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

Whitten, Ms Meredith, Executive Director, Disability ACT

Hambleton, Mr Graham, Director, Disability ACT

Baumgart, Mr Richard, Director, Policy, Planning and Sector Development, Disability ACT

Sheehan, Ms Maureen, Executive Coordinator, ACT National Disability Insurance Scheme Taskforce

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services for its inquiry into annual and financial reports for 2012-13. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you, Minister Burch, and your relevant directorate officials for coming today. This afternoon the committee will be examining the following areas: Office for Women; Office of Multicultural Affairs; child, youth and family services; care and protection services; disability and therapy services; disability services; and policy and therapy services. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement before you on the table. Minister, could you and your officials confirm for the record that you all understand the privilege implications of the statement.

**Ms Burch:** Yes; thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes, and are being webstreamed and broadcast live. Minister, before we proceed to questions from the committee, would you care to make an opening statement?

**Ms Burch:** Thank you, chair; I will make a brief opening statement on the portfolio responsibilities for women, multicultural affairs, care and protection, disability and Therapy ACT.

I will start with multicultural affairs, an area where we continue to have strong

engagement with our community. One of the main vehicles for this engagement is the successful National Multicultural Festival. This is accompanied by a range of programs that support the multicultural community, such as the work experience and support program, the ACT multicultural awards, the multicultural grants programs and our community language schools.

As Minister for Women, I continue to work to bring about improvements to the status of women in Canberra. We work across agencies to address issues such as homelessness, experience of violence and barriers to education and employment. Our 2013 progress report on the women's plan provides a clear picture of the government's substantial investment in services and programs, both targeted and mainstream, and the impact that they have had on the lives, interests and aspirations of women and girls in the ACT.

Moving to care and protection, an area at the forefront of our efforts to support vulnerable children and young people, I am pleased that there continue to be significant improvements in progress in the area. For example, work continues on the out-of-home care five-year strategy. An issues paper and research paper have been released for comment and a carers survey has been conducted. The strategy has had input from carers, and I am pleased to have been able to attend two carer roundtables this year, with a third one planned in the near future. It has been great to hear directly from carers about their ideas, suggestions and concerns.

In relation to the operations of care and protection services, the integrated management system team continues to develop revised policies and procedures.

Finally, as we move to the national disability insurance scheme, which will be launched here in July next year, preparations for this major reform are well underway. The \$7.7 million enhanced service offer grants, which have already benefitted more than 800 Canberrans with a disability, have encouraged people to plan for reasonable and necessary supports. A range of accommodation models have been explored; for example, the home share pilot is providing home-sharing arrangements to enable people with a disability to share a home with people without a disability. In addition, at the moment the getting a life intentional community is supporting three young men with a disability to embark on independent lives.

Therapy ACT continues to have high levels of client satisfaction through the provision of quality services and supports. For example, in 2012-13 it expanded the use of therapy assistants in schools as a way of enhancing students' access to therapy services.

In closing, I would like to take an opportunity to thank the executive and the officials here, and all those that do great work across our community, for the work they do in supporting many of the vulnerable folk in Canberra. I thank them for their work.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. I shall kick off with a question. On page 66 in volume 1, it states:

During 2012-13, the Women's Plan Implementation Group comprising senior executives from ACT Government agencies and the Chair of the Ministerial

Advisory Council on Women worked on the delivery of the ACT Women's Progress Report.

Could you tell us some more about what the highlights of that report might be, minister?

**Ms Burch:** That report was released in the second half of last year, and it certainly did highlight the work that we have put into place. The women's plan is for 2010 to 2015. We have committed to do two progress reports; this was, I understand, the first progress report. We also worked very closely with the ministerial women's advisory council. The ministerial women's advisory council also did a shadow report on that, and both are available online.

Let me go to some of the performances that I am very pleased about. The snapshot confirms that ACT women are participating in the workforce at a far greater level than they are nationally and also that women's incomes and financial security are stronger here than elsewhere. But let me go to some of the projects that we have worked very closely on. One example is violence prevention. That is a key aspect of working on the women's plan. That includes working with groups such as ANU on effectively violence prevention around a focus on consent—that if there is no consent, there ain't nothing going on, so to speak. I would look to that. Perhaps Mr Manikis or one of the officials from the office can talk to that.

**Ms Chapman:** The women's plan report highlights a range of good work that has been done. The women's safety audits are one of the particular things that the women's plan focused on. That has become, I believe, embedded in many of the territory's initiatives. So if there is a major function, like the multicultural festival, doing a safety audit has become part of the preparations for those kinds of events.

The ACT women's microcredit program has been very successful and has helped a lot of women to start their own businesses, helped them prepare for going back into work. The return-to-work grants program that we have running also helps women who are re-entering the workforce after being away for a long time. In 2012-13, 150 return-to-work grants of \$1,000 each were provided. Since the establishment of that program, I might add, 672 grants have been approved.

So there has been a range of pieces of work being done through the women's plan. The other piece of work that was done in concert with that, which was the data collection, the aggregation of data about women and young females, is also proving very useful from a policy development point of view, because we now have a database that we can use when we are thinking about policy initiatives that will impact on women.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, what are the next steps in this progress report?

**Ms Burch:** What we will do now is look to the information that we have got. Certainly in the conversation with particularly women's groups it is about how we harness and keep on having access to disaggregated data that is relevant for the women's sector and program and policy development. We will work across that.

Let me say another thing going back to your original comment on the progress report: this is deeper and broader than just the Office for Women collating programs together. It is very much a whole-of-government approach. It covers, for example, a confirmed increase in access to child care. If we want to continue our high rates of workforce participation and women being involved in the workforce or training and other opportunities that they may wish to take up, we have to ensure that there are good quality childcare services in place for them to be able to participate in other activity.

Also, if we look to education and training, how do we ensure that vulnerable young women who may be young parents continue to have access to quality education? The commitment to CC Cares is very much at the forefront of making sure that being a young parent should not disadvantage you or disengage you from opportunities through good quality education and care.

And if we look to the child and family centres, we are increasingly working with them as a hub for supporting women in the community, not only to access good parenting advice and good family-oriented advice, but around a whole range of other services that ensure that women have access to the services where they want them and that we reduce those barriers for access.

We will produce a second report and will continue to work with the ministerial advisory council about how we can finetune the data collection process and look through the implementation group to ensure that our effort is smart effort in collecting all of this data. The next progress report will be in the latter part of next year.

**THE CHAIR:** And the work has begun on the next women's plan to take it beyond 2015?

**Ms Burch:** Yes. Given that it takes some time to develop a plan, we will look to the progress report and the conversations that we have had with interested participants, particularly through the community conversations, for want of a better word, that the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women had. They were well attended by individuals and leaders within the different women's groups. We will look to that narrative and we will finetune and start the work on a plan that will be in place ready for 2015. But I would expect with those filters around looking at women across economic and social planks—those filters, with three key planks—we will continue making sure that work will continue. Those planks—financial security; health and wellbeing; education and training; safety and access to justice—will continue but how the plan will look will be evidenced in the cooking, so to speak, Dr Bourke, in 2015.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Ms Berry, a substantive question.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, chair. I have a question regarding the ACT prevention of violence against women and children strategy, particularly relating to the use of safety assessments. Can you explain what these look like?

**Ms Burch:** This is where we look at events or we look at broader planning and development. We have looked at it with key events. How do we literally walk through the festival or the events footprint with the lens of the safety audit? There is a developed tool. We have trained a number of assessors, and we will walk through the

event, making note of what is access, what the lighting looks like, what is access to facilities and a range of matters. I am sure that assessment is probably available online as well. That comes back to the event organiser and any finetuning is done. I might go to Mr Manikis, because we have used that for the last couple of years at the multicultural festival.

**Mr Manikis:** So what it looks like is that there is a panel of women who come together and make an assessment. And if we talk about the National Multicultural Festival as an example, I do remember the panel of women did go across the footprint and have a look at areas that would present some concern for women, especially after dark. The impact of that was that the organisers, us for example, had a point, say, near London Circuit where the audience at the festival, particularly women, knew that they could come there at these times and a security guard would be there to escort them to their car, wherever it was parked. So that is just a practical outcome, just one—some would say minor, but I think a good example—of a women’s safety assessment providing a good, practical outcome.

**MS BERRY:** And how were the people on the panel selected?

**Mr Manikis:** As far as I know, the panel that I dealt with were some representatives from MACW and from some of the key women’s groups here in Canberra. There was also a woman who had a disability and who had a different lens on the site. There were a few things we needed to adjust as well for accessibility. So it went from women’s safety and sort of lunched into accessibility, which is good for everybody on the footprint anyway. And that was the experience we had with that group. They made, I think, about 20 different recommendations and we addressed all of them. I think from year to year, as we address them, we are mindful for the next time around as well.

**MS BERRY:** How did you manage the diversity that was on the panel? I know it was sort of centred on the multicultural festivals.

**Mr Manikis:** Yes. That was just one panel.

**MS BERRY:** So there is more than one?

**Mr Manikis:** I think there are different panels.

**Ms Burch:** We may go to Ms Howson, because we have actually put some effort into training and a register of these assessors as well. So Ms Howson may be able to help further.

**Ms Howson:** We have asked for volunteers, and they have made up the membership of the panel and, as far as we possibly can, as Mr Manikis has already suggested, we are looking for women that will bring a different perspective on safety. Those panel members are trained, and there is also a tool kit which is available online for those assessors to apply. That tool kit would inform any event organiser as well about the issues that they need to be mindful of when they are planning the layout of their particular event and spaces and some of the services that they would need to have in place to ensure that women do feel safe in environments around these sorts of events.



I think a number of centenary of Canberra events have also used these panel members to do these audits this year. This was, I think, one of the great ideas that have come out of the Ministerial Advisory Council for Women. They came up with this suggestion back in 2010 and, with the minister's support, we have enthusiastically trialled this method and applied it, as Mr Manikis has said, to the Multicultural Festival. Our intention would be that we continue to promote this across the ACT government and to our colleagues in a range of directorates that are hosting events and see it as a core piece of effective planning for a successful event.

**MS BERRY:** And you said that it was mostly based around safety and security for women but that other issues were often raised or addressed during those meetings.

**Mr Manikis:** Certainly, from my experience, that has been the case. And we have referred, in our case, to the relevant authority, like TAMS if it is something to do with the physical infrastructure. If there are some deficiencies there that need addressing, that is where we pass a concern on.

**MS BERRY:** I have some memories of people raising concerns around access for prams or the manoeuvrability of prams through different events that were held and how that was addressed. That is the sort of thing you would send over to TAMS?

**Mr Manikis:** Yes. That particular one is also about how you configure the layout as well, which is our responsibility. People with wheelchairs or prams going over broken pavers or what have you is the sort of stuff that would go over to TAMS. Making room for prams to go through the crowds is another issue that we address through reconfiguring.

**Ms Howson:** Those sorts of issues would be the responsibility of event organisers. This particular initiative is very much focused on prevention of violence. It is under our umbrella of the prevention of violence against women and children. It is one of the key initiatives that have come from our thinking under that strategy. So it is about safety for women particularly.

**MS BERRY:** And one of the things that you said that you used to address some of the concerns that were raised by the panel in the assessments that they did was having security officers escort people back to cars. Were there other examples of ways that you addressed some of their concerns?

**Mr Manikis:** That was a classic example of something that we could do that was positive.

**Ms Howson:** Excuse me, Nic, I might just come in there. Things like lighting—I think Nic was just about to say that—spaces, advice on the footprint so that the footprint was not creating space that could present a risk to women, and access to security sites and hubs are the sorts of things that would be commented on in the assessment process.

**Mr Manikis:** And a children's sanctuary. We did one of those, which is a rest and respite place for mums and bubs.

**Ms Burch:** And just where you locate your basic loos and facilities and make sure they are accessible, they have got good lighting and there is no hidden spots around them.

**THE CHAIR:** Substantive, Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** I refer to page 68 of volume 1. The second paragraph has some statistics about the about the number of contacts with the Women's Information and Referral Centre. I wonder whether you could tell me how many women accessed the services during this reporting period as a result of an ACT court mandate.

**Ms Burch:** I do not know that we would have that number. We do not say, when they come in, whether they have come from any particular precinct or area. That is my understanding.

**Mr Manikis:** I could run down the top 10 issues by way of background.

**MS LAWDER:** Perhaps you could take that on notice.

**Mr Manikis:** Yes.

**Ms Burch:** From our information, the top 10 issues raised were general information, WIRC support groups and information sessions, WIRC courses, information on domestic violence, information on financial matters, and then you are getting down into five per cent was legal, four per cent was publications, 4.6 per cent was mental health, 4.4 per cent was counselling and 4.2 per cent was education and training. So if you look at the top three, they are around general information. I think that reflects the numbers of people accessing either online or through the phone just to get some general information.

**MS LAWDER:** What I was trying to get at was that, with the recent talk of the closure of the Women's Information Referral Centre and the courses that are run there, there may be a lack of non-custodial options for women and what that might mean for women, given the information that we have that a number of people access the Women's Information Referral Centre because of a court order.

**Ms Burch:** I do not know where you get that information from. The court order determined that they needed to go to something at WIRC?

**MS LAWDER:** Yes, a course.

**Ms Howson:** I am just speculating here. We would probably need to take that question specifically on notice.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you.

**Ms Howson:** But I can imagine women might be referred to, for example, financial planning and financial literacy programs. And in that respect, those programs certainly are offered by the Women's Information Referral Centre but they are also

offered by a range of other providers. In fact, that was one of the issues that informed some of our decisions around the Women's Information Referral Centre. There was some duplication on a number of the programs that were being offered, and our expectation is that we can augment those programs that are being offered by other non-government organisations in the community, for example, the Women's Centre for Health Matters, who run programs in this area of financial literacy. So that particular requirement could be met through referral to programs that are offered by other agencies.

**MS LAWDER:** Of the courses that WIRC did offer, including personal development courses, what plans does the government have for alternatives to running those courses?

**Ms Burch:** The first six months of next year's calendar is being collated at the minute, and a number of these courses are offered through community partners or—and I use the words—private consultants who would put an interest out to WIRC that they will run a program. Whilst a good number are free, a good number of the programs on offer attract a fee. And that is predominantly through those private consultants. It is my understanding that there is still the capacity to run those, either through the Theo centre or through other locations, whether it be the child and family centres or certainly a number of community orgs. The Centre for Women's Health Matters have said that they can run courses on their site because it is consistent with the other offerings that they do. Sue?

**Ms Chapman:** Just some additional information: there are a range of courses, some of which are the financial services ones that we have talked about. We fund the YWCA to run those for women in the Tuggeranong area. The women's personal and professional development courses are run through WIRC but not necessarily by WIRC staff. They are contracted. And those facilities and those types of courses could still be run and paid for in the grants program that we currently have.

Those grants will continue to the other agencies that we already provide grants to, domestic violence, for example, and those non-government organisations. So there will not be a change in that area.

The other thing that women have come to WIRC in the London Circuit building for is information—brochures, books and things like that—and that kind of information can be available anywhere. We can make sure that it is available anywhere as well as online. It could be at child and family centres, libraries—where women go—women's health centres and so on. So most of the courses that are run can be run anywhere and, by and large, are currently run by other people, not WIRC staff.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Jones, a substantive question.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, with regard to the closure of the Women's Information Referral Centre, on what date was notice given to vacate the building and on what date was the decision taken to close the centre?

**Ms Burch:** The decision to vacate?

**Ms Chapman:** The decision to vacate in terms of the date, I think, was probably in late September, but I would have to take it on notice. The lease runs out at the end of January. That was a driving force for when we had to give notice, because we had to give three months notice, I think. It was probably then.

**MRS JONES:** Just as a subsidiary to that, was there substantive tension between WIRC and the Office for Women about the driving of the closure of the service?

**Ms Howson:** Do you want me to answer that?

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**Ms Howson:** No.

**MRS JONES:** Finally, given that the Women's Information Referral Centre was one of the only non-mandatory reporting services where women could come and talk about something going on that then did not necessarily end in a description of their situation going on to another agency, can you guarantee that services that will fill the gap will also give that opportunity to women who are perhaps in quite vulnerable situations and do not necessarily want to report to a place that has a mandatory reporting requirement?

**Ms Burch:** The question infers that every agency of government has a mandatory reporting, and I would dispute that. If you go to the library, if you go to CONTACT Canberra, if you go to the child and family centres, if you go to a number of our non-government agencies to seek information, to seek support, that does not equate to any mandatory reporting.

**MRS JONES:** That is different to information that I have been given, but that is fine. Thank you so much.

**Ms Burch:** Can I say that there is misinformation out there. I would accept that it is important for us now to move quickly to publish the calendar for the first six months of next year. I think that would be a vehicle to reassure the broader community about the consistency and the continuance of a number of programs. We are mindful of that.

**MRS JONES:** Can you give a short explanation about why the service was cut when it seems that when the annual report was completed, there was no mention of it or no preparation for it? Can you give a brief explanation of the thinking that has gone into it?

**Ms Burch:** I think the thinking has been said. It is that if you looked at this model that was in place for 35 years, you have to ask, "How does it match a contemporary range of service provision?" given, as I have said before, that we have now got a physical presence in the suburbs—good services that women access. It was just a decision to reduce that duplication and to really embed these services where the women are. A consistent message I had from women was, "Have it near me. Have this service near me." Many women in the suburbs thought that Civic was difficult for them to get to.

**MRS JONES:** If a woman was in an abusive situation and wanted a service far away

from home, would that still be available in some form or other?

**Ms Burch:** We will have a presence in Civic. The other thing we are thinking about is vacating the central CBD. But we will have a presence within Civic as well. There will be a presence in Civic. There will be a clear presence through our infrastructure that is out in the suburbs. Also, our community partners are certainly part of this—the Women’s Centre for Health Matters, the Y and these other organisations, including the Multicultural Advisory Group. We are all aware that change causes a level of tension, but we are certainly all aware that this will be a good outcome once it is bedded down.

**MRS JONES:** I think you mentioned before that there was no written plan as yet as to how to deliver these services once this centre is closed. When can we expect that to be completed?

**Ms Burch:** There was always a broader high level plan about pulling it out into the community, into the suburbs. But I interpreted that question—and I remember it now, Mrs Jones—as being about what is on for women. If you are looking at that six-month calendar, we are pulling that together now. As I have just said, I think that will be a demonstration about how these services will continue. I think it is important that we pull that together. Regardless of whether the Civic office closed, it would always be about this time that we started pulling that together anyway, because that is just the nature of the beast.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, I want to talk more about financial literacy since we have had a little bit of a go on that. On page 270 of volume 1 it is stated, “Through 2012-13 ACT women’s grants program funding through the Women’s Centre for Health Matters in partnership with Care Inc will provide financial literacy training and develop resources for older women.” How are these programs different from the previous financial literacy programs?

**Ms Burch:** Thank you, Dr Bourke. Certainly one of the key messages we have heard is around financial literacy or financial security for women and how do we give women access to good financial information, knowing that, particularly for older women, their finances historically are not as good as the male counterpart? It is wrapped up with a whole range of matters around work, work patterns, superannuation and all of that.

What we are doing here is funding resources for training that in particular supports disadvantaged groups of women by providing basic financial information. It recognises that a one-size-fits-all-approach does not fit everybody. We have provided the Women’s Centre for Health Matters with about \$24,000 through the grants program to support older women.

That will look like a series of free financial training sessions, access to resources relevant to that particular target group and also the centre is putting together an online information hub to help women to locate targeted information that is from a reliable source. If you scan the web, there is all sorts of information out there, but the Women’s Centre for Health Matters will give it a bit of an integrity test to make sure that what they are promoting through their information hub is of a decent nature.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you be a little more specific about the program's content and duration and what the achievables for the participants are?

**Ms Howson:** I am not sure if any of our officials can go into that detail about the Women's Centre for Health Matters financial programs. Fiona, can you give some more information on that? While Fiona is coming up, I do know that these programs have been informed by an element of research that has underpinned the decisions around the targeting of these programs.

**Ms Burch:** The Y also provides some financial literacy programs, but they are targeted more at the younger women.

**Ms Baker:** The funding that went to the Women's Centre for Health Matters was in particular to do a number of things. One is to have some forums and unpack what it is that is needed by the different marginalised groups of women. We have talked about older women, but it is also refugee women. You can understand that their particular financial literacy needs might be quite different. There are also women in the justice system—women exiting prisons. They have particular issues. There are also women experiencing domestic violence.

We gave them a grant at the end of the financial year. They are pulling together that information and then tailoring training for those groups of women. So I cannot tell you exactly—that is what they are gathering. It will be a sustainable resource, or a number of sustainable resources, for those different groups of women. More broadly, the financial literacy information hub is for all women to try and navigate their way through those difficult financial decisions that you might need to make at different life stages.

**THE CHAIR:** Single older women are also at significantly greater risk of homelessness. What is being done in that area?

**Ms Howson:** That is under Minister Rattenbury's responsibility.

**Ms Burch:** It is not within this portfolio, but certainly we are very much aware of the vulnerability of older women. If they are separating from the family home, they are more likely not to have the wherewithal and are exposed financially to homelessness, but also access to super and the family's wherewithal. In a broader sense, this financial literacy program is really targeted at these women so they can take their independence and control over the resources that they have access to. But certainly I would ask that you ask Minister Rattenbury about the various homelessness programs.

**MS BERRY:** I had a question regarding the Audrey Fagan enrichment grants. It looks like a fantastic program. Could tell me a little more about those?

**Ms Burch:** Yes, the Audrey Fagan enrichment grants have really got a target of younger women. We have got a number of Audrey Fagan grants. We have recently reviewed all our women's grants programs. But the enrichment grants of \$2,000 are targeted at younger women that have aspirations about their careers. Last financial year I think we gave out seven grants. To date, 20 enrichment grants have been

awarded totalling \$30,000.

I have seen the young women when they have received their grants. As I move through the community at different functions, a number of the young women who have received grants have come up to me and told me how they deeply appreciate the grants and how they have changed their lives. It relates to all interests. For example, there was a young woman who is a violin maker who got a grant. She had a fantastic internship, for want of a better word, to make a violin. Every time she sees me she thanks me for that. One went to a young woman who was supported to go to a water skiing championship. The grants relate to sport, music and education. A whole range of things have been supported through this. It is very much targeted, I think, up to the age of 18—from 13 to 18.

**MS BERRY:** Is their financial need taken into account when the assessments are made for the grants?

**Ms Baker:** Assessment panels do look at that as—it influences them if they are less financially able to finance something like a violin-making course.

**MS BERRY:** How many of the grants that were released this year were awarded to women to study in non-traditional trades or academic pursuits. You mentioned the violin. Are there others?

**Ms Burch:** I do not know, but we are happy to give you a list of last year's recipients if you would find that useful. I am always impressed by the range of interests of young women in our city and the fact that we can support them doing these different things.

**MS BERRY:** Are the grants for different amounts of money dependant on what the project is or what people have applied for?

**Ms Burch:** I think they are up to \$2,000. Some may only request support for \$800 or thereabouts. But I think they are capped at \$2,000.

**MS BERRY:** The report talks about—

**Ms Burch:** What page are you on?

**MS BERRY:** Page 67. I beg your pardon. I am looking at \$130,000. That is for the whole—

**Ms Burch:** That is for the whole program.

**MS BERRY:** I was going to say that that is a lot of grants at \$2,000 a piece.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** I might defer to Mrs Jones, in the interests of time.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, what is the plan for the 3.5 FTE staff who have been

working at the Women's Information Referral Centre?

**Ms Burch:** Yes, Mr Manikis can respond to that.

**Mr Manikis:** There are 3.5 full-time equivalent staff currently, made up of five staff members. They are all permanent. Some are part time and two are permanent—three part time, two permanent. We have one of those part-time people away on six months' leave without pay pursuing other career options. The two that are full-time permanent staff and the one part-time staff will be redeployed. We are actively working with those staff and our human resource area to ensure that they will be redeployed.

The other part-time staff will come into the Theo Notaras centre and anchor the regional effort with services and programs, given that the services and programs, as we have said, will not be diminished. We are looking at ways to enhance them. That 0.5 in the community participation group, which has about 23 to 24 staff at the moment, will support the new regime of service and program delivery—

**Ms Howson:** Model, Nic.

**Mr Manikis:** Model. What did I say?

**Ms Howson:** Regime.

**Mr Manikis:** The new model.

**MRS JONES:** You have got to use the right lingo, Mr Manikis. As a supplementary to that, will the service providers who have been running courses continue to be engaged? If not, is there some flexibility to include them in the current panel of providers, even though that panel tends to be fairly set for a period of time? Will they then have the opportunity to tender to get on the panel of providers potentially?

**Mr Manikis:** We are going through a phase at the moment of putting the new service model together. What that will look like I am not 100 per cent sure of at this point in time. But we are getting good ideas from the representatives from the women's sector organisations. I think at the end of the day there will be a place for a panel and for the people that are delivering facilitation, supervision and all the rest of it for those courses, but I am not sure to what extent that will be the case at this point in time.

**Ms Burch:** Also, it is worth noting that whilst there is a number of programs on offer in the calendar, if there are no enrolments, the courses are not pursued, particularly the fee-paying ones.

**MRS JONES:** So would it be fair to say, that as part of the new service model, at this stage you are expecting that no-one will lose their job but there is a change going on and there is not really a specific plan for how that will be delivered?

**Mr Manikis:** I think the first part of your statement is correct—that is, we are endeavouring to make sure that the 3.5 full-time equivalent positions are placed. Certainly one of those positions will have a role in the new service model. As far as the plan is concerned, we are not imposing a new service model. We are working



collaboratively with others to ensure that we get something that is workable that does not go off the rails. We want to make sure that where the services land they are at least at the level that they are now, if not enhanced. We would be looking at enhancing, because in conversations so far we have had a look at the service map for children and family centres, for example. There are a lot of services provided for women, and we want to make sure that in the process of trying to get away from the duplications that we are not creating more duplication along the way.

**MRS JONES:** Yes, but if you are looking at someone who, for example, has complex home life issues, they may not want to go near a family centre because it may be a very difficult place to go.

**Mr Manikis:** Yes, that is right. So they will have a choice of a confidential room in the Theo Notaras centre. So we are looking at those sorts of aspects.

**MRS JONES:** Still in the city.

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Members, we will move on to multicultural affairs now. Minister, on page 119 of volume 1, there is a table with the results of a number of satisfaction surveys. I note that, for the National Multicultural Festival, respondents returned a satisfaction rate of 96 per cent.

**Ms Burch:** A pretty good effort, isn't it.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. So tell us how the survey was undertaken, and what other feedback was there from respondents?

**Ms Burch:** Thank you. I will go to Mr Manikis, but the festival consistently has a positive survey result because most of the participants understand and enjoy their time there. But we use the feedback about how we plan the next year's event, and it goes to some of the earlier comments about the footprint, how we manage the stage and what sorts of facilities we embed and bring in to the festival. Some of those have changed over time—the children's sanctuary and the older person's sanctuary. Those changes come from feedback through the survey but also through stallholders and just generally how you develop and manage this over time. I will go to either Ms Winters or Mr Manikis.

**Mr Manikis:** I am happy to take that. So the survey we have been doing since 2008, and it is done annually at every festival. A team of volunteers distribute a one-page survey to spectators on each day of the festival. Using a self-completion method, a total of 1,245 surveys were returned by spectators for the 2013 festival. That represents about 0.7 per cent of total spectators attending the festival, so around about one per cent of the total. But it is a large sample—it is 1,245.

Satisfaction, then, is measured on a five-point scale from very satisfactory to very dissatisfactory. Spectators were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the festival. Overall, as we have heard, 96 per cent of spectators reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the event, and we had just 10 people express

dissatisfaction with the event. So it is not a perfect score, but it is something where we can look to improve in future.

Spectators expressed that they particularly like the food, the diversity of the culture, music and overall entertainment at the festival. So these are the things that kept cropping up as their favourites. Analysis of the survey results revealed that around about 20,000 interstate and international visitors attended the festival on that weekend. That excludes Queanbeyan and Jerrabomberra residents. A smaller proportion stayed in Canberra as a result of the festival. These visitors stayed on for an average of nine nights. So, for interstate and international visitors who came to Canberra and attended the festival, total expenditure has been estimated at approximately \$2.5 million. When you take on the tourism multiplier effect, which is a factor of 0.3 used for the multicultural festival, the additional benefit of the festival to the ACT economy is over \$740,000. So that brings the total to around about \$3.2 million for that weekend for our economy.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, the Indigenous showcase was a prominent part of the festival this year. What are the plans for the showcase next year? Is there going to be something different or all the same?

**Ms Burch:** Well, they will certainly be an anchor of the festival, but we are coming to an end of some discussions about where they will be. Certainly, they have been over the last couple of years within Civic Square, but there has been some narrative about should they be more embedded into the larger footprint. I might go to Mr Manikis about where you are up to with those chats.

**Mr Manikis:** The Indigenous showcase is very important and very popular and very well received by the community, particularly this year where there were very high profile acts, but there was also a high degree of involvement by our local visual and performance artists. It is very important that that continues. We have been negotiating with the organisers. The way the festival is set up is that we sit there and facilitate; it is the community that actually puts on the various components, whether it be the Indian community, the Greek community or the Chinese. In the case of the Indigenous showcase, which is organised—and very well—by our NAIDOC Week committee here in Canberra, we have come to an agreement, as we have done with the Indian community and with others, for the site for the stage, the number of stalls and where they will be situated. That is settled now and everyone can go off and do the planning.

We have also got an additional component where we have been approached by other Aboriginal groups who are keen to put on cultural performances on each of the other stages. So they will 20-minute to half-hour cultural performances. While the Indigenous showcase is there and spectacular, there is a component that travels around maybe five or six of the stages throughout the days—on the Indian stage, on the Greek stage, on the Chinese stage. So that brings that awareness around to a broader audience.

**THE CHAIR:** Without wanting to steal any thunder from the forthcoming launches, are there any highlights for the festival that you could tell us about?

**Mr Manikis:** It is all under wraps; it is all embargoed at this point in time.

**Ms Burch:** It is shaping up to be fabulous again, though.

**Mr Manikis:** There is a lot of work by a lot of people who have huge numbers of volunteers. If you can think of the 350 to 400 stalls and the 10 volunteers attached to each on average and then, on top of that, you have got the stages, which not only have volunteers from one community but between five and 20 community organisations that get together to put on a program, and then you do the multiplier, thousands of people are involved in bringing product. Then you put on top of that the embassies and the diplomatic missions that get involved. International performers are coming. There are a few surprises. We like to keep the festival alive, so there are some surprises.

**Ms Howson:** We are aiming for a higher satisfaction rating.

**Mr Manikis:** We are. We are really determined to get that four percentage points that we missed out on last year. It is a huge community effort. Thousands of people are involved. It is getting a lot of traction overseas. We have groups coming from Moscow, St Petersburg, Papua New Guinea, India and China. I can say we have got interest from a kindergarten in Tianjin for our children's sanctuary. We have been inundated on our website from performers from all over the world—Austria, Poland, Germany. That is performers who want to come here and be part of our festival. So it is getting more prominence overseas. There are groups from Melbourne and Sydney who want to come up and perform. We have application forms that are online, but we are getting them in from community groups in Sydney and Melbourne as well.

How big can it get and how far we can go with it? If we really put a tourism spin on it and put an effort from that perspective rather than the community perspective that we have got at the moment, it can develop into a great marketing tool. The foundations are there for our city.

**MS BERRY:** I have a supplementary on that. Some people have said that it is too big now and that it has lost that small community multicultural feel. How do you respond to that?

**Mr Manikis:** I would say that people are entitled to their views. What really counts are the applications. Our local multicultural community groups, which get priority, continue to put in their application forms and want to participate in the hundreds. I would say to people that feel that the thing has lost its atmosphere as a small community event that it is certainly not a small community event anymore. It is not a fete, and it is not what it used to be. That is true. Does that stop community groups from participating? No.

**Ms Howson:** One of the first events I went to when I first joined the ACT government with the Community Services Directorate was the multicultural festival. It struck me at that point what an excellent demonstration of a connected community Canberra is. I think it exemplifies the community spirit within Canberra in so many ways. It not only showcases our multicultural community and our social inclusion, but people from all age categories and all parts of Canberra come together. The volunteer aspect that underpins it is a very stark expression of community. I think that sort of comment

is intriguing. I think it is a fantastic showcase of a very connected community that demonstrates who we are here in Canberra. I think it is wonderful.

**Ms Burch:** There is no doubt it is big. I think last year we probably stretched the footprint. The footprint, despite Mr Manikis's enthusiasm—I can tell by that twinkle in his eye—has to be managed. But when you see the stalls predominantly are community groups, volunteers. It is their major fundraiser activity. Most of the entertainment are the sons and daughters and aunts and uncles and mums and dads that are in our community, living next door to us, the kids go to our kids' schools. That is the heart of it, and I think that is why it is so goddam good.

**THE CHAIR:** Substantive question, Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** Table 29 of page 332 in volume 2 talks about the recipients of the community language grants. I wondered if you could take us through how these grants support community language schools? I am looking through them, and some of them are for IT and things like that. How does that support actually help them deliver their language programs?

**Ms Burch:** Our support into community language schools is twofold: one, it is through the association and supporting that as a main body and, two, the grants to the individual schools depending on their size and other bits of formula. Before I go to Mr Manikis, ACT hosted the national community language school forum or conference in Canberra probably about six weeks ago, and it was good to see community language schools from other states come in. But also, to me, it highlighted again the connectivity of our cluster of community language schools and how they do such a fabulous job in their commitment to making sure that the generations to come have access to their mother tongue and also recognising their kids are in a generation of a global world, so how we make sure they are positioned through language to access other opportunities as well. But the grants, Mr Manikis can talk to those.

**Mr Manikis:** In 2012-13 we had a stand-alone community languages grant program. As you can see there, \$75,000 was allocated. As you can see from the description, that was essentially for materials, some teaching aids and supporting individual schools. I think there are around 45 of those schools. They applied for a grant, and I think everybody got something to support their Sunday school, weekend school, or whatever it is. By and large, it is weekends. Mind you, the student numbers in these schools range from 10 through to 350 in one case—the Chinese school. The money supports them throughout the year to get text books and so on.

In 2012-13 we provided the Community Language Schools Association, which is the peak group across a lot of those schools, with \$40,000 for a presence in the Theo Notaras centre. They have got their office there. They are very active. They have got a staff member that is there every day. They support the schools through teacher training and provide opportunities for various training of the teachers and other staff at each of the schools. They put on an event throughout the year that showcases the schools. The association do a lot of good work. They also dovetail into the national association as well.

For 2013-14 this grants program has been folded into the program. These schools

used to get about \$40 per student. The education department used to administer that. We have folded in that \$75,000, so there is just one program to administer, and they get \$90 for each student for the year. That is how we are administering it from this year onwards. On top of that, there is a sliding scale of an administrative contribution as well to support their ongoing admin for the schools.

It is a partnership between us and the peak Community Language Schools Association in terms of how that gets distributed. But it is fair. The association do the audit on the numbers throughout the year. They do random audits to make sure that the schools are presenting the right number of students so they get the \$90 per head. It is a thriving and dynamic sector here in Canberra.

I might add that it is not just migrant kids. A lot of Greek families send their kids to the Greek school, but there are also people from the foreign affairs department or other interest areas around Canberra that attend and learn the language, even on a basic level. We are finding that with some of the schools as well. They put a lot of resources into it themselves. Some of the embassies are involved in pouring resources into some of these schools. It is a good program.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you, Dr Bourke. Minister, can you tell me, given the ACT policy of English as the national language, how many English language courses have been run across Canberra in the reporting period for migrants and how that might compare to previous years?

**Ms Burch:** As in English through, say, CIT or adult literacy programs?

**MS LAWDER:** Yes.

**Ms Burch:** I do not know if we have that detail, but we will certainly be able to provide it. The provision of this mostly sits within education, either through CIT as a public provider or CIT Solutions as well, but we can give you the range. Nothing has come to my attention that they have diminished. I think I provided some information to you, Mrs Jones, about the offerings up around Gungahlin. We can supply the location and what they are, in short.

**MS LAWDER:** I am also interested in the pass level. What is the point at which people are deemed to graduate?

**Ms Howson:** You are talking about proficiency?

**Ms Burch:** I think it depends on the course they are doing. Mr Manikis mentioned DFAT. Certainly, through CIT Solutions a number in DFAT do very high level language. They are learning another language and not English. It depends on the course. We will try and collate as much information as we can about those different things for you.

**Mr Manikis:** I might be able to help a little bit by saying that we have a funding agreement with Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services. In that agreement they

provide some English classes. There are some formal English classes that MARSS provide, but there are also conversation classes. So instead of going right into the formal stuff—and I often see them up there in the Theo Notaras centre in a classroom that they have got set up there—it is really around conversation. There are different levels of getting into the English language and learning it.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Jones.

**MRS JONES:** Just following on from that, how are the courses advertised out in the community? I have raised in the past concerns about people who are losing out. Can I be given some information about what is undertaken to get the information about those courses to the people who need them in the language that they speak? Do we have translated advertising of courses available? Do they go into the *Chronicle*, which goes to every door stop? Could you have a rotating language where one month it is an advertisement in a Middle Eastern language and another time it is in an Asian language, or whatever the emerging groups are who have the most concern with this? What is done for people who are beyond the point of receiving MARSS assistance, people who have been in country for a bit longer? For example, if a mother has come as part of a husband and wife couple to Australia and her husband has been working and learning English, what are our undertakings to give the wife the opportunity, even if she has to wait until her children are in school, to get proficiency? Do we have any incentives to get those women there, given that often there is not a great social incentive within the household for that person to improve their English? I am just wanting some more information on that, if I may.

**Mr Manikis:** Learning English is not compulsory in our community.

**MRS JONES:** No, but we could attract people to it.

**Mr Manikis:** Yes. That is the other side of it. MARSS certainly get funding from the commonwealth—a fair whack of funding from the commonwealth—to do certain things for a certain group of people for a certain amount of time.

**MRS JONES:** Yes, a period of time.

**Mr Manikis:** That is right. We provide that funding under our funding agreement for the others. The whole aim of our funding is to capture some of those migrants that might be around for not the five years that they get the commonwealth funding for but beyond that. As far as promotion is concerned, I am finding that in the multicultural community groups they tend to provide their services in that zone of the clients that they would deal with. Companion House is around trauma counselling and medical is their main service delivery. Those family groups would then avail themselves of the other services that Companion House may have available. Similarly with MARSS, it is really the groups that immigration might present to them to look after. It is those members of that family, for example, that MARSS would tend to provide its services to.

We have been trying to become a little bit more accessible in the way that you are talking about. For our children and family centres, for example, in terms of what they have to offer, we have had brochures done up in 10 different languages, translated

into different languages, and have had those distributed to the relevant community groups.

**MRS JONES:** Can I get copies of those?

**Mr Manikis:** You can have a copy of these, yes.

**Ms Burch:** We will leave those with you.

**MRS JONES:** Thank you.

**Mr Manikis:** That is in an attempt to ensure that at least people in those regions that do not speak English are aware of the services that are on their doorstep.

**Ms Burch:** We have got copies for each member.

**Ms Howson:** Just going to your last question, Mrs Jones, one of the things that I have had the privilege—

**THE CHAIR:** It is a multi-language set of 10 different languages with each language on one card.

**Ms Howson:** In terms of encouraging women, in particular, that might be at home with children to improve their language skills, the child and family centres again play a really pivotal role through the playgroups and a number of the programs that are offered particularly targeting the multicultural community. Women come together, and the common language is English. Again, it is in a safe environment around subjects the women are familiar with. There is a very strong esprit de corps and a lot of peer support for women to converse in English and, by its very nature, improve their language skills. Then, of course, the child and family centres can direct women that want to take that further into specific programs.

**MRS JONES:** Do we ever send direct letters to new people who have settled—or is that part of MARSS, that they get that information pack about what is available? Are there follow-ups?

**Ms Burch:** Within the client group of MARSS, yes.

**MRS JONES:** Finally, let me give an example: a Bengali woman who arrives in the ACT, is living in the outer suburbs, has already had her children and is not having any more, is not necessarily attending the health centres—although that obviously catches a certain group—and does not go to mosque because her husband goes to mosque; she stays home. Are we targeting these specific types of groups? Do we identify groups that are missing out on the English language courses and try and target something towards them?

**Mr Manikis:** Not so much targeting for the purpose of the English language, but certainly for activities and connection. The Muslim community in the north of Canberra is a good example. As I understand that community, it ranges from the fundamental right through to the liberal view of the world. But they all come together

and pray at the mosques and all the rest of it. We try to work with the leadership of that community and try to get the kids to mix with other kids through sports. Over the years we have provided sports grants for the Muslim community to get their kids to participate.

**MRS JONES:** But there is no particular targeting of a woman like that, for example?

**Ms Burch:** Probably not. But I think some of the benefits are having the community groups in Theo. There is a central hub, and it is the work through the office into those associations to give them information that we hope to spread out through their newsletters and bits and pieces like that. It is just taking the opportunity through the general access. It is almost like any opportunity is a good opportunity to target some of these groups.

**Ms Howson:** There is the Multicultural Women's Advocacy association. Again, in Theo Notaras I have seen programs where it is just craft classes and women are encouraged to come in primarily to make that connection.

**MRS JONES:** With children?

**Ms Howson:** No.

**MRS JONES:** Not with children?

**Ms Howson:** Just women and women of an older age group, generally, that have some common interest in getting together or enjoying doing crafts or other sorts of activities that they can do together. A number of our community-based providers—through the YWCA et cetera—while they may not have a particular program that targets an individual, they certainly provide plenty of opportunities for women from multicultural groups to come together. It does not have to be centred around their child.

**MRS JONES:** I am just wondering about women who have children but cannot access these kinds of events. It is very difficult for them then to pick up the language and they can end up in a time warp.

**Ms Howson:** This is really part of the objective around the general funding that we provide to the broad range of community or non-government organisations.

**MRS JONES:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** A supplementary around that, minister. There was a bit of talk about mosques just then. How is the mosque in Gungahlin coming along?

**Mr Manikis:** I think it is subject to legal proceedings at the moment. As I understand it, I think some approvals have been given for work to commence. However, there is an order in the Supreme Court, I think, at this stage from some objectors, and that is proceeding at the moment.

**Ms Howson:** If you are unsure about that, Mr Manikis, that might be a question we



would need to take on notice and confirm.

**THE CHAIR:** Very good. My substantive question is—

**Ms Burch:** But I would note that I would personally like to see it progress, and I support the community of Gungahlin in their aspirations in having a mosque.

**THE CHAIR:** I am sure they will be happy to hear that, minister. Returning to the multicultural festival and the joy of statistics, in volume 2, page 361, strategic indicator 6 is the number of groups participating in the annual National Multicultural Festival. You can see that you have exceeded the targets—exceeded the targets—for community and multicultural groups participating. What did you do to encourage participation, and how does that compare with previous years?

**Mr Manikis:** I think the standout for this year was the fact that it was the centenary year. I get the sense that the multicultural community groups were probably limited in the way they could celebrate the year other than through putting in a special effort at the multicultural festival and coming out and celebrating the year. Certainly, we made sure the facilities and the infrastructure were there for all the community groups that wanted to participate to participate. That is why I think we have had an increase in the numbers there.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned the centenary there. Apart from the National Multicultural Festival, what other multicultural events have had a centenary focus this year?

**Mr Manikis:** We have worked with the centenary team over the year, certainly through our e-community news in promoting all their events straight to 1,200 subscribers. We have represented on their working groups as well, the Office of Multicultural Affairs. We had discussions at the beginning of the year with the centenary team in terms of ensuring that there is a focus on our multicultural community. I think several high profile grants provided to our peak group, the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum, by the centenary team to deliver projects. I think one was on last weekend.

**Ms Burch:** The bus.

**Mr Manikis:** The bus, harmony bus.

**THE CHAIR:** Tell us about the bus, then.

**Mr Manikis:** I understand two buses were put on and they did a circuit around the religious establishments and institutions around town and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural centre. There were some food stalls down in Civic Square and also an entertainment program that was very well attended up in the Theo Notaras function room. It was very well patronised—I think, between 800 and 1,000 people turned up.

**Ms Burch:** And they had a project called “Home”.

**Mr Manikis:** Yes. We encouraged some community groups to participate in the celebration around the lake, which involved—I am not sure of the numbers—quite a few multicultural groups. They were funded to provide a depiction, an artwork, of their home, and you may recall some of those installations and other activities around the lake during that day. There has been quite good engagement from the multicultural communities throughout this centenary year. As I say, we promoted every one of those events through our e-community news.

**Ms Burch:** And also outside of the Office for Multicultural Affairs through arts and other directorates. A number of embassies have come on board and have put on various offerings as well.

**Mr Manikis:** So windows to the world was a good example. Very successful.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you just tell us a little bit more about windows to the world?

**Mr Manikis:** Windows to the world was a centenary idea. I know embassies have held open days in the past, but for the centenary year it was a coordinated effort. Quite a few embassies made a real big effort with a significant number of embassies throughout Floriade period. I think they got around about 35,000 people through those open days. I know from a couple of the ambassadors, they strongly supported it through cultural programs. I know the Greek ambassador put on a very special arts exhibition with interstate artists and some from overseas as well. So they went, you know, the full—

**THE CHAIR:** And there was the panhellenic games as well, now you that you mention the Greek ambassador.

**Mr Manikis:** That is right.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, we were having a little chat with Mr Manikis before about the size of the multicultural festival and its location. If not in Civic, where would we have it and would it still carry the same style and flavour?

**Ms Burch:** This question about the size comes up regularly. I know one year we expanded down into Glebe Park. That was not deemed as being too successful, predominantly by the stallholders. They felt they were disconnected down there. Whilst people say we are getting large—a quarter of a million people come through over the three days, so it is certainly well attended—I cannot imagine the festival anywhere else but Civic. Yes, it has been asked whether you take it elsewhere, do you take it up to EPIC? I actually do not think it would be the same. What makes it work, I think, is the fact that it is clearly taking the heart of our city and overlaying our multicultural community. I think that is one of the great successes of it.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** I had a question on the progress of the multicultural strategy as it relates to refugees, people seeking asylum and humanitarian entrants. There is a committee through which the concerns of people who have entered the country as refugees or humanitarian entrants or seeking asylum can raise their concerns. Who makes up this

committee?

**Mr Manikis:** What page are we on, sorry?

**MS BERRY:** It is on page 72.

**Ms Burch:** This is RASH is it?

**MS BERRY:** Yes.

**Mr Manikis:** RASH is a pretty broad church. I chair that committee, and it is a group of service providers and government representatives that come together on roughly a quarterly basis. It is an information-sharing committee. We have got CatholicCare, we have got Kippax Uniting Church reps, we have got immigration, Red Cross, St Vinnie's, Canberra Refugee Support, Companion House. So there is a broad representation of people who work with refugees and asylum seekers. It has been going on for quite some time and it a very useful forum for just touching base with each other on what the issues are, what sorts of activities and other initiatives are going on in other parts of the city in relation to supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

It has proved to be quite an effective group or forum for also throwing up solutions. So we get the issues and information exchange on issues and what have you, and then you pose the question, "Okay, what are we going to do about it?" because we are not the font of knowledge on everything. So we get a result—

**Ms Burch:** He is bashful.

**Mr Manikis:** No, we are not. But things like that ACT service access card is something that is very successful, and that was a suggestion out of that group. We have a working group that is going to report later on this month on some ideas around housing and accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers in this city. That group has been meeting now for a couple of months, and they are looking at what is happening internationally—in Scotland and Canada—in this space and having a look at what is happening around Australia to see if there can be some initiatives or some programs that can be suggested. That will report back to the RASH committee meeting we are having next month.

**Ms Burch:** I think the mix that sit around the table is what makes it work. You have all the elements of industry and support and community. The access card, I remember having that discussion with the RASH committee. We have as a government a clear policy of providing access to all services. But, this committee was very clear in articulating to me that, whilst that policy is right and sound, the lived experience for many people is that it is difficult, because they have got to tell their story multiple times. Often the front-line workers will not have the full understanding of a high level policy. We took our time to work through the access card, which has been successful and has certainly given access, but, importantly, dignity to a number of these people so they do not have to keep on telling their stories twice and having that confrontation which is unnecessary, often at very vulnerable points in their lives.

**MS BERRY:** Are there people on the committee who are asylum seekers or on bridging visas?

**Mr Manikis:** No, there are not. It is already around about 30 people around the table. I am sure there is a place for a forum. We rely on Companion House and Canberra Refugee Support group, Red Cross and those organisations to represent the views. That is something worth thinking about as well. Thank you.

**MS BERRY:** Do you know how many people in the ACT are currently on bridging visas?

**Mr Manikis:** I know there are around about 280 asylum seekers. I am not sure whether all of them have their applications processed for protection. But I can get that figure for you.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, that would be wonderful. And one more question about the access card: how long has this been in place and how does it differ from the federal ImmiCard?

**Mr Manikis:** The federal ImmiCard, I think, came after our service access card, which the minister launched on 5 September 2011. The ImmiCard card is provided to permanent residents, so they have got their PR and it identifies them as having permanent residency. The ACT services access card is given to people who have put in an application for a protection visa. That sometimes takes between three to 12 months, sometimes even longer, and in that period they are in flux and that is where they have the most difficulty in accessing services at service points around town. It is that group that we were very interested in supporting and helping, because they have no other supports in place.

**Ms Burch:** So the access card gives them access to essential services. That also includes concessional public transport, English language classes and health care. It is managed through Companion House.

**Mr Manikis:** So it is another partnership with our office and Companion House.

**MS LAWDER:** Back on page 68 under the women's section, it talks about applicants and whether they were identified by age or being from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, a culturally and linguistic diverse background, having a disability or having a family member with disability. Of course some people will be a part of several of those groups.

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** I raise that because, on page 331 of volume 2, the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum received funding for healthy ageing and wellbeing for multicultural seniors, which is a good thing. Then on page 344, under a different funding program, a group received funding for cultural and linguistically diverse seniors group projects. My question, minister is: how do you as the minister and/or your directorate determine who gets funding under which bucket, and do you ever refer them on or how do you manage those?

**Ms Burch:** There are three distinct grants with different sets of criteria, but the devil is always in the detail, so I go to Mr Manikis. The returns to work are quite individualised supports for women in their efforts to return to work and that individualised support for women at that time whereas the other groups are broader support groups. But I might go to Mr Manikis.

**Mr Manikis:** All these groups—certainly for the multicultural grants—are assessed by a community panel. They do have a set of criteria. Where it is obvious that the project really should be funded from another grants program, they will not get money out of the multicultural grants program. They might get referred to sport and recreation grants, health or seniors grants or women's grants. We try to be as helpful as possible both in explaining why people did not succeed and also in providing them with grant support and/or information on when the next round of the relevant grant is coming up.

**MS LAWDER:** I appreciate that. I guess my question was: on the face of it, these two grants, for example—one is under seniors—

**Mr Manikis:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** Healthy ageing for multicultural seniors. The second one is under multicultural, diverse seniors group projects. There is a bit of commonality there.

**Mr Manikis:** It depends on the project and what they are doing. I would need to go back and have a look, but it may be that a diverse group of seniors want to participate in the festival, that it is a cultural activity—

**MS LAWDER:** I was interested in whether, perhaps, there may be instances—I am not saying there are—of the same group receiving funding for a similar program.

**Mr Manikis:** We are on the lookout.

**MS LAWDER:** So you are able to monitor that?

**Ms Burch:** Yes. You are right: in any grants program, and against all directorates, there will be various grants. Sometimes organisations will put a grant in because it is the right time for them. At other times they may have tried grant A and not been successful so they go to grant B. But it is something where I think particularly within a directorate it makes sense every now and again to look at our grants.

**MS LAWDER:** Sure.

**Ms Burch:** Which is why just recently we collapsed radio and language grants into one—multicultural grants. It was a bit of a case of asking where the divide is, and you would get a far better response collapsing them together.

**MS LAWDER:** Is there a single grant system throughout the directorate or the government that you can—

**Ms Howson:** I am happy to take that.

**Ms Burch:** Please; yes.

**Ms Howson:** This is something we intend to look at in the not-too-distant future, Ms Lawder. We have applied a particular online tool, smarty grants, to all of our ACT arts grants programs. We have recently applied that same technology to the grants round in Disability ACT. We are looking to see whether in the future we can reduce the burden on the community sector in terms of them having to apply for multiple grants to package together for a suitable funding pool to make a decent go of it at a particular set of outcomes for a particular group. So it is something we are interested in having a look at in the future—seeing if we can improve our approach and apply technology that is beneficial for both the community and the applicants and the administration that goes into this estimate process.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Jones.

**MRS JONES:** Just briefly, would the minister care to update us on the current situation with the fringe festival, the development of that event under the leadership it currently has and so on?

**Ms Burch:** I think you are referring to a most unfortunate article that was in the paper. That was certainly something that I did not want to read. That is fair enough to be said. I may go to Nic, but, whilst it is the fringe festival and it does sit in arts, just to respond to you, we are looking at the contract. To date the contract has been managed. To date the fringe festival programming is being delivered. I was going to have a quiet word with Mr Manikis at some point during the day just to give me confidence that that is continuing to be the case.

**MRS JONES:** So it would be fair to say that at this point there are some questions that you are seeking answers to—

**Ms Burch:** It would be fair to say that the evidence to date shows that the contract to honour to develop a fringe festival is in place. But it would be fair and reasonable to just confirm that.

**MRS JONES:** Will you be able to report back—maybe take it on notice and report back to us?

**THE CHAIR:** It is an arts matter; you can bring it up when arts is in.

**Ms Burch:** We have had arts.

**MRS JONES:** We have had arts?

**Ms Burch:** I am happy to bring back what I can within the time. Okay?

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. We are going to adjourn for afternoon tea.

**Sitting suspended from 3.06 to 3.23 pm.**

**THE CHAIR:** We shall resume. Minister, we will move on to children, youth and family services. I see you have got your relevant directorate officials with you. In volume 1, page 6, one of the highlights I would ask you to tell me more about is the number of cultural plans for 98 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the care of the Director-General to support cultural connections.

**Ms Howson:** Minister, would you like me to answer?

**Ms Burch:** Please.

**Ms Howson:** This was one of the key areas of focus flowing out of a number of the reviews that were undertaken into care and protection services 12 months or so ago and something that we are very pleased to have achieved in such a short period. I might just ask—Christine, would you like to take that question?—Ms Nolan to talk about the impact of that effort.

**Ms Nolan:** This has been really important for us. Over about a 12-month period we have created a dedicated position to help drive us to that 98 per cent completion rate. We have continued that. We have a number of dedicated staff within the care and protection services area so that we can try to maintain that very high compliance rate.

It is probably worth mentioning to the committee that on 22 November the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body will be hosting a forum for interested community members to speak with us about out of home care and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in a general sense, but we are also going to be using that forum to explore with the community whether there is real interest in going forward with the proposal that came up through the elected body a few years back to establish an AICCA, an Aboriginal and Islander childcare agency, an independent, Aboriginal-controlled, community-based child welfare agency, or whether, in fact, it may be easier to go with our alternative proposal to continue strengthening this area of operations through advertising expressions of interest for a panel of cultural advisers so that a variety of people could put their hands up, could be paid on a fee-for-service basis, to assist us with developing the cultural care plans and generally providing advice to us, for example, when we are taking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children into care and are looking for the best possible placements that we can for them, hopefully with relatives or other members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you just talk the committee through what a cultural care plan is and what might the components of that be?

**Ms Nolan:** In a general sense, the cultural care plans are essentially plans that will assist us to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who come into care in contact with their culture and with their kin. So, depending on the circumstances in which children find themselves here in the ACT—and we have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here from all over the country—there might be a variety of

actions that we would be taking under that plan. Certainly actions like searching for relatives, be they interstate if not here, and providing, I guess, opportunities for kids to participate in educational and other cultural experiences would assist them to reconnect if they become disconnected from the culture or to maintain connection. It really is a very situational thing, I guess, like most individualised plans for children. I might ask Ms Pappas, the Director of Care and Protection Services, if she has anything to add.

**Ms Pappas:** The cultural plans are really about assisting kids to remain connected with their identity. So it could look very different for every child. It is an individualised response, and it depends on what that child or young person sees as important to them. The staff who are tasked with doing this work go out and speak to the kids and talk to them about what is it that this plan is for them. And over time we are hoping to build that into the child's life story. That will be very different again for every child—talk about their family, their land, their mob, their community, what it means to them, gather stories from people within the community. So it will look different for everybody.

**THE CHAIR:** And perhaps you could briefly tell the committee why this is so important for Indigenous kids?

**Ms Nolan:** Probably most people realise how important a sense of belonging and identity is for all of us. We have all got different versions, but what we have seen in the past historically for children in care is often a real drift in care and a real disconnection from extended family or other sources of belonging so that kids came out of care at the age of 18 and were very alone in the world and really struggling with: “Who am I, where do I belong, who can I turn to as I am moving into adulthood and starting to live out that part of life?” That is not what we want for our children. We are working very hard to try to support kids throughout the care journey, but particularly as well in transitioning from care so that no child is leaving care without a sense of where they have come from and why, who they are and that, hopefully, all of them have good support networks around them.

**THE CHAIR:** And how do you validate the quality of your cultural care plans?

**Ms Nolan:** Quality is always a difficult concept in a way. What we have got at the moment is compliance. But I think it is going to be an ongoing journey in working on the quality of those plans. Helen mentioned about the life story experience, and I might get her to say a little more about what is intended or what is happening in that life story space. But in some ways, the proof is in the pudding, I think, in terms of whether we actually start to see some better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people coming out of care at the other end. The research shows that life outcomes for children coming out of care around the western world, on the whole, with some exceptions, are considerably poorer than they are for children in ordinary living situations in the community.

We can think we are providing quality services, but are they the services that people actually value, that really end up making a difference to kids? And I think that is why it is really important us for to try to involve a range of others and have some external validation of the quality or the accuracy, the comprehensiveness of the plans that we



develop for children in this space in terms of cultural care plans and in terms of our general planning for children in care.

**THE CHAIR:** Are any different approaches in this area being taken in other states or territories or perhaps overseas, for instance, in New Zealand?

**Ms Nolan:** New Zealand is really always a wonderful case study for us, I have to say. There are always a lot of very interesting things going on in New Zealand. I did go to a care and protection conference there in 2005 when I was working for the Queensland department of child safety and was really impressed with an array of things that they were doing. But I suppose I was even more impressed with the way in which acceptance and mainstreaming of Indigenous culture is just so noticeable. The conference was opened by the New Zealand Prime Minister. She opened the conference speaking in Maori. There were prayers from Maori pastors at the beginning of each day. There were a whole range of other ways in which New Zealanders are so much more sensitised to those issues.

It is also a much smaller country with a proportionally much larger Indigenous population. And so I think it is much easier to connect people back to—I think the correct word is—iwi, whereas here we have got people from all over Australia and we have actually got a really high proportion of stolen generation people in Canberra, strangely enough. I think some of the challenges are a little different here, but there probably are things we could look at and learn from New Zealand. I would love you to send me to New Zealand to have a look. That would be fantastic. Ms Pappas, do you want to comment further?

**Ms Howson:** Dr Bourke, to go to your question, though, I think the work that Christine was talking about was in relation to establishing either an AICCA in the ACT or an alternative option, a panel of advisers. We will certainly support further research and development in this area as well as accessing best practice across Australia and providing, I think, a forum where we can test quality around our initiatives like our cultural care plans. I think it would be probably fair to say that, while there are pockets of best practice, every jurisdiction is demonstrating the challenges in reducing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care settings. And in terms of the connections that we have with our colleagues nationally through our officials' networks and ministerial councils, the focus on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is definitely there. So we do have forums to access best practice.

The cultural care planning is an important part of that, certainly, as well as promotion of kinship care placements. That is something that the ACT does extraordinarily well compared to other jurisdictions, being able to place children with family as opposed to foster care placements.

**Ms Nolan:** I might just add that we have also had several discussions over the course of this year with Frank Hytten, the CEO of SNAICC, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, and they are certainly very willing to assist us in some of this work.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** I was wanting to ask about how the creation of the kinship support team has assisted with kinship placements within care and protection.

**Ms Nolan:** Minister, would you like me to take that?

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**Ms Nolan:** This has been one of our great success stories. We have been very happy with the difference that the kinship care support team is making to kinship carers. I guess what has happened in the kinship care space is that we are using kinship carers more and more often than we did historically, and that is a sort of national phenomenon. I think that is an excellent phenomenon, because, as we talked about a bit earlier, it is really important for children to have that sense of identity and belonging. If we can find safe, appropriate kinship care places, then that really assists with those two issues.

But some of the kinship carers that we work with may be, for example, Aboriginal grannies. They are living in public housing, they are living on benefits. They do not have a lot of resources. They love their grandchildren, they want to absolutely do their best for them, but they do not necessarily have the resources that some of our better-off foster carers do. So we had quite an inequitable situation that just sort of developed accidentally over time as we increasingly looked to kinship care for placement solutions.

It has been really a great corrector to create the kinship care support team. We have had very good feedback about their work. We have got some very experienced workers in there. And I think it would be fair to say that, in terms of the kind of feedback that I have got from Marion Le, the President of Grandparent and Kinship Cares, from early in my time—2½ years ago till now—there has been a total change in the messages. They are very happy with the assistance they are getting. In fact, she said to me, “We want to stay with the directorate. We don’t want you to think about outsourcing us to the non-government sector. We are very happy with the kinship care team that we’ve got now.” I think it is a really good success story.

We did a literature review just recently. We had a couple of prominent research bodies in Melbourne do a literature review of the meta reviews around different aspects of care to inform development of our new out of home care strategy. And we were really relieved to see that the literature based on studies elsewhere is suggesting that kinship care has just as good outcomes for children as foster care, or even better. Some studies show even better outcomes. So I guess it goes to these issues of identity and belonging.

**MS BERRY:** So, just to help me out—kinship care is directly funded by the department? It is not done through a—

**Ms Nolan:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** So the difference between kinship care and foster care is that there is some relationship with the family?

**Ms Nolan:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** You talked about the difference in funding.

**Ms Nolan:** Just a different set of arrangements.

**Ms Howson:** Ms Berry, I will come in. What we do with our foster care families at the moment is that we fund agencies like Barnardos and Marymead to support those foster carers and the placements. When it comes to kinship care, we manage that all out of the department, so we provide those services directly to those families.

**MS BERRY:** Are people who are in kinship care able to apply for other funding to assist them, like foster care parents can?

**Ms Nolan:** Yes; they both have equitable access to resources. But until we established that kinship care unit, they did not have the level of carer support. So there is a difference between the carer support role and the caseworker who is supporting the child. Now we have the unit, it is excellent, because we have people who are dedicated to supporting the carer and caseworkers who are dedicated to supporting the child. That is the model for a lot of the foster care placements. They have the same access to care subsidies, the same allowances, and they have the same access to contingency, for money for special things over and above what the allowance is expected to cover.

**Ms Burch:** And some of the programs inherent in that kinship carers support team involve access to a family—Relationships Australia, I think, is the contract; we have a contract with Relationships Australia. Kin carers are faced with added complexity because it is often their grandchildren; their own child has not been able to look after their children. So that extra support and contract are in place for those carers.

**Ms Nolan:** I might just add, if I might, that the other thing that we have done just recently—about 12 months ago—is to engage the Australian Childhood Foundation to run a therapeutic support program for kinship carers as well. This is in the non-government sector. It is called side by side. There are 10 very troubled young people or children who are in kinship care who are being supported through that initiative by the Australian Childhood Foundation. It is working with the kinship carers and the child to try and keep that placement stable despite some of the trauma and behavioural issues that the children are presenting with.

They have also put 30-plus kinship carers through training on trauma, the first level of training on trauma-informed care, and they will be running four more training groups next year. They are also doing some comprehensive assessments for us of children coming into care, going to kinship carers, so that we start out with a really clear idea about what the kids' needs are. This has been another really successful initiative, and one that we want to keep building on in the years to come.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you, chair. On page 86 of the annual report it mentions that there are 156.6 FTE staff, including casual staff. I think there have traditionally been some recruitment and retention challenges in the area. How does the 156.6 staff equate to available positions? Is there a shortage; and, if so, in which areas?

**Ms Burch:** Sue, do you want to do this? Christine?

**Ms Nolan:** I am happy to take this. Care and Protection is a really difficult environment, as you are probably aware, to attract and retain staff to. I think we have to accept that no matter what we do for staff, a rational person who will be attracted to it—a social worker or a psychologist—will want to help children, will put in two, three or four years and will then think: “This is really the hard yards. I think I’ll go and be a hospital social worker or something else where I’m still helping people but I’m not under the level of pressure.” The pressure arises from the very high risk nature of the work involved; the fact that there is often quite a lot of aggro, really, from perhaps unhappy parents whose children you have taken away; and the fact that you are under a lot of public scrutiny in all the decisions that you make. It is a pretty challenging environment.

**Ms Howson:** Excuse me, Christine; I think we might just go to answer the question, which was around how we are going against the FTE.

**Ms Burch:** Numbers.

**Ms Howson:** Could someone look for those statistics.

**Ms Burch:** Certainly.

**Ms Howson:** If I can just come in, Ms Lawder, Christine’s preamble was essentially saying that there is a turnover in Care and Protection. That is something we keep a very close eye on, because as soon as we have a particular level of vacancies it creates extra burden and extra stress on the staff that are still working in those areas. We are particularly focused on maintaining recruitment and numbers in our front-line service provision. In comparison with most jurisdictions, we do very well in that area.

We have had some very good success this year in keeping a constant flow of new recruits coming in. As we are losing people, there have been a range of initiatives put in place to increase the incentives for staff to stay with us. We have done quite a bit of work on asking them what they think they need to be able to stay in place. One of the key responses to that was that we needed to move away from a lot of temporary appointments to permanent placements. So this year we have put in an increased effort on recruitment and retention. I know that Ms Pappas could talk about that, because it has taken up a lot of her time this year to secure staff into permanent placements. You may be aware that in the past we have sought recruits from overseas, and that program works quite well. I think at the moment, if somebody has got the statistics, we—

**Ms Burch:** I have got some in front of me. It is 115 front-line staff. CPS has 115 front-line staff; 101 Care and Protection front-line positions are currently filled with

ongoing recruitment. So in addition to the international and national recruitment, we have adopted an ongoing recruitment process. Since January of this year, we have conducted 17 recruitment processes; this has seen 40 permanent positions, including 33 front-line staff, come in. I think we have a vacancy rate of about 11 per cent or thereabouts at the minute, which, given the tough—

**Ms Howson:** It is quite favourable, considering the role that we play.

**Ms Burch:** Yes; it is good. With some of those initiatives for keeping staff, it is around how you supervise and support. We have initiated a retention payment, which is probably just at the end of its first year or thereabouts. After 12 months or two years—

**Ms Pappas:** Three years.

**Ms Burch:** Three years? I knew I would get it right eventually. After three years someone is rewarded through a retention payment, and then it is an annual payment from there.

**MS LAWDER:** I do not think any of us would dispute the challenges of retaining staff in the area. My other question was going to be about the retention bonus scheme, but I suspect it is far too early for you to have any kind of analysis of its success or otherwise.

**Ms Burch:** Anecdotally, I have heard that it is retaining people. Whether it is retaining them for multiple extra years or just securing them for the end of their second, third or fourth year—given that it is only one year in, it is probably a bit early to tell. But even taking the turnover from—pick a figure, any figure—10 down to eight per cent, it has a significant impact on your workforce. Plus it is about valuing your staff that are doing a really tough job as well.

**Ms Howson:** I think nationally the view is that the general length of time that a caseworker would stay in this area of work is about two years. So even extending that period by 12 months is worthwhile. And it has all sorts of positive benefits that flow through to the case management of the children that we are caring for.

**Ms Nolan:** I might just add a comment: we have had 33 people receiving that retention allowance to date, and only two of those have left the department permanently. I think we have another one on maternity leave. So far, it is only one year in, but it seems to be indicating it may be worthwhile.

**MS BERRY:** I have a supplementary, if I might, chair?

**THE CHAIR:** Go for it.

**MS BERRY:** I think we are all in agreement that the people who work in Care and Protection do an amazing job under some of the most challenging of circumstances. I was wondering whether there is other support that is given to these employees other than the retention payment.

**Ms Burch:** I will go to one of the officials here, Helen. But there is, and it is about ongoing professional development. It is about supervision and the space and ability to reflect on their practice and decision-making. All of that goes to supporting—

**Ms Howson:** Increasing job satisfaction.

**Ms Burch:** That is the one. Ms Pappas, do you want to talk to that?

**Ms Pappas:** Sure. In 2012 we had quite a strong focus on implementing the office supervision framework, because we recognised that staff were telling us that, because of the complexity of the work, they really needed high quality supervision. We had a project officer who did a lot of work in understanding what are the barriers to supervision, and what are the benefits to supervision, and then worked with the team leaders and the operations managers to implement that. So staff were getting a real sense of sharing some of the risk associated with the work that they do.

We have continued that work. We have employed a second practice leader position. Those two practice leaders have a focus on continuing to build the capability and the capacity of team leaders to deliver high quality supervision so that workers are feeling supported in their role. That will be something that we will continue to have a focus on.

The other work we have been doing over the last 12 months is really trying to develop the leadership and management capability within Care and Protection services. We have had an independent person come in and work with our team leaders, who also have a really difficult job, in my view, having been one myself, understanding that difference between managing risk and how they are to support staff to make their own decisions—rather than giving people answers, helping them work through some solutions. So it is building a bit of a capacity and also some autonomy of caseworkers. People get a sense of achievement and a sense of responsibility when they are not told what to do and when they are able to work through what the best solution is for each individual family. That work, again, will continue early into next year; then we will have a look and see what the training needs are.

The other work that the staff told us they wanted was refreshed policies and procedures. They wanted to understand what was expected of them, what they needed to do and how to do that work. That is the work associated with the refresh and implementation of the integrated management system. That combination of work goes to some of the key fundamentals of what staff talked to us about, what helps them in their job.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a supplementary as well: with regard to recruitment, are you still recruiting from overseas?

**Ms Chapman:** I can take that.

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**Ms Chapman:** Dr Bourke, we are looking at a list that we already have for overseas recruits from the last round in terms of people who are still interested. What we are

actually focusing on at the moment is trying to beef up our recruitment approaches, different recruitment approaches, in Australia. Last week I went to Queensland to talk with a couple of our staff, including one of our staff members who was a grad and who has stayed with us for eight years, and directly to graduating social work and psychology students at QUT and the University of Queensland. We thought that approaching the students directly rather than sending them a letter or whatever might have better pay-off, so we are trying that in a few places. As you know—well, you might not know—in Canberra, only the Australian Catholic University has been graduating social work students. They are just recommencing the program. But up until recently they have only been graduating about 11 a year, and we need hundreds, really.

So going to other jurisdictions where they have social work programs where, depending on the circumstances in that jurisdiction, we might attract them is one of our strategies at the moment. We think that out of that round we might have got a few. We are waiting for their applications at the moment. If that does not work, or we are not getting enough through that direct kind of approach, we will go back to the overseas recruitment strategy and go to those 14, I think it is, left on the list who have indicated to us in recent times that they are still interested in coming to Australia. So it is a combination of things.

The other thing that we are doing, which is a longer term strategy, is looking at the way we structure our position in terms of what is the work that they can do. There are positions that you must have a social work degree to do, but there are positions where we have used social workers but we might be able to use a different kind of paraprofessional. One of the pieces of work that we are looking at is what would that look like and how could we get those people trained up so we kind of grow our own locally. At all kinds of levels we have got recruitment strategies underway.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, can you tell me about the after-hours bail support service and how that might be working to divert young people from Bimberi?

**Ms Burch:** I am happy to talk about it, but it is also covered under a different output class that we spoke about on Thursday. In short, it is a very successful program. It certainly has reduced the number of young people that have been held in Bimberi in detention. It also recently received the ACT public service award, which is I think a great outcome for such a new program that is making such a difference.

**THE CHAIR:** I will move on to something else that is in this area. Turning to page 87, I understand that from 1 April the staff of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit were redeployed directly into Care and Protection Services as well as the new Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs within the directorate.

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you tell me what the aim of this movement was and how you decided which staff went where?

**Ms Howson:** Dr Bourke, I will start the answer to that and, Helen, would you like to take it from there? This was as a result of our decision to recast our Office of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. A number of the functions around generally lifting the capacity of the Community Services Directorate to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families were moved into the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

However, in making that change, we gave the staff within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit the option to choose what part of the organisation they would like to work in. A number of them selected to go to child and family centres to be able to work in the community to support, again, the relationship development and community development work that we do through child and family centres like west Belconnen.

Others chose to work in the kinship care program within the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support or in other parts of the office. Their role is a mainstream role. They have moved into mainstream work. However, I think the office is formulating a network of those staff to be identified as an advisory group for all other staff should they wish to engage their support and experience in dealing with particular families or individuals that they are working with. Helen could probably take it from there.

**Ms Pappas:** Two of the staff members came and they are leading the work on the development of cultural planning. They are working alongside child protection workers to both mentor and support them to better understand and to build a broader capacity to do that work. The officer that went to the kinship care team has subsequently left, but we managed to recruit another Aboriginal woman who is due to start with us in a couple of weeks. She will sit in that position.

Again, that is about not necessarily carrying a full load of Aboriginal kinship carers, but also working with other staff to increase their understanding and their ability to respond to Aboriginal carers. It is about really working together. For care and protection, that is really fantastic in terms of getting that expertise and that skill embedded into our service.

**MS BERRY:** I wanted to ask about the Auditor-General's report released in March this year. It identified the need for annual visits for all children moving in and out of the home care system. Is care and protection on track to meet this recommendation?

**Ms Burch:** In short, yes.

**Ms Howson:** In fact, we have.

**Ms Burch:** We have?

**Ms Nolan:** No, there are eight children remaining to be seen.

**Ms Howson:** Would you like to talk about that, Christine?

**Ms Nolan:** Yes. We made an undertaking in March that we would commence to visit all children at least once a year. When I say that, that does not sound like a lot, but it is important to understand that some of these children are interstate and being



supported by other child welfare departments and some of them are being case managed directly by people like Barnardos and Marymead.

Notwithstanding that, we felt it was also important that we see all these children on some sort of regular cycle. Many children will be seen every couple of days literally at particular points in their care journey. Since March this year we have seen every child in care with the exception of eight children. So we are well on target to meet the target by next March of having seen every child in care.

**MS BERRY:** How many children—

**Ms Nolan:** Are in care?

**MS BERRY:** Have you seen?

**Ms Nolan:** That would mean that we have seen 565.

**Ms Pappas:** Minus eight.

**Ms Nolan:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** Since March this year?

**Ms Nolan:** Since March this year, yes.

**MS BERRY:** And those eight, did you say they were interstate?

**Ms Nolan:** No. Five are that I am personally aware of—one family is interstate. I am unclear about who exactly the other three are. But, yes, there are always—

**Ms Howson:** We could take that on notice in terms of the reasons.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you.

**Ms Howson:** Of course, this is a program of visitations over 12 months.

**MS BERRY:** Sure.

**Ms Nolan:** And we are a bit more than six months in at this stage, yes.

**MS BERRY:** With the interstate families, how does that work with the department in Canberra being responsible for the children who are interstate?

**Ms Pappas:** There is an interstate protocol in place that all jurisdictions have signed up for. What that means is that when a child moves from the ACT into another jurisdiction, we can ask our colleagues in that jurisdiction to take on a case management role. That ordinarily would include them visiting and providing us with information and being a conduit for us. If that child is settled there and that arrangement stays in place, then we are able to transfer that case across to the other jurisdiction, with the parties' agreement.

**MS LAWDER:** I have a supplementary question. In the Auditor-General's report there was another recommendation relating to knowing where children were at school and general hours. How is the directorate going towards achieving that?

**Ms Nolan:** I want to reassure you that we do know where all our children are. At the moment there is one child where we are not sure where they are; they have run away from their kinship care placement. They are a 15 year old. It is not uncommon that that would happen from time to time. We have got some children with behavioural issues and with other concerns. But in respect of every other child, we are entirely up to date with who they are living with, what school they are enrolled in and so on.

**MS LAWDER:** All their contact details?

**Ms Nolan:** All their contact details.

**Ms Burch:** This was part of the conversation when it was raised. About 40 per cent of our placements are case managed through the agency. So we are reliant on the agency to provide contemporary, updated, accurate information. What we have found is that our information system does not provide a seamless or an absolute at-ease process for that.

Part of the work we are doing is looking at our CHIP database to ensure we have that connectivity to the external agencies improved. You would appreciate that whilst it may not be clear on the paperwork, at the end of a five-minute phone call the director-general, who is the territory parent, would exactly know every detail of the child. But it is about how information comes into our CHIP system. Certainly that is an area that we are looking at.

**Ms Howson:** We have received some funding to do our first case study on how we will upgrade our IT system in order to make that connection with the agencies seamless so that the information is inputted once by either a Barnardos officer or a Marymead officer and then it is available in our system at the same time.

**MS LAWDER:** Do you have a projected milestone date where you expect that to be completed?

**Ms Howson:** The feasibility study, I think, will be commissioned shortly. Then we will take a case to government for the upgrading of the system from there.

**Ms Burch:** Part of that small budget item this year is to do some improvements within the existing system just to make the triage and the information flow within the system a little bit easier to manage for the workers as well.

**Ms Nolan:** That is underway.

**Ms Burch:** I am sure you would appreciate that data systems are interesting.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, in those questions have we covered off all the elements of the Auditor-General's recommendations or are there some that we have still not talked

about yet that you are taking action on that you would like to tell us about?

**Ms Howson:** We are making very good progress. You may recall, Dr Bourke, that there was an external milestone review panel appointed by the minister to oversee our implementation. So we have had a very disciplined approach to ensuring all the recommendations that were made by the Auditor-General have been well scoped and that project plans are in place.

We could give you the data. I am sure that somebody can tell you the number of recommendations that have been completed and the number that are underway. There are a small number that relate to a sort of major restructuring review of a system or an approach, such as the one we were just talking about in relation to interoperability for the child, youth and family support system. That will be a much more longer-term initiative.

The centralisation of our quality and compliance focus within CSD is a much more longer-term initiative. The work that we are doing on our information management system that has been mentioned already today around policies and procedures is more medium term. An enormous amount of work is going into refreshing our policies and procedures and then putting them in an online environment that makes the administrative burden of managing the compliance with those procedures easier for our care and protection workers. We are well underway with all that. It is just not finalised at this point. But we have completed a number.

**Ms Nolan:** We have completed 16 of the recommendations and we have commenced work on 41. Some of the recommendations did not relate to us; they related to oversight bodies. There are four that we have not commenced in any substantive way, and some of those are quite complex—the idea of information sharing across government. As Ms Howson said, it really is going to questions of the ACT government's overarching ICT strategy and those kinds of things that are under development in a broader sort of canvass at the moment.

**Ms Burch:** With the milestone review committee, the Public Advocate was on that panel, as was the chair of the children's services council.

**Ms Pappas:** And a member of our external audit review committee.

**Ms Burch:** Yes. All those reports are available online; so you can see the progress we have made. In respect of the areas that have not been progressed, the milestone review panel looked at them, considered them and understood and basically accepted our decisions and our way forward from here.

**THE CHAIR:** A substantive question, Ms Lawder?

**MS LAWDER:** Yes, on page 87 there is a section about adoptions and permanent care. What is the average time frame for an adoption in the ACT at present?

**Ms Pappas:** It is a quite a detailed process. I will just go through it. It can take somewhere between 12 to 14 months from point of expressing an interest to point of being entered on the register, which is a requirement under the Adoption Act.

Families will come to an information session to find out what adoption is and what the options are in the ACT. Then there is a seminar that they attend, which is a two-day seminar which talks about the challenges of parenting a child who is adopted. That could be about receiving a child with a special need or a child who is traumatised. It is really preparing people to make an informed decision about whether this is the route they want to take.

The families then need to make a decision about whether they want to take that course of action and they need to express an interest. Once they have expressed that interest, there is an assessment process. That assessment process involves the parents or the applicants talking about their life stories. That is recorded and they can take as long as they like to do that. It is really about working at their own pace. They then need to attend medical assessments and have police checks. They are all requirements in order to be found suitable.

Then there is a government-non-government joint panel which considers the final product, the final assessment and all of that information. Once the families have gone through that process, they are able to be placed on the register of suitable people. At that point they are waiting for placement of an appropriate child for them to be matched with. So that is the time frame.

**MS LAWDER:** Is there a backlog of people who have been on the list for quite some time and who have not yet been matched for some reason?

**Ms Pappas:** I cannot tell you the numbers, but what we are finding is that there are people who are interested in adoption who have not yet considered the possibility of a placement of a child who is in foster care—those kids who have come into care who are not going back to their biological families. We are seeing a growth in that area. There are people who have not ever considered that. That is discussed with them and some people are opting for that because the inter-country adoption options are becoming less frequent and they are waiting for long periods of time for placement of children.

We are seeing a growth in the numbers. At the moment we have got eight families who are heading down the route of enduring parental responsibility, which is a permanent care order. That is not an adoption order, but it is a permanent care order. So we have got seven children waiting for adoption orders—sorry, 10 children heading for a permanent care order. That enduring parental responsibility pathway is becoming more—people are becoming more interested in that as an alternative to adoption.

**MS LAWDER:** So when a child is placed in permanent care, does someone from the directorate continue to visit them or have some further contact with them?

**Ms Burch:** When they are in enduring parental responsibility?

**MS LAWDER:** It says “parental care”—“permanent care”, sorry.

**Ms Pappas:** When a child is adopted, there is no further contact with that family, unless they then are set to come and get some support through the post-order support

service. Where a child is in enduring parental responsibility, the long-term responsibility for the day-to-day and the long-term parenting of that child is transferred from the director-general to those parents, to those carers. They are able to make decisions as if they were that child's parent. They continue to receive a subsidy from us to support that, but the child needs to have been stable in that placement for a long period of time—up to two years—and they need to have gone through a fairly detailed assessment process to make sure that that is not going to break down. Of course, you can never guarantee that those arrangements will not break down, but that is why so much work is associated with doing comprehensive assessments of those arrangements.

**MS BERRY:** A supplementary, chair. So parents who are providing EPR—is that the slogan?

**Ms Pappas:** Enduring parental responsibility?

**MS BERRY:** Okay, enduring parental responsibility, is that the same as kinship and foster care, in that same ball park, and is their funding the same or not?

**Ms Howson:** Well, they are not the same, because a different set of policies and expectations sits around them. Enduring parental responsibility is acknowledging that a child has been in a stable placement with a family and we want to make that situation as normalised as possible for the child and the family. But parents that go down that route and if enduring parental responsibility is secured, we still provide some financial support to that family. But it is a different set of policies and arrangements to a family that would be in a foster care program or a kinship care program.

**Ms Burch:** But the children go from a foster or kin. These are the families that go into the enduring responsibility.

**MS BERRY:** But the funding is very different?

**Ms Howson:** Certainly the policies are different.

**MS BERRY:** I probably already know the answer to this question, but if they are in an enduring parental responsibility scenario, can they apply for the same sorts of funding support that foster and kinship carers can?

**Ms Howson:** No.

**MS BERRY:** Because it is basically looking at it like a permanent—

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**Ms Pappas:** They get a subsidy, which is slightly more than what a foster care or kinship carer would get, but they do not have access to the contingency budget. The idea for this is for that child to know this is their home, this is their parent. And you treat them just like you would your other children.

**Ms Howson:** And minimise the role of government in their life, really, to be frank.

**MS BERRY:** One more supplementary: if families are in that enduring parenting responsibility situation, is that a way they can then move to full adoption? Is there a pathway to full adoption, or is EPR the best way to do it?

**Ms Pappas:** You can move to adoption. With EPRs, the idea is that the biological family may choose to still have contact with that child. And those arrangements are made between those family members. The government or child protection services is not involved in that, unless we need to be or at the request of either the parent or the carer. But, over time, moving into adoption might be something that that family want to consider. It is also about whether the parents give consent to have their children adopted out. So, it can become quite complicated. It is a very emotional time for biological parents, as you can imagine.

**THE CHAIR:** We might move on to disability and therapy services at this point. Minister, page 31 of volume 1 shows Disability ACT expanded its self-directed funding trial with capacity for up to 30 individuals. Given the NDIS will give consumers choice and control of the ability to self-manage and self-direct funding, could you provide the committee with an example of how this self-directed funding trial was a success?

**Ms Howson:** While the officials are still taking their seats, Dr Bourke, your question was about how the performance on the self-directed funding trial is progressing, is that correct?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Howson:** I will hand over to Mr Hambleton in a moment, but we certainly increased the number of families in that trial over the course of the last, I think, 12 months.

**Ms Burch:** Yes, and we worked through community organisations such as Anglicare and Community Connections for this. It is a program called my choice. I think nine individuals are currently in the program and seven are getting ready. As we move towards the NDIS, certainly choice and control and self-determination of resources is important. I think 42 people have been contacted by my choice to obtain information. People go out into the program through these community groups and get information, and then narrows down to people's confidence and what information they need to self-direct their funding.

**Mr Hambleton:** The my choice program, as the numbers have been correctly articulated by the minister and director-general, has been successful in encouraging people to take on the role of self-direction. It has kept the pace pretty well with international experience around both UK and New Zealand and with other parts of Australia where the pick-up is initially slow, and that is because people really want to think about it, they really want to engage in the whole logistics of doing it and also their responsibilities. What is happening in the ACT is mirroring those experiences. As people get a little more confident in trying all the various elements of self-direction, they start to pick it up. Word of mouth gets around. They start telling

friends about how it is going for them, and that advertising is the best advertising that occurs, because people start to realise what they are able to achieve.

The people who have gone through it at the moment are very successful, very happy. They are reporting a great deal of satisfaction in being able to manage their own arrangements, and that word is getting out. So we are finding there is a growing level of interest in it.

**MS BERRY:** I have a question about after-school care and vacation-care programs for students with disabilities. Could you update the committee on the provision of before and after-school care and vacation care?

**Ms Burch:** This is a program that came into place from the beginning of last year across a number of sites. Certainly what we heard was wanted was increased opportunity for vacation care, but also before and after-school care. There are two community providers—Belconnen Community Service and another group called Northcott. I think there was a little bit of a slow uptake in the first year until people got used to it and transport arrangements were bedded down. But it is my understanding that the response to these services is quite strong. I will hand over to Richard.

**Mr Baumgart:** The uptake was quite slow, and, of course, there are different services—there is the after-school care and vacation care, and they are run by several different organisations. In addition, Communities@Work is also part of this. There is still capacity within each of those programs. However, the uptake has been increasing as we have moved along.

The service being undertaken by Belconnen Community Service, for example, is trying something very different. Rather than it being after-school care at a school base, it is trying to do an inclusive youth arrangement. That is probably the one that is trying a really different model. They are probably the one where we are need to work more on trying to get more people to become aware of it and see it as a different model. The vacation care is quite popular, and that is getting considerably higher in its uptake now.

**MS BERRY:** With the BCS program, are the complications or the complexity of that because they are moving it out of the school to another site?

**Mr Baumgart:** That is part of it. But it is also because it is a very different model, I guess. In that case, we are not talking about six-year-old children; we are talking about 16, 18-year-olds. In fact, some people they have been targeting are actually adults but are in their year 12 or the extended year through the select high schools. So it is quite a different model. It is trying to provide that community-based option for people who are in their teens and things like that. It is not simply a six-year-old or a seven-year-old at a school. That is provided for in the other services. But this one is one is trying different models, and we are working with people and the schools to try and increase the uptake, of course, with Belconnen Community Service, which is are running that.

**Ms Burch:** But other services such as the one at Malkara, are vacation programs and

they are within the school. But while the figures are going up, there is probably some work we can do as we move towards independence to promote these services and try and unpack why we are looking at a 50 per cent vacancy rate in some of the short-term services. It could just be that families are getting used to these new services being there and how they fit them in with the broader program about access to community-based services for their little ones.

**Mr Baumgart:** And, of course, some service users are only using it on one or two or three afternoons a week. So the providers may have a full day on one day and not on any other, similar to any form of school or after-school care. It is not that people necessarily want that every day of the week, and, therefore, there are peaks and troughs and things like that. So it is trying to actually find appropriate times and for people for whom that is what they are after to fit in for those particular days when there are more vacancies et cetera.

**MS BERRY:** On the BCS program, I was not clear whether you said people are being transported to the program from the school.

**Mr Baumgart:** Yes. I understand they are. I would need to double check the exact arrangements on how the transport is coordinated. I do not think I have that in front of me. I do not believe that is an impact on that.

**Mr Hambleton:** Yes, there is a bus that BCS is able to get from Black Mountain School, and there is an arrangement for them to be able to transport from Black Mountain to that program. But it is not just young people from Black Mountain that access it as well. So that is a further complication.

**MS LAWDER:** A supplementary on that: those after-school and vacation-care programs, will they continue after the introduction of the NDIS?

**Ms Howson:** Certainly you would expect that individual support plans will identify after-school and vacation-school care as one of the aspects of what is reasonable and necessary in term of their funding arrangements. So I would imagine all these services will continue. Is that right, Maureen?

**Ms Sheehan:** The work that we are doing at the moment is identifying which service is essentially a mainstream service. That should make a reasonable adjustment so that everyone in the community can access it. Those sorts of services will not undergo any changes at all, because that is a mainstream service. Even though Disability ACT funds some services now, that could really be about, I suppose, the reluctance or the nervousness of some mainstream services at the moment to really engage with children with a disability. Then other services go beyond what is that reasonable adjustment. That would go within what is reasonable and necessary for those children to participate in the community as every other child participates. Those services would be within the national disability insurance scheme.

Shortly government will be making decisions about whether to simply provide the dollars for those services across to the commonwealth agency so that then children and their families can have a choice about what sort of support they would like after school. Maybe they would prefer not to go to centre-based after-school care. That



would be really enhancing the control and choice of those individuals and those families. On the other hand, it might be that it is very hard for families to organise things for children after school and, in fact, it is a much better option for families if government continues to provide specific services.

Those are some of the considerations that we will need to look at when we are working out whether to keep providing those block funded services, because it suits people better. It is not a choice if you cannot find anything, is it? It is really swings and roundabouts and just having a good look at what suits people and what really enhances control and choice.

**MS LAWDER:** I guess that is what I was thinking. Say your model was you needed 18 people a day to viably run it, but only 15 subscribe, where does that leave those 15 then?

**Ms Sheehan:** That is exactly right. Some mainstream services would provide specialist supports for some children with a disability. Take that example there: 15 children do not have a disability and three children do. You lose any efficiencies, I think, by shaving off some money for three children and saying that those children could get an identical service if they just had a little bit of extra money to buy it. We are looking at things that work for children and their families. We are looking at the efficient provision of services so that people do not just waste money in their package. We are really looking at trying to enhance services, not make them less efficient and less attractive to families.

**MS LAWDER:** Post-school options are referred to on page 30 somewhere. In the annual report it says that, as at 30 June, 57 young people with a disability will be completing school and looking to transition to the workforce. Will all of those young people and any others that need to be able to access programs to assist them and their families to transition to life after school—

**Ms Howson:** Could you state your question again?

**MS LAWDER:** Post-school options and transitioning—do all of those students and their families receive support, or are there some criteria about receiving support to transition?

**Ms Howson:** My understanding is that they do. Graham will be able to give you the detail on that.

**Mr Hambleton:** The way it works for young people as they are entering into post-school options is there is an arrangement with the Education and Training Directorate where information packs go out early in the year. Students and families seeking formal support at the graduation are required to complete a referral and forward it to Disability ACT. We work with House with No Steps around this whole process.

There are two streams where they go. One is work and further training and the other one is community access. It is really at that point of that assessment process that the decision is made with their family and their guardians as to where they go from there. If they go to education and work, that is what they are supported to do. To date, we

have had a really high success rate with all those young people being able to find a place, either work or where they can further their education.

If it is community access, there is a fund where they are able to access support to do that. There are a number of organisations where they are able to get support around the city, or they are able to self-direct, as is happening now. One of our pilot participants in the self-directed funding is a mum of a young woman who has said, “I want to buy my own supports for my family member.” There are organisations like Koomarri, Sharing Places, LEAD, Shaw Possibilities and others. They are able to access those particular services through that for community participation.

They are all funded and supported. The enhanced service offer that has recently come through as part of the NDIS initial rollout has been able to add to that. In terms of community participation, there was the government commitment for a further \$5,000 and there has been a further \$12,000 added on top of that. So you have now got a significant package that has allowed people to gain greater access in the community.

**MS BERRY:** Regarding the school into transition programs, do you have any examples about some of the outcomes of those programs? Have you been able to track what has happened? I know they have only been there for a short time.

**Ms Howson:** I am sure Graham would have some excellent examples.

**Mr Hambleton:** As I say, a number of young people have chosen, particularly around community participation, to explore what is available to them. One young woman who has been able to couple the money that she has been able to get out of the enhanced service offer has been able to set up her own small business with the assistance of her mother. She has been able to get engaged in a craft, learn the craft and build all the required aspects that she is going to need to take that to markets and to start to sell her particular articles, products et cetera.

Others have been able to use it as a way of engaging the community in a more realistic way. We have got a young man who has become part of a volunteer group for Kippax. He has joined that whole community. He is supported to do that, and he has been able to become part of the infrastructure of the community. We have got other people who are, as I say, using it for sharing places. Some of them are using it for recreation outcomes. On the community participation side of things, we have had quite a deal of success of people engaging meaningfully in their community.

On the work and employment side of things, people have gone on to find jobs. We have got people that have gone into tertiary study and used it. The ANU has been a place where people have been able to attend, as well as the other tertiary institutions in town.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, can you tell me more about the everyone, everyday disability awareness program? I understand it is a teaching resource for primary schools.

**Ms Burch:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I understand there was a pilot evaluation. Can you tell us about that

and what future plans there may be?

**Ms Burch:** That has been a very successful program. It has gone through our schools and, really, the next generation. It is about making sure that people are really aware of people with a disability and include them within the community. It is a very good place to start in our schools with that program. The pilot work was tested. As always, if you ask young folk about solutions to problems, they come up with the most direct and sometimes the simplest way forward. Just by inherently being young and thinking about the world through a different set of eyes they give us clarity that we sometimes clearly need. I might go to Graham for some work about it. Tasmania has also been very interested in this program and what we have done through our schools. As I understand it, officials are talking with the officials in Tasmania about them picking this up to run through their public school system as well.

**Mr Hambleton:** The program everyone, everyday was originally trialled in five schools in the ACT. It was trialled in years 3 and 4, and it was very successful. As the minister said, we had an evaluation conducted by the University of Canberra, which we can make available. It was a very positive evaluation. It showed the benefit for the schools, not just for the children with disability but for the broader school community. They found that it really focused the students on including everybody in the classroom. There were obviously kids with disabilities, but there were also kids from different ethnic backgrounds et cetera, and they were able to think about “how am I including those?”

Last week there was a presentation at a national conference of everyone, everyday. There is a YouTube video following a teacher talking about the difference it made in her classroom. I am sure that is going to go up on the public line soon and we will be able to make it available.

The second phase is rolling out at the moment—so this term in 2013. Weetangera and Bonner schools are taking it on as a whole-of-school. They are adding it to years 1, 2, 5 and 6. This is the first time we have had a whole-of-school approach. The support from the principals and the teachers is fantastic. They really are getting the difference it is making. It has been designed as a curriculum resource. We have obviously been working with our colleagues in the Education and Training Directorate as well so that there is a good mesh of their education curriculum and what we are attempting to add on top of that.

**Ms Howson:** I think this is a really good example of what the national disability strategy is all about in terms of creating more opportunities for people with a disability and just changing attitudes within the community towards people with a disability. You can imagine these young kids in terms of where they will be as young adults, creating a completely different environment for people with a disability to be able to participate much more fully in community life. While we move towards the national disability insurance scheme in this city and the direct benefits for people with a disability, this work within the community is equally important.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MS BERRY:** I have a supplementary, chair. Can you give some examples about some

of the learning or educational opportunities and activities that the kids went through during this? I know we will see it on YouTube soon.

**Mr Hambleton:** You will see it on YouTube soon. That is coming to a YouTube near you! As the minister mentioned when we went to the launch at Malkara; I think that was the school—

**Ms Burch:** No, it was down at Garran.

**Mr Hambleton:** Garran; that is correct. Four young students got up and talked about the difference it has made in their lives. As the minister referred to, they had a very blunt and direct way of addressing the changes it had made for them. When they saw a child by themselves or saw a child isolated, they found themselves thinking, “Gee, how can I include that child in our play and what we are doing?” or “How can I make sure at lunchtime that they are involved in our conversation? I might go and sit and eat my lunch with them.” It really opened the children to thinking about the kids that were on the outer or on the fringes. Also, if anybody saw somebody treating someone badly it gave them a real sense of “No, that’s not right, that’s not on; I’m going to do something about it.” It is really quite a direct approach.

I forgot to mention that we are also lowering it to kindergartens as well. It will be the full primary school and preschool curriculum that it is going to be able to be used in. In the tiers it is really aimed at where the kids are in their ages and what they can understand. That is what it is designed to really address.

**Ms Burch:** I think one of the key messages clearly comes from them. It is not about disability; it is about their ability. So if you want to play in the schoolyard with someone in a wheelchair, that is easy to do. You just get down to their level, so to speak, and do it. For the next generation, it will be the norm.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, in a higher philosophical sense, what are going to be the benefits for us as a community of that?

**Ms Burch:** It will be an inclusive, fair and equitable community where all with disability and various levels of ability will be treated as one and given the same opportunities as all. That is what I see the end of this program to be. And as soon as it is on YouTube I will send you a link.

**THE CHAIR:** Lovely. Thank you very much. Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, chair. Perhaps due to some of the media attention there has been more done to acknowledge the rights of people with a disability to relationships and sexual expression. What is the ACT doing to support this?

**Ms Burch:** It is about just working, again, across various programs, whether it is in health, whether it is in accommodation, whether it is in ACTES. There are a range of matters in there. I know at different times there are concerns about the health and wellbeing of people with a disability, ensuring that they are treated with respect and dignity. And I am looking at one of the officials to bounce to.

**Ms Howson:** I was just going to say that it is an issue that exercises a lot of discussion and debate in terms of the autonomy of individuals with a disability to make their own decisions about their own lives. I think, again, we are probably at a crossroad as a community in terms of accelerating our understanding of that and making those choices and options available for people with a disability. And I think the national disability insurance scheme, again in an intentional sense, is to genuinely create choice so that people are not forced to only choose what is available. If there are issues around how they want to live their lives and who they want to live their lives with, there is the opportunity to do that with the purchasing power that the national disability insurance scheme will give to people with a disability around the support arrangements and choosing the staff that they work with and, I think, facilitating a whole lot of innovative housing options for people with a disability. I think we are at the cusp of seeing some significant change over the next decade in relation to this issue.

As to general awareness and attitudinal issues, we have put some investments into providing opportunities for people with a disability to exercise their voice. Good examples of that are the digital storytelling projects that we funded where people with a disability, through a visual medium, have been able to tell their family, their friends and other people they want to share their story with what their desires are, what sort of life they want to live. We were also party to funding the film *Beautiful*, which is a fantastic film about relationships for people with a disability, challenging again, I think, prejudice around people with a disability and how they should live their lives. Richard, what did you want to say?

**Mr Baumgart:** In particular, we have engaged Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT, SHFPACT—an interesting acronym—to draft policies to support agencies, and that is referred to in the annual report. And that is currently out with the sector. It has not been made fully public yet because we are working with the sector. Our hope is that they will then be able to adopt those policies and practices. And so it has been out talking with the sector in October and our hope is that by the end of the year we can get that out and working with the organisations whom we are contracted with.

Graham might be able to talk about *Mirrorball*, the movie, if you wanted to know more about that. But otherwise you can actually go on Vimeo and have a look at that. It is a purchase otherwise. It is in the ACT libraries. It is another piece of visual art that talks about expressions for individuals and the rights to relationships.

**MS BERRY:** Before that, I want to clarify that you are waiting for feedback from the sector before that report is made public.

**Mr Baumgart:** Yes. SHFPACT has prepared that, I believe, at varying levels of draft stage, and that is getting consultation with a select group within the sector and then it will be modified and made public. Yes, it is still in progress.

**MS BERRY:** Without giving too much away, tell us about *Mirrorball*.

**Mr Hambleton:** *Mirrorball* is a movie that was made, once again, with some support from the ACT government. And it is a movie that you are able to see, as Richard said. But it is a movie that has been very well received in the ACT and, interestingly, been

very well received internationally and throughout Australia. It has been shown at international film festivals as well as a major film festival in Melbourne that was dealing with the subject of that particular matter as well.

**Mr Baumgart:** Too much detail.

**Ms Whitten:** I can talk about it. We actually launched *Mirrorball* last year. It was a presentation about young people in our community and what was important to them in terms of their relationships and also their family relationships or their personal relationships with their partners. So it was actually a very empowering presentation to be part of, I think.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** I have a question about the transition to NDIS. And I wonder whether there has been a pricing schedule determined yet and, if not, when might that be finalised.

**Ms Sheehan:** Thank you for the question. As you would be aware, in the launch sites which have already been established, there have been prices issued by the National Disability Insurance Agency, and those prices, in some cases, are benchmark prices and then in other cases they are maximum prices, depending upon the type of service that it is. The way that these prices were arrived at in the other launch sites was by a survey of existing costs in those launch sites, and that is why the prices are different in each launch site.

With respect to the ACT, of course the national agency will not open its doors until July next year, and we have a commitment from the national agency to do a pricing study in the ACT. In fact, just last Thursday we reached an agreement on how we will do that, and that is that we will be surveying existing prices and providing all of the existing pricing information that we have in the ACT through to the agency.

Fortunately, the agency have recently done a revision of the service types that they have got prices for. For example, if you think about services that are very common and that we know that people will want under the NDIS because they have them now—things like personal care—it just makes sense that there were questions around: is that a price that even resembles what might be charged in the ACT? Will there be travel time included? And so on and so on. We will be feeding through to the national agency all of the information that we have in the ACT. They have recently appointed their very first actuary to the National Disability Insurance Agency, and our financing people will be working with that actuary to get good prices in the ACT. We all want that confidence that our providers can actually provide services for those prices.

**MS LAWDER:** That is another progress or transition to the NDIS. Has any office space been identified in the ACT for the agency and staffing levels?

**Ms Sheehan:** We do meet on a monthly basis with the agency on implementation issues. And the minister met very recently with the chair of the board of the agency and the chief executive. And we were told in our monthly meetings—and the minister was informed—that the agency is actively looking for space in the ACT. And thanks

to the minister lobbying very hard, we have rather excitingly reached agreement that there will be a level of co-location between the Community Services Directorate and mainstream services and the agency, at least in one north side site and one south side site. So we need to identify those places.

It is a very exciting development to have that upfront agreement about co-location between the territory services and the commonwealth services. And most importantly, it builds on the jumping-off point for the national disability insurance scheme, which is not extra money for specialist services. There will be extra money for specialist services, but the jumping-off point is access to mainstream services that everyone else in the community just takes for granted but which people with a disability have had a very hard time, indeed, accessing. So that opportunity to co-locate mainstream services within those extra, specialist services will deliver a really outstanding outcome, we hope, for people with a disability in the ACT.

**MS LAWDER:** And the second part was about staffing? Have you had any—

**Ms Sheehan:** The agency has already undertaken recruitment for the most senior executive for the ACT and, indeed, for all of the launch sites. And very excitingly and appropriately, the agency agreed to the requests of the launch sites that in their selection process a person with a disability and someone from the launch site be involved. So there have been national interviews for all of the launch sites. And we are crossing our fingers and very hopeful that there will shortly be an announcement of the executive who will be the leader of the launch site from the commonwealth perspective.

**MS LAWDER:** I think you might have touched on this but how often, minister, do you get briefed by the task force?

**Ms Burch:** It forms a regular part of my briefing. It is certainly weekly. I have a weekly briefing with CSD, and certainly the transition to NDIS forms part of that. It depends on what excitement has happened during the week and what information comes forward. I have said this in the chamber. There is so much work going on behind the scenes. The task force and the officials involved really are to be commended, because this is complicated, complex work that involves commonwealth negotiations, negotiations and discussions across our other agencies, about how do you unpack every dollar that may be attributed to the NDIS and that we will hand over to the agency, and then what is really here for mainstream services. At the end of the day, we will hand over money to the agency, who will distribute it through their mechanisms. But we still, as a government, are responsible for serving an inclusive community that needs to cover all in our community. Maureen is doing a fantastic job as our state coordinator and lead negotiator with the commonwealth.

**Ms Sheehan:** Thank you, minister.

**Ms Burch:** And there is a lot of work that I know people are rightly wanting answers to, as we get closer and closer to July next year. But there is a lot of work, and I have indicated that we—“we” as in government—will be in a position in the new year to be very clear about that. But it is important to take that time and work with the community providers. Some of this transition is also around the sector development,

and I think we have touched on it a little here. Not only do we need to understand our dollars, but every community provider needs to understand their dollars and what it means to move from block funding into, effectively, market-based funding.

You touched on it with your vacation care and your after-school care. And so part of our sector development for which we are finalising that plan—good, I am glad you nodded there, Maureen—is just working with the sector and supporting them to do that by internal interrogation into their own business structures so that they can stand up for what they need to be part of the NDIS. We are seeing alliances, we are seeing full mergers with a number of organisations in preparedness for the move to NDIS.

**MS LAWDER:** One last supplementary on that, if I may, you are not so much a service provider but a representative of peak bodies in the ACT. I know some of them are a little concerned about their funding model under the NDIS. Could you explain what might happen?

**Ms Burch:** This would be, for example, the Deafness Resource Centre?

**MS LAWDER:** Yes.

**Ms Burch:** It is something that we are certainly very in tune with. At the meeting with the chair and the CEO of the agency, I made a very strong case that, using the Deafness Resource Centre as an example, there is a level of service provision within that but there is also a holistic universal access that, for a tier 2 client base, needs to be maintained as well. I think one of the additional challenges for us in the ACT is as a whole jurisdiction. So there is a buffer only in the sense of how we implement the change, but there is no geographical buffer zone whatsoever. You may want to talk about the tier 2. But certainly it is recognised that we need to maintain that level of universal information and education service as well.

**Ms Howson:** I might just add that being in a launch site we are essentially in the process of resolving these complex issues as we face them. And it is very difficult at times to give stakeholders a very clear and straight answer because what they have raised are questions that are still being worked through. I guess one of the benefits of being in a launch site is that we are very much in the front seat of influencing the design of a full scheme as we move towards that in 2019, 2020. The downside is that the recipe is not clear and all of the elements of how this system is going to work are well understood. But in terms of tier 2, Maureen might make a comment on that.

**Ms Sheehan:** Thank you. The thing about the NDIS is that it is literally being designed as we implement, and that is quite an unusual position to be in. The situation that we have moved to is this. We used to talk about tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3 services. I think where we are now is that it is not actually services; it is individuals and people that need different types of services. So when it comes down to information in referral services, clearly, if you are eligible for a package under the NDIS, you will need information and referral services and you will have a package of dollars that will help you pay for that. But there will be other people in the community that will not have an enduring disability who will have a need for information and referral services. The minister was talking about the Deafness Resource Centre, which is a perfect example. Vision Australia would be another example of that. There is a point in time where you



start to have some questions about your abilities and you are looking for information. The last thing that you will be doing is running off to the National Disability Insurance Agency for an assessment and hoping that you get a package before you get your first piece of information.

So as Ms Howson was saying, in the ACT, because our whole system will move across, we need to be very confident that we have that first point of contact and information and referral, that we can resource organisations to improve their services and that we do not get ourselves into the ridiculous situation where you can have a Rolls Royce service but you cannot have a ticket to catch the ACTION bus. In other jurisdictions, where it is a small part of their population accessing the Rolls Royce service, in fact, there are head offices in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney that will be funding all of those services and no-one inside the launch site will need to think a second thought about it.

So we are working really closely with the commonwealth on that. As the minister said, you could see the penny dropping with the chair of the National Disability Insurance Agency as he spoke to the minister that it is a very different situation in the ACT, and we will absolutely need to ensure that we are funding those services to continue so that you can get that one-off or maybe short-term information and referral and so that people without an enduring disability have got access to services. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that.

**THE CHAIR:** Any supps?

**MS BERRY:** Yes, I have a supp. Using the Deafness Resource Centre as an example, they are an organisation that would be thinking about their ability to provide a service to people under the NDIS. I guess there will be a whole bunch of people, and you touched on this before, who will be thinking about whether or not they can survive under the NDIS with the new funding model. I do not know how this could be managed at all, but is there a concern that a lot of these smaller organisations will be consumed by larger organisations? And then what would be the quality of the services that are provided when those smaller locally based organisations are moved out into maybe national organisations? How is that sort of transition with all of that being supported through the NDIS?

**Ms Sheehan:** I think it would be fair to say that there is not a concern that smaller organisations might make a choice to amalgamate or to form partnerships. I think that that is a very natural thing to do in moving from a community-based organisation, probably even parents and friends based organisations, with very specific vision and values, relying on block government funding, into a market environment. It is only natural for boards to think about what sort of business model they need, what sort of prices they would need to charge in order to move into that market-based model, and whether the people that they formed an organisation to serve be better served if they amalgamated with others. We would be very keen to support organisations to do an assessment of their capability and their ability to move into the new environment. If their assessment was that they would be better placed to do that by partnerships and amalgamations, we would be very keen to support them in doing that.

It is not just disability service providers that are thinking about that. You see it right

across human services provision: small organisations find that their overheads might be relatively high because they do not have those economies of scale and efficiencies. The ACT government has actually put a lot of resources into developing community hubs right around the ACT to enable, for one thing, small organisations to co-locate and to share resources. It is a very natural thing for organisations to do. And if it makes organisations better able to provide services in an environment, after all, where resources will double, then that can only be a benefit for people with a disability, who will then have an opportunity to make some choices. As we were saying before, it is one thing to talk about control and choice, but if there is no growth in providers, no growth in workforce, then doubling the resources does not deliver what we need to deliver for people with a disability.

**THE CHAIR:** It is almost 5 o'clock, so we will adjourn. I remind committee members that the committee has resolved that supplementary questions are to be lodged with the committee within four business days of receipt of the proof transcript of the hearing. Minister, the committee asks ministers to 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.

**The committee adjourned at 4.59 pm.**