



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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

(Reference: [ACT public service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment](#))

**Members:**

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

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**THURSDAY, 12 DECEMBER 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.

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## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 9.31 am.**

**GRAY, PROFESSOR MATTHEW**, Director, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, College of the Arts and Social Sciences

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, Professor Gray. Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services for its inquiry into ACT public service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. On behalf of the committee I thank you for attending today and appreciate the time that you have given to assist us.

We are hearing evidence from this morning, followed by Rachelle Towart from the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre at 10.30. At lunchtime the committee is going to meet in private with ACT public service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and from about 1 till 2 pm we will hold a roundtable discussion with the same employees.

As a witness participating in an Assembly committee inquiry, you are afforded protections and obligations by parliamentary privilege, and I draw your attention to the privileges statement—the pink card—in front of you on the table. Professor Gray, for the record, could you confirm that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

**Prof Gray:** Yes, I have read and understood the privilege statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and webstreamed and broadcast live. Professor Gray, before we begin, can you please state for the record your full name and the capacity in which you appear today?

**Prof Gray:** Professor Matthew Gray, Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University.

**THE CHAIR:** Before we proceed to questions from the committee, would you care to make an opening statement?

**Prof Gray:** I will be very brief. I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission and give evidence before this committee. It is a very important topic and one which is of great interest and which the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research sees as important. The centre has done a lot of work around determinants of labour force status, retention, education and demographic projections. They are particularly relevant to the work of this committee, but then it has also done work on a whole other range of issues which impact upon the wellbeing of Aboriginal Australians.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Professor Gray. We will start with some questions from the committee. Talking about the advantages to the ACT public service of this kind of work—I appreciate the breadth of the research that CAEPR has already done across the public and private sectors—what advantages would accrue to the ACT public

service from recruiting and retaining Indigenous employees?

**Prof Gray:** I think they are significant. They are difficult to quantify sometimes, but they include better ability of the ACT public service to provide services to Indigenous constituents. At the 2011 census our estimates are there were over 6,000 Indigenous people living the ACT, and that is projected to increase to about 10,500 in 2031. So having Indigenous public servants is crucial in terms of service delivery. It has a direct impact upon improving the wellbeing of the people who have jobs and their families and quite strong flow-on effects. Also it is important in terms of the reconciliation process. It is important that public services play a leading role. It is an area in which public services across Australia have probably not done as well as many people had thought and expected, but it is an area where certainly the public service should strive to play a leading role.

**THE CHAIR:** Professor Gray, are you familiar with the term “cultural capital”?

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you explain how that may be an attribute which Indigenous public servants could bring to the ACT public service?

**Prof Gray:** So “cultural capital”—my understanding anyway—is partly about knowledge, but it is also about the networks and connections people have. If you have a cohort of Indigenous employees in the public service, they will have cultural capital. They have networks, connections and understanding within the Indigenous community within the ACT and more broadly, and that knowledge and those connections are important in order for the government to be able to be as effective as it can in achieving its objectives. It is similar to other groups as well. It is important to have diversity within the public service. There are many similarities between peoples, but there are also some cultural differences which are challenging for governments to deal with. Having cultural capital can help both with the design of policy and services and the implementation and evaluation in terms of understanding why things may or may not be working.

**THE CHAIR:** Might those different world views and different ways of doing things not only enhance service delivery to Indigenous clients of the ACT public service but also help the public service to deliver better policy for everybody in Canberra?

**Prof Gray:** Yes, I think so. A lot of policy is about high level issues, but a lot of policy also depends upon the detail of the design and implementation and how people will respond to the incentives and so on that are created. Having a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the population which government and the public service is serving will, I believe, ultimately lead to more effective policies and services. These are difficult to quantify, but I think that they are substantial.

**THE CHAIR:** In your paper you talked about non-standard recruitment strategies to give people who might otherwise be screened out by standard recruitment a chance. What sort of strategies could the ACT public service try?

**Prof Gray:** There has been a lot of research about why people find it hard to get jobs.

Some of it is to do with not having education or work experience. Some of it is to do with drug or alcohol-type issues. But there is evidence, particularly from the private sector—a lot of mining companies, banks and so on—that have adopted quite different recruitment methods and procedures for Indigenous employees than they would generally adopt for their workforce. They do that because they find that if you follow a traditional merit-based process—I believe all decisions should be on merit—the way it has been implemented in public services in terms of written applications, you will not attract Indigenous employees. If a job requires a high level of competency in writing, literacy and so on, then it makes sense that you would require a written application. But, for many other jobs, people may need a level of literacy, but being able to present really well in writing can lead to people being screened out.

Sometimes things like criminal background checks can knock people out because a much higher proportion of the Indigenous population will have convictions. Sometimes it is for major dishonesty or fraud or very serious offences like that, but often it is for things like drunk and disorderly, driving without a licence. Sometimes those sorts of things will preclude people from getting a job when, actually, you could make an assessment that they will be fine in certain roles.

If you follow a normal process with a selection committee, you will find you order people according to some sort of selection criteria against which you rank them. Often you will find that it is very hard for many Indigenous people to score highly on those. It is a challenge because public services, understandably, have a duty in the spending of public money and making sure there is no nepotism or favouritism, but, equally, it is important that there not be discrimination. These sorts of processes certainly make it more difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

With things like some of the psychometric screening-type testing and so on, there is quite strong evidence that people from certain backgrounds will do better on those tests independent of their ability to do the job. For example, the mining industry has been very successful by guaranteeing people a job. So they say, “If you do a work readiness course and complete this training and pass these tests”—in the mining industry if you are operating heavy machinery being drug free is important so you get a drug test and alcohol test—“if you do all of these things, we will guarantee you a job.” That can be very important because many people go through many training courses which never lead to a job. That is very disillusioning and people become cynical about it. So you can say, “Well, actually, if you do this set of things, we guarantee you a job.” Now, once you get the job, you have to perform in the job and meet the criteria of the job, but those sorts of things have been very important in getting people into employment. I understand it is a big challenge in this particular context, but to really seriously increase employment rates, they are some of the things you have to consider.

**THE CHAIR:** One of the things we have heard a little bit about from other witnesses is the need for flexibility in the workplace. I note the title of one of the papers you mention in your letter is “Workplace agreements and Indigenous-friendly workplaces”. What do you think constitutes an Indigenous-friendly workplace?

**Prof Gray:** There is a range of factors. Some of them are about people feeling safe and comfortable in the workplace. A lot of the research shows that what is important

to people in jobs is having money, having a chance to improve your skills and get advancement and feeling you are doing something worthwhile. That is not different from what you would find with any other group of employees. Partly it is about an absence of discrimination—people taking people for what they are. Partly it is about understanding the obligations people sometimes have to their family, kin. So it is about flexibility in terms of leave provisions and so on.

We find that a lot of times people will be using carers leave or personal leave or sick leave. While there is sometimes cultural leave, it tends not to be used as much as you might think. People often want to use the standard provisions, because if I need to take time off to care for my sick mother-in-law or something like that, that is not that different. There are cultural differences, but, in a sense, I need to be away from work to provide care.

On the other hand, it is important that people actually do the job they are paid to do and that their family commitments do not preclude them from being as able as any other employee to perform their job. So, there has to be a balance. The research shows that it is about things like not asking extra questions you would not ask of another person if an Indigenous employee says they have to care for a sick family member.

The role of managers and supervisors is crucial. This research is not specific of Indigenous employees, but we know that companies have a huge range of family-friendly policies, and we know that what often is very important in influencing whether people are able to access those is the attitude of their manager and supervisor. So it is really working on the supervisor-manager level. It is not just the policy you have got but it is the extent to which managers and supervisors actually implement it. It is very easy to make someone feel uncomfortable by saying, “I’ve got you taking leave again.” You can very easily dissuade someone by saying, “Geez, if you want to get a promotion, you know, it’s going to be pretty hard.” Those sorts of statements can make it very hard. And, again, it is a balance, because people have to do the jobs they are paid to do.

**THE CHAIR:** It was suggested earlier in the committee that Indigenous public servants are less likely to seek promotion. Do you have any evidence of that?

**Prof Gray:** I do not have direct evidence. We certainly know that Aboriginal employees tend to be in lower paid, lower skilled jobs generally. Partly that is undoubtedly due to qualification and work experience. If you look at Australia since the mid 1990s, there have been very big increases in Indigenous employment in remote, non-remote, men, women, younger, older. It is still a very low employment rate, but there have been big increases. But what has happened is that the number of Aboriginal people in professional occupations, managerial, is really much lower, particularly professional occupations. And some of that is to do with qualifications. I do not have direct evidence on this but I believe that it is partly to do with promotion procedures, processes and mentoring and discrimination, not necessarily deliberate or overt discrimination, although that sometimes does happen.

There is research. When we asked the Australian population about discrimination and about stereotypes—I have not got the exact figures here—quite a high proportion of the population thought that Aboriginal people do not work as hard as non-Aboriginal

people. They are not as disciplined. So there are these beliefs amongst the general population. I can provide to the committee, if you are interested, some of that work on discrimination.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Prof Gray:** There are these attitudes, and I think we would be naive to say that discrimination does not play a factor. So things like mentoring programs are important and sometimes, as I say, dedicated positions. This is a situation in which the role of the senior management, the secretary and the chief executive of the department and their deputies and so on is crucial, because if they really drive it and bring people on, give opportunities and secondment and acting roles and all those kinds of things, they can be helpful in getting people promoted.

It is difficult, because you cannot afford to have people in roles which they do not have the competency to do; nor is it good for the person either. You do not want people in a role in which they cannot succeed. That is not good for them either. So it is about trying to make an assessment of whether people have got the ability, the experience, and whether a certain level of support might enable them to get there. But you have to make sure that they are actually able to do the job; otherwise it is not a good outcome for anyone.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Wall.

**MR WALL:** Yesterday we heard quite a bit of evidence from Dr Kate Barnett from the University of South Australia who had done a substantial study into Indigenous employment in the South Australian public service. There were a number of recommendations that came from her research that were never implemented, and the government down there cited budget constraints, which is a common issue with governments of all persuasions. What, from your research and your experience, are probably some simple initiatives that would be low cost that could be implemented fairly easily to start achieving some improvement in employment figures?

**Prof Gray:** I think that changing some of the recruitment processes and procedures can be done in a fairly low-cost way. That is one thing. I think that the mentoring programs can often be not very expensive. It takes some staff time but people mentor other people all the time.

**MR WALL:** Recruitment and training generally is an expense that is incurred regardless of—

**Prof Gray:** That is right. I personally think that really incentivising the chief executive to achieve the outcomes is going to be seen as effective. Mining companies had massive increases in Indigenous employment in the Pilbara. It is mixed. There are areas where it has not been. And it is a contentious area. But why have they done that? Partly it is to do with economic factors. They need a workforce. Partly it is to do with their liking the social licence to mine. They are mining people's lands. Partly it is because people care. They want to improve. If they can, they will do good. But they incentivise people to achieve the targets.



So I think it is about actually putting in some consequences for non-achievement of targets by senior people, making themselves unpopular, but people will get serious about that. That sort of thing is important. I think it is important to be realistic in terms of things that have to be done. It is important to have realistic goals as well. If you set targets which are unrealistic, people very quickly just say, "It's just lip service. We can never do that." Those incremental gains are important.

But in terms of other things which you can do which are low cost—many of these are probably done; I do not know—there is cross-cultural training for employees. Some of the other things are probably more expensive. When somebody gets a job, for example, when other people in their family have not had a job, that can be really hard. And that is not true of just Aboriginal employees. You get a job, you become different, you have got money, you have got to go off to work each day at 8.30, 9 am. Other people are heading off to do whatever they do during the day.

Sometimes support to the families has been found to be very important. Again, that is going to cost. But for the number of Aboriginal employees that you are talking about in the ACT public service—is it 270, something like that?

**MR WALL:** Just under 260.

**Prof Gray:** Yes, and a fair proportion of people are going to be doing fine and settled in. Then if you go to 400, you are not actually talking about that large a number of people. I do not know how many agencies there are, eight? I do not know. You are probably not actually talking about all that large a number of people. So you probably can afford to have fairly customised approaches around each individual, especially given that quite a lot of people will not actually need any particular assistance. They are well established in the workforce and are doing fine. The others tend to be more extensive types of things that you can do.

**MR WALL:** You mentioned cross-cultural training. Ultimately, how should it be provided? To what level of staff?

**Prof Gray:** I am not a particular expert in the actual provision of how you go about doing it, but the evidence shows that it is beneficial, if it is done properly, in terms of improving people's understanding of issues and cultural issues. Also, often the training is provided from the community and it does help build greater trust between the government and the public service and the community. And that is a big issue. The history of governments and the treatment of Aboriginal populations have been, at times, very poor. There are significant levels of distrust and suspicion. So anything that the public service can do to engender greater trust and so on will also make it a more attractive place for people to want to come.

I think one of your big challenges is going to be that we know that when you have got growing employment, it is much easier to increase the proportion of Indigenous employees, but when you have got a contracting labour market it is much harder. And that is likely to be the case, I guess, for the ACT. I would not expect there will be very strong employment growth in the next few years. I may be wrong but I think you have got to be realistic about it. It is going to be a challenge in that context, yes. But if you have got strong employment growth, it is much easier to achieve the targets than if

you have got a fairly stable workforce.

**MR WALL:** Just a further question, one of the initiatives currently within the ACT public service—and I do not know whether your research covered across it—is identified positions or dedicated positions that are reserved for Indigenous employees only. Did you find that there was any resentment or any attitude or perception change among co-workers relating to people that occupied one of those positions?

**Prof Gray:** I have not done research specifically on that issue. It is possible.

**MR WALL:** Obviously a large part of the retention side of things pertains to attitude and the work culture?

**Prof Gray:** I think there are critical mass issues. It is not such an issue in the ACT because the ACT, I think, has about the highest employment rate of Indigenous people in Australia. The ACT's performance overall as a labour market is very strong compared to the rest of Australia. But partly it is the threshold issue. Where you have got very low employment rates, for the first few people who get work it is harder. But also it is hardest for the first few people coming into a particular workplace. There are threshold issues and there are issues to do with it being very hard for a single person. If you have got a group, a cohort that can support people, this is very important.

Certainly when you talk to the banks and so on, they are making quite big efforts. ANZ, NAB—I do not want to single them out particularly because I think they are all pretty much making efforts—talk about how you have to start to identify kids in school, offer them cadetships, offer them traineeships, these kinds of things. They are not expensive. The wages paid in those roles are pretty low, and then that can help encourage them to go on with education. For most people, if you cannot see any prospect of return from your education, people tend to lose interest pretty quickly. But if they can see it might lead to this, then for those who have got the aptitude and the background, it really does motivate people to continue on in education.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** I was interested in Rio Tinto's Indigenous employment program. I do not know how much you know about it. I know it is a very different work environment and the types of duties that people would be doing at the mine would be different. They talk about focusing on a retention rate of 26 weeks. And they have got a number of programs in place there that support people. You have mentioned cadetships. They do cadetships, identify the kids at school and provide them with opportunities. Do you think some of that stuff that they do out there, given that it is a much higher Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and a very different population, probably, from here in the ACT, could work here?

**Prof Gray:** As you say, it is a very different context. The nature of the work is sometimes different. Sometimes it is not. You will find people in HR, or finance, processing accounts, that kind of stuff. I think that you can learn a lot from what companies like Rio Tinto have done but you should understand also that they have had spectacular employment outcomes. That is partly in the context of a huge mining boom and the very high revenues that they generate and generally high salaries that

are paid in that industry. Yes, in some ways you probably have an easier job in a way in the ACT because there are generally higher employment rates, higher levels of education, orientation to work.

On the other hand, the challenge for the ACT public service, in particular, is that there are other employers who are also trying to attract Indigenous employees. That is true of the mining industry as well where the big mining companies are competing in a sense for the people who want a job and are ready to get it. I think that with these things about literacy and numeracy support, traineeships, apprenticeships—I do not know how much you have apprenticeships—the focus on retention, job training and recruitment, the way you would operationalise it would differ but the principles are going to be pretty similar. They have got particular issues with fly in, fly out, locals. Nonetheless, the things that they have done in terms of mentoring and all these things I think are pretty much common across workplaces, particularly big workplaces, big employers.

**MS BERRY:** Do you know much about the work start program?

**Prof Gray:** The Rio Tinto one?

**MS BERRY:** Yes, with the Western Australian Department of Commerce.

**Prof Gray:** No.

**MS BERRY:** It is okay if you do not.

**Prof Gray:** I do not recall the precise details.

**MS BERRY:** Okay.

**Prof Gray:** Generally speaking, these are collaborations between the government and the company in terms of training, support and sometimes wage subsidies. Wage subsidies are very important in getting people in.

**MS BERRY:** We can find out some more information about that, but I just wondered how long the program goes for and exactly what happens.

**Prof Gray:** I cannot recall the details of it.

**MS BERRY:** Do you know much about the four-day workshops that they have with the Aboriginal people as a way to have an interview process?

**Prof Gray:** This is about changing your recruitment methods. They give people a range of tasks; they see how they interact in different situations. They are testing aptitude for different roles—things like whether people turn up and all those kinds of things. If you say you have a four-day workshop, you have got to turn up for four days. Do they turn up? If you provide feedback on how presentable you should be and those kinds of things, do people respond? That gives you quite a good indication of how they are going to go. They are really trying to make an assessment. A lot of Aboriginal people who have got strong skills will get jobs. Then there are groups of

people who have not perhaps worked for some time, but are not far off having the skills and the behaviours that you require in order to sustain paid employment. Then there are people who are a long way off being able to get a job. There may be alcohol, drugs or violence. They may have never worked. Perhaps they did not do much schooling. Perhaps they do not have the sorts of routines and behaviours that you require.

**MS BERRY:** Yes.

**Prof Gray:** The experience of these sorts of programs is that they will pick up really quickly anybody who is ready to get a job. These sorts of programs work with people who are not that far off being job ready. It is much harder to get people who are a long way off being ready for a job. The evidence is that while they have managed to employ some people who started out needing a lot of assistance, they will tend to be taking from the pool of people who are not that far off being job ready. These sorts of recruitment processes and so on can help them assess how quickly somebody could be got up to speed, so to speak.

**MS BERRY:** One of the things that we talked about yesterday in the evidence that was provided was Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people talking themselves down out of work in the public service.

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** One of the reasons could be that they have been out of employment for a long time, but it could be that they do not have appropriate clothes or things like that.

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** Have you done anything on that? Is there any support that other organisations have given to people in those sorts of situations as part of that job ready program?

**Prof Gray:** There is certainly research about how you help people who are homeless or, and that is an extreme case sometimes, long-term jobless—how they can be helped to get jobs. I forget the current title, but with Job Services Australia and the national employment services, quite a lot of what they are actually doing is building some confidence, helping people with how you present in an interview, how you apply for a job, how you dress in an interview—things like being able to provide some assistance with getting a haircut or getting new clothes. There is a lot of evidence that these things can really help people.

**MS BERRY:** Yes.

**Prof Gray:** It is partly confidence and partly to change people's perceptions of them. Certainly, these types of things can help. I am not quite sure if that would translate into what you would do, but those sorts of factors are important.

**MS BERRY:** If people are applying for jobs and they are not quite job ready, and if they keep getting knocked back, when they are already talking themselves down—

**Prof Gray:** You destroy people's confidence and they give up.

**MS BERRY:** Yes.

**Prof Gray:** That is one of the real barriers, the obstacles, when people lose their confidence. That is one of the reasons why, with long-term joblessness, it gets harder and harder to get a job. That is partly because the fact that you do not get a job means that you may not have the skills to get the job, but partly it is just that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in a way: you believe you cannot, so you cannot; you are not confident. These things really make a big difference. The other thing is that often Aboriginal people are entering paid employment later in life; they are not getting that sort of progression of leave school, get a job or go into education and from part-time work into a career-type job. Often you will find young women who have had children much younger, for example, coming back to do further education later in life. For that group, too, those issues of confidence, connection to workforce and so on are very important.

**MS BERRY:** Do you think that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that long-term unemployment self-fulfilling prophecy is greater than for other groups?

**Prof Gray:** There are certainly more people in that situation. We also know that people are influenced by their friends and family. It is not only yourself; if you are in a social network or a grouping where a lot of people do not have jobs, it feeds on itself a bit. There are not the role models. You get social norms and social activities starting to happen during working hours. All that means is that if you get a job, you become socially excluded from your network. It is probably not quite to the same degree that these issues are present in the ACT; they are probably not nearly the same as you would find in regional centres or remote areas.

**MS BERRY:** Yes.

**Prof Gray:** If you think about your employment targets, partly you can view this as a competition: there is a pool of workers and you take from the commonwealth or from the private sector. In a way it is not really a valuable use of your efforts. If you have got a job, what do you care really except if you want people to work on your programs and help with what you do? In a way, if you are talking about retention, why are you worried about retention? Partly because you have invested in people. But if they are going onto a job somewhere else and it is a better job with another employer, it is sort of—

**THE CHAIR:** So what you are really suggesting is that we should be thinking about growing our market?

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Trying to get our market of job seekers?

**Prof Gray:** Yes. You get a lot of benefit. You can draw in people who are not going to get a job easily in other ways or you can try and poach—offer them an extra

incentive payment or something. You can do that and meet targets. But in a way I do not think that is what you are really trying to do.

**THE CHAIR:** But if you did take that approach, that would necessarily mean that your workforce is going to be skewed to more entry-level, supportive-type positions rather than middle and upper management?

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** So you would have to account for that within your overall strategy and accept that that would be a socially desirable outcome.

**Prof Gray:** Yes; you need to have a clear statement about the strategy. In the submissions, I saw sort of some concern about low levels of employment—low levels in the ranks.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Prof Gray:** I share that, but I want to know where people have come from. If you are actually bringing in people who would not have had a job otherwise and the fact is that they are coming in at the lower level, it is not necessarily a sign that there is a problem. You need to understand more about it. It is important and desirable to get people into more senior roles and professional roles, management roles; there is no question about that. But there are questions about understanding pathways in and where people go. Bringing people into entry-level jobs is not necessarily a bad thing if you are giving people a start which they otherwise would not get.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** I am interested in the recruitment side of things. Yesterday we heard from a couple of people that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to rely on friends and family or word of mouth for recruitment.

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** I have been thinking about that and wondering whether it is a chicken and egg kind of thing. I have been thinking about the digital divide. People across the board with lower levels of education tend to be lesser users of technology and the internet. We use the internet a lot to advertise positions, submit applications and all sorts of things like that.

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** I am wondering whether you have any evidence from your research around that.

**Prof Gray:** I think it is right that Aboriginal people disproportionately rely on family and friends, but they have got fewer employed family and friends so it is not necessarily as effective a way of getting a job. Then, as you say, the public service tends not to be word of mouth, though people might say, “Have you seen there’s a job

at such and such which might suit you?”

I am a bit sceptical about the issue of the internet. I have not seen the evidence in the ACT, but the mining companies, Rio Tinto and so on, as I understand it, get a lot of electronic applications. People have got smart phones. So I do not know. There may be some issues there—I am not saying there are not—but I am a bit sceptical that it is a really huge barrier. I guess you could find that out from Indigenous employees; they would be able to help you with that. Sometimes it is said, but I think that people increasingly are online and accessing information online, whether or not you type up the application and send it.

This goes to recruitment processes around requiring a very formal CV and addressing selection criteria. If you are knocked back 10 times, it gets harder and harder to do a customised application and so on. There may be something there, but it is probably not so much to do with a lack of access to the internet as with the way that then translates. You could put it on social media: “Five jobs available for Aboriginal trainees.” I reckon you would get the message out real fast. The question then is: how do they apply?

**MS LAWDER:** Flowing on from that, what about multiple barriers to finding employment. Again, it may not be as much an issue in the ACT, but more generally Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do seem, from all the research, to be overrepresented in homelessness, incarceration and all those social determinants of health.

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** It is difficult to focus on finding a job when you are worried about much more pressing and immediate issues.

**Prof Gray:** Yes. This is the classic chicken and egg. People in employment have better outcomes. Is that because they are in employment? Partly. But the fact that they could get employment means that they had a certain level of health and mental health, functioning, family stability and so on. For those with what you describe as serious multiple barriers, which we were talking about earlier, people who are a long way from being able to get a job, employment might almost be a by-product of addressing those issues. The costs to government and society of that level of multiple issues are very high in terms of child protection, incarceration, crime, victims of crime, policing and justice. They are enormous. You want to address those issues as best you can anyway. If people get employment, that will be important, but you cannot just say, “Right, I’m going to take you and give you a job now.” With your experience, you would understand homeless populations and so on better than I would.

People need hope. The hope that they could achieve something can be very powerful. It is when people actually have given up, when they just do not believe they could ever actually achieve anything, that it becomes very difficult. They are long processes.

**MS LAWDER:** Finally on that, does intergenerational unemployment have a real impact as well?

**Prof Gray:** There is certainly evidence of growing numbers of families in which parents, grandparents and children are not employed. Certainly that family background—not having a role model or perhaps education not being valued, fairly sort of chaotic living circumstances often associated with substance abuse and so on—can have an impact. But equally there are people who will escape from that. It is a degree of destiny, I guess, but it is also not fixed forever.

Certainly in those cases that is where some of these sorts of programs that have been used—“If you do these set of steps that we set out, we will guarantee you a job.” For that sort of group, in particular, those things can work. You would expect them to have a reasonably high failure rate but, equally, your returns from getting people in that situation into employment can be very high as well. It is an investment, but a riskier investment. But I think you would want to have a range of strategies that you try and groups that you are targeting rather than having a single sort of approach. I think there is a role for that, but it would only be one of a range of strategies that you would need to have.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you familiar with the paper from the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining on Indigenous employment?

**Prof Gray:** Yes, I have read it.

**THE CHAIR:** In that is a—

**Prof Gray:** From the University of Queensland?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. In that there is an organisational maturity chart which looks at about 20 different categories. It then considers whether an organisation is disinterested, token, committed, capable and—

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you find that a particularly valid chart, given your understanding of it?

**Prof Gray:** I cannot remember the precise details of it but, yes, I think that that is a helpful framework for thinking about organisations. I do think that that centre has done—there has been a huge amount of research on why people do not find jobs. We know it is education, blah, blah, blah. There has been much less work done on the employer side. Companies for which there is a combination of social responsibility by employers and a business case—it is that alignment of people caring and that business case which really drives it.

I think it is an experience that companies and employers need to learn. They can try things; they work, they do not work. They consult with the community. There is a process that they have to go through. Often the gains to start with are small. They might get some quick wins and then it is pretty hard to make progress. But then they will get to a level of maturity where they become known as a good employer. They have got the processes, the systems, the questions about whether people are resentful. These kinds of things sort of disappear because it is working and people are doing



their jobs. You can find examples: national parks and so on have done quite well. They have grown in maturity in terms of people sort of working with rangers and others in some areas.

I guess that a useful way to think about it is that there are people who pay lip service, there are those who are really committed but have not quite worked out how to do it and then there are the companies that have had experience and get good at it. I think it partly highlights that these things take time, effort and resources. You do not expect to get instant results. It takes time. Cultural change does take time.

**THE CHAIR:** We talked a little earlier about flexible workplaces. Given the different characteristics which are sort of pretty much characterised as social determinants of health and those targets for close the gap campaigns, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has, compared to non-Indigenous Australians for instance, half the population under the age of 15.

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** But it has three to four times the chronic disease rates.

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Higher rates of overcrowding in housing.

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Lower levels of wealth, lower levels of education.

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** How is that going to play into that flexible workplace space? If you have significantly greater responsibilities for childcare or looking after sick relatives and all those other issues, how does that fit into a flexible workplace?

**Prof Gray:** Yes, as you say, there is a much younger population and generally higher fertility rates—I do not know if it is the case in the ACT—and younger childbearing. That combination of factors is going to mean that you are going to be getting many more employees who have got both their own family—their own children—and in many cases, grandchildren. Children are young and their children have children relatively young. At the same time, life expectancy is going up. There is now a growing older Indigenous population, which is a great sign of success. We know also that life expectancy is still much lower. So people start to get those health problems that come towards the end of life. As you say, you are going to have that combination of elder care, childcare, grandparents, a sick partner, whatever. So there is a much higher burden of care; no doubt. Therefore, you would expect to have, on average, a greater need to access these types of provisions.

But that is not necessarily because you have got greater cultural obligations or something like that. There may be an element of that. It is also just the demographics of it. If you pick other non-Aboriginal people in a similar kind of situation and you

ask the question, “Given the family circumstances, is there a higher rate of use or not?” I do not know the answer to that. But I suspect that a lot of it is driven by the higher level of ill health and disability, combined with children. Nick Biddle, my colleague, has projected that the ACT’s Aboriginal population will go to 10,500 in 2031, which is not an insignificant increase in the context of the ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** Of course, the Indigenous population is not homogeneous. It is heterogeneous.

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** So there will be some people who will have greater levels of these issues than other people.

**Prof Gray:** Yes, in terms of that aspect, it is not distinguishable. Most people at some point in their working lives will have something really go wrong and have to take time off. It is sort of a normal part of life that people will. It is about the intensity, I guess, and the willingness of the employer to wear that cost. But then there are gains as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Another thing we talked about a little earlier was racism and discrimination and perceptions of that. We had some evidence from Kate Barnett yesterday from the University of South Australia that Indigenous public servants who have been in a unit and got to know the people in that unit feel safe, culturally safe.

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** So they think the people that they are working with are okay but view the rest of the public service with perhaps a greater level of suspicion or the potential for discrimination and racism.

**Prof Gray:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Has there been much in research or readings that is—

**Prof Gray:** Yes, so some of my colleagues—Nick Biddle, Boyd Hunter and Yin Paradies in Melbourne—are doing a lots of work around discrimination and workplace discrimination. We can send through to the secretary.

**THE CHAIR:** Perhaps in a very short, concise nutshell you might be able to tell us.

**Prof Gray:** That is why some of these sort of—yes, where people have personal experience and contact with people which is positive, then that leads them to believe that—the impact of racism sort of blocks people. It means they do not get a job. But it also changes the behaviour of the person who is discriminated against. Okay?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Prof Gray:** If you believe that you are going to be discriminated against, you may not go for that opportunity. You feel safe where you are. You do not want to disrupt that. Certainly that is where the companies have found that. Cultural awareness, anti-

racism, some campaigns and programs are very important, but it is a fact of life that there is racism. That is the other reason for the importance of having a significant cohort of people, support networks, mentoring. Those sorts of things help address that and break down those barriers.

I think it is important to recognise that it is not only the behaviour but it is the consequence that has on the person who is being discriminated against, what it means for them and how they behave and respond to that. That is how the real impacts on them will come through.

In a way, it partly matters what the intention of the person who is discriminating is, but what also matters is how it is received by other people. People will do things that they do not realise is discriminatory, putting people down or shaming them. It is still the impact on the individual. That is where some of these programs can help. Sometimes people exhibit behaviours they do not understand. Sometimes people are pretty racist and nasty, but in other cases they do not understand that their behaviour is having this impact. Yes, so I think Kate Barnett's work is very good in this area and well worth looking at as a good model of what works.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Wall?

**MR WALL:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry?

**MS BERRY:** I want to ask a supplementary on that. We also heard evidence about the possibility of under-reporting for discrimination, for racism.

**Prof Gray:** Yes, I think that is pretty well accepted that there is underreporting. It happens but it is not reported.

**MS BERRY:** Is there any recent work on that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? I think we pretty much know why it happens, but—

**Prof Gray:** I am not aware of that specifically. It is very hard to get at. But there are questions in various surveys, which we could find the details of—"Have you been discriminated against? Did you make a formal complaint?" There is a big gap. In a way, it is easy to say, "Yes, I was discriminated against." There are varying degrees to deal with it—making a formal complaint; going formal. Sometimes making things formal is important and worth while. On other occasions, it is not. It depends on how serious and widespread it is. It is kind of a delicate balance. If you make it formal, then something has got to happen. Sometimes they can be dealt with in other ways than through a formal process. That can be more effective.

If people do not understand the impact they are having and they can be enlightened and persuaded to change, that is probably better than making it a formal process. In other cases where it is serious, systemic and calculated, then it probably requires a formal response. But this is where it comes down very much to the views of the supervisors and managers and how they handle the issues.

**MS BERRY:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Professor Gray, for coming along this morning. In a few days the committee secretary will send you a proof transcript of today's hearing. You will be able to suggest corrections. The proof transcript will assist you in identifying any questions which you might have said you would come back to us about. Thank you for appearing today.

**Prof Gray:** Thank you very much.

**TOWART, MS RACHELLE**, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, Ms Towart, and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services for its inquiry into the ACT public service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategy. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for being here today and appreciate the time you have taken to assist us.

We will be hearing from you for about the next hour and then we will have a break for morning tea. At lunchtime we are going to meet in private with ACT public service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and then we are going to have a roundtable after that. So that will be interesting for us.

As a witness participating in an Assembly committee inquiry, you are afforded protections and obligations by parliamentary privilege, and I draw your attention to the privilege statement—the pink card—in front of you on the table. Ms Towart, for the record, can you confirm that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

**Ms Towart:** I do.

**THE CHAIR:** The proceedings today are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and webstreamed and broadcast live. Ms Towart, can you please state for the record your full name and the capacity in which you appear today?

**Ms Towart:** My name is Rachelle Towart. I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre.

**THE CHAIR:** Before we proceed to questions from the committee, would you care to make an opening statement?

**Ms Towart:** Yes, thank you, I would. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I am currently on leave, but I thought it was important to come along and have the conversation around where we may fit for employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders within the ACT public service.

The Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre has been around since 2001 and it is currently chaired by Dr Tom Calma, who sends his apologies for not being able to be here today. The centre came out of an idea from two guys—Russ Taylor and Joe Ross—going on the Australian rural leadership program. They came back and asked, “Why isn’t there something like this for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?” Very quickly, they got together with AIATSIS—Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies—and commissioned a research report into such a need.

Very quickly that report came back with, yes, there was a need for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership program, however Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were sick of being trained for the sake of training, and if they were going to do something in length, why not have a qualification for it instead of being

trained for the sake of training. So we became a registered training organisation delivering certificate II in Indigenous leadership, certificate IV in Indigenous leadership, an advanced diploma of Indigenous leadership and we have just recently in the last few weeks had put on scope a certificate IV in Indigenous governance for next year. The reason for the two is that when we hear the word “leadership”, it is quickly followed by the word “governance”, especially out in communities.

In 12 years we have just over 1,200 alumni that have completed our programs. Currently the competition rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for TAFE programs is at around six per cent. Our program’s completion rate is above 95 per cent. Seventy per cent of our alumni go on to further education, be it either in the VET sector or university programs, and we have also got some pretty good research that at least 70 per cent of our alumni are going to get in their first 12 months after completion a \$13,000 to \$15,000 pay increase. While we do not have a direct employment outcome, we know we are going to give you a better employee from doing our programs.

We know that almost 20 per cent of the alumni in this calendar year have come from people living in the territory. That is not including Queanbeyan participants, who I just did not keep the statistics from. I am looking at a contacts sheet, which I am happy to give you, and quite a few participants or graduates have “act.gov.au” in their email addresses. While I have been in the CEO’s position we have never asked the ACT government for funding for those participants, so we have maintained either corporate or other government sponsorship for our programs. It would be interesting to get that alumni cohort together at a function early in the new year for you to listen to their stories of change and confidence.

We know that 100 per cent of our alumni go away saying, “The best thing about it is I now have the confidence to stand up for myself or to apply for another job or to go on to further education.” One young girl in Canberra recently graduated with her social work degree, and she works for the federal government within the old DSS or Centrelink—whatever they are now called. But she was the first member of her family who went to university and then the first person ever to get a qualification from that. So there are many of those examples and stories that the AILC has.

One of the other things that we do is provide mentoring training in a different way to how it is normally taught. It is one of our non-accredited programs, but the Victorian government have taken it up and it is booked out every year because of what they do. We set up diversity in the first instance where we have a non-Indigenous female and an Indigenous male. We find that if participants are non-Indigenous, for the first half day the questions are asked directly to the non-Indigenous facilitator, because that is where they feel there is safety and their comfort zone is, and the Indigenous people in the room ask questions of the Indigenous facilitator. But by the end of the three days, they are actually working together.

I think it is important that we recognise that it is a much bigger commitment by those who are not just wanting to take on cultural awareness training. Yes, that is important, but it is the next thing that really matters—that is, how do you mentor and supervise your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members? I think that is a really good question to pose.

We have been experts in this field for more than 12 years, and we are here to help with that next step. We have been based here in Canberra for those 12 years, and I believe we are not being utilised enough by the powers that be around Canberra to the best of our ability to be able to pass on our knowledge and skills around leadership development, especially within the public service. How do we move people onwards and upwards from entry-level positions? How do we then retain them? We make promises all the time. We see jobs advertised that somebody else is getting and they are not having that conversation about, “Why wasn’t that me? What skills do I need?”

There may be an opportunity to have a look at skills auditing of current staff that you have—what skills do they have, where do they see themselves in term of their vision and their values, and what skills do they need to get to that vision and implement that vision. That is a really important missing piece that we do not necessarily look at and it is sometimes forgotten.

That is a very long opening statement, but I am very passionate about what it is that we do. We are very much supported by our residence at Lady Denman Drive. It is one of the most beautiful places and provides an opportunity to bring in people to get them to have lunchtime seminars to know about what it is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do here within the territory. We have the art gallery next door where we have this wonderful collection of art that is just not Canberra-based Aboriginal art; it is art from all around Australia. Because we are such a nomad place lots of people come to Canberra to work within the federal government, and we find that spouses et cetera are actually working in state government or with corporates here in Canberra. So, we need to work a bit more together, I think.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Towart. Perhaps you could tell us a little bit more about your course, about how you recruit people and what are their motivators for doing the programs?

**Ms Towart:** We advertise our programs nationally. In the past 12 years we have had national programs, but we also tailor programs, which we have done for domestic and family violence prevention units, we have done them for stolen generations, we have done them for rangers and we have many other tailored programs. I think the great thing about us is that we go to you to do our program. It is a very competitive selection process where we have funding for probably two people to do a program. So for every 10 applications we receive, we only have funding for two. So it is a competitive process, and to have almost 20 per cent of ACT people getting through that program reflects the high quality of applications.

It is not so much about the standard application answers we are getting about people; we want to know about their vision. There are no right or wrong answers. We want to see whether they are doing additional work outside of their actual workplace. One of the things we do not do well is recognise leadership qualities that come from outside the workplace. We all know that leadership is just not a 9 to 5 job. While we might be in an entry-level position within employment, we might have very senior obligations within the family structure. So we might be considered up here outside of work and down here inside of work. Those sorts of things are not recognised by employers. We look at that; we look at what does leadership mean to them.

We go through a selection process that has other alumni members within the panel. As I said, it is very competitive. We want to make sure we have a good gender mix. It is interesting that we know that 70 per cent of our applications come from women. So we need to build our men up to that next level. They are sending their women out to be trained through education. I do not know whether it is the same in the university sector—what the men to women ratios are—but I presume it would be quite similar to what we are seeing. So we are always on the lookout for men.

We want to get a demographic spread of applicants, so we want to get people from Tasmania through to Kununurra. It is a very expensive thing, because most of our training is held out of Cairns. We cannot do our training here in Canberra because it is too expensive. Because our programs are residential, if parliament is sitting you could be paying \$400 a night for a room in Canberra, where we can get a twin-share room in Cairns for \$104, and that includes breakfast. Conferencing packages for a daily delegate are around \$85 here in Canberra; we can get them for \$35 in Cairns. So we need to do something about that if we are really serious about delivering here in Canberra.

We also need to open an office in Darwin, because we see that the need for leadership and for governance is quite strong within the territory, and we do not want to be another east coast training provider being based out of Canberra coming in and being the saviour. It is not something we want to do. We engage our alumni all the time here in Canberra. We have profiled two or three in our annual report, of which you have a copy. Their journeys themselves are quite amazing. We look at somebody like Steven Brown, whose mother helped set up Winnunga medical centre, and the role he now plays. He travels to the UN and is now working with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Department. He certainly has an ability to be pushing for that high profile very shortly within his life.

It is a big question to ask, because we get hundreds of applications, even through our non-accredited spaces. I have not been able to get those statistics today, but we had 300 applications within 48 hours from women who wanted to participate in a non-accredited leadership program. I gather that statistic is pretty much consistent around the percentage of Canberrans we get on our programs.

**THE CHAIR:** If you could talk a little more about the motivators, why people want to do your program or, indeed, other similar programs? This goes to a suggestion we have already had that Indigenous public servants are less likely to want to seek promotion. Could you talk a little around that and your proposed motivators for the people who do your program?

**Ms Towart:** Probably at the moment most people's motivators are that they have heard that there is an opportunity or they know somebody who knows somebody who has done this course and it was really good, it was life changing. So a lot of our alumni come from that sort of process. The other motivator is that they want to be recognised as a leader, probably not so much in the workplace until they get there and they work out what their vision and their values are.

We have to be very careful also. The first thing that we do say to our students is that



just because you get a piece of paper at the end of the week that says, “I’ve graduated with a certificate II or IV in Indigenous leadership,” does that make you a leader? There are cultural values that come with that. We could be in a lot of trouble if we say to people, especially those who are still practising culture within their families, “Yeah, I’m a leader now.” But that is certainly not the case.

In regard to why employees are not moving, we do not have a lot of senior people at the moment within the federal public service and we certainly do not have very senior Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people within the public service here. So I think we need to go back and create those role models for people to start looking up to. I think people have been burnt in the past in that there have been lots of retentions, people leaving, lots of restructures. People do not like being in that conflict situation. I look at the intervention that happened through the federal government. There were a lot of people whom I used to work with in the federal government department and they had to implement policy that they did not necessarily agree with on a personal value.

It could be taken to the public service here. You have got to believe in what you are actually doing, and I think that is why we get a lot of Aboriginal people working within the community sector and the educational sector. But I also think that we need to give people a bit more of an opportunity.

I look at Woolworths as an example and go, “Woolworths are not just about the checkout chicks; they are about the marketing.” They employ helicopter pilots, doctors and lawyers. The best marketing people in the world are working for an organisation such as Woolworths. But I do not think that Woolworths actually talk to themselves about what it is that they offer. Because you work for Woolies, one assumes that you are a checkout chick.

I think the same can be thought of the public service, in a way. We do not actually sell what it is we have got inside the walls of the public service. We do not sell what career opportunities there are for people. We do not mentor people to be able to move to that next level, to move to the onwards and upwards stuff. We do not have the honest conversations with people around what do you need to do to be able to get that job. It is as simple as dreaming.

I use the dreaming analogy, dreaming where I want to be in five years time. My dream when I was young would have been that I wanted to be a hairdresser, but I did not have those dreams put down onto paper in terms of just dreams and dot-pointing how am I going to get there, what do I have or what do I need to get, which would allow me to be a hairdresser. I think that we need to go back to that dreaming for people to have those clear visions of where they want to be. Some people are just happy.

My happy husband works for the ACT public service, and he is very happy in his ASO6 job. He has been a public servant for 25 years. He got a sponge roll cake and a laminated certificate to congratulate him on his service, and he is happy with that. Some people are very much happy with that. They do not want the added stresses, because, potentially, they have those stresses in the home place.

One of the main reasons that we came up with the idea of the diversity and mentoring program was that I had a guy come to me and say, “Rachelle, I’m thinking about letting one of my staff go. He has been to seven of his mothers’ funerals. How many more mothers does he have?” And he was really quite arrogant in the way he was asking the question.

But I sat and thought about it for a while and I went, “There are two things that you can do here. One, you can say yes.” People take sorry business to the nth degree. They want to take it for as long as they can. They are not going to come up to me and say, “I want leave for sorry business,” because they know the manager will say, “I can’t say anything because that might be racist and they might take it a different way.” He could have taken it the other way, which I am very glad that he did.

My suggestion to him was that he go and give the guy a hug and say, “Mate, you’ve had seven people die who were close to you and that you considered to be your mother. How are you? Are you okay? Is there anything that you need that I can do for you?” Have a conversation with somebody and ask them directly. We all know about performance management and conversations we read in the AD20 manager books and things like that. But to have a conversation with somebody over a cup of tea is much better than anything else that you can do.

By having those types of conversations, you will only get to know your employee better and you will learn some of that culture by a thing as simple as having a conversation. Having a conversation with those employees today is going to be a really great start when you have your roundtable discussion over lunch. Ask them what do they want. I think that is the question. What barriers do they see as they are being moved onwards and upwards? They are the only ones that are going to be able to answer.

If I look at an organisation like ours, over 12 years we have always been living with what I call the payday lover syndrome. We have always been living payday to payday, and that is financial year to financial year, as an organisation. But for the first time ever this year we received multi-year funding, which allowed us to look at what that vision was. I think the same can be said for employees. Where do they see their security? How can that not just be the payday lover syndrome? What skills do they need?

I keep on going back to skills, because I think it is really important to have a look at what have they got, what do they want, what do they need, and having those sorts of things. Do they need leadership development training? I would love to say yes, but the answer might be no. They might need project management skills training. I digress from where I was going to.

With our multi-year funding, it allowed me to write a business plan for the next four years. It allowed me to look longer into the 2020 vision of the AILC being in every state and territory by that time but to also have 1,000 alumni each year rather than the 1,200 alumni that we have had over the 12 years that we have been around, because people want to learn. And I think you would know our statistics of success in that we are doing something that is unheard of. Indigenous educators go, “How are you succeeding? How are you getting those retention rates?”

The simple answer is that we work one on one with individuals. It is that simple. It does not need to be anything that is complicated. It needs to have a person who is supported, somebody who is not moved up too fast. It is that whole, “Yes, you’re an Aboriginal person. You can go and deal with the Aboriginal issues,” when, really, they may not want that. But that is where they are put into. People want to be recognised as a leader, not necessarily an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leader. It is the word. Yes, it is nice that they want to recognise that within themselves, but they are not there for any other reason than they are a leader.

I look at people like Mick Dodson, Tom Calma and others that have gone through who are seen to be put up there on pedestals of Indigenous leadership. They are no different to the grassroots leaders that are making a difference at Gugan, at Winnunga, any of the other housing officers or school educators. They are there because they have a passion for what they do. And I think we really do just need to ask them.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Wall.

**MR WALL:** In that last answer, you started touching on what I was about to ask, which was: if the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre has been so successful in both attracting applicants and retaining them to complete the qualification, how can government relate some of those lessons back into the day-to-day employment to improve retention and, I guess, productivity and culture?

**Ms Towart:** I have this amazing idea. My daughter completed her year 12 and graduated last week from St Clare’s. And when we went to the graduation ceremony at the great hall they read everybody’s name out and up on the big screen came Caitlin Towart, year 12 certificate. Then it had a cert III in business, a cert II in childcare and a cert III in hospitality. I really do think that we teach leadership at year 5 and year 6 in very early class level stuff, and then we go back into leadership stuff in year 9 and year 10 and then again in year 11 and year 12. Why would we not start that qualification at schools? If we are getting those statistics around completion rates and then around those who are going on to further education, why would we not start that early, doing leadership development training and giving people a qualification for it? It looks bloody brilliant on an application form that you have been recognised as an Indigenous leader.

One of the things that we do a little differently in our programs is that we work with not only the head space but the heart space. We have a psychologist that is there throughout the whole training, and it is an opportunity for people to work through those things. We have all been affected by some form of trauma, grief or loss in our lives, whether we are Indigenous or not. I think that is a really important component of leadership development. They have those opportunities. It is different to a counsellor. It is different to the school counsellors, and I think it could really help some of our guys starting that young.

What can we do here? We have always been here. We have been around, as I said, for 12 years, and our biggest problem is that we have been working on putting all these people through these programs. Earlier this year the AILC engaged a PR company, because our biggest fault was that while we do amazing things, nobody knows who

we are and what we do, until we come and have opportunities like this to speak. So our PR company has got us talking to lots and lots of different people.

We want to stay here in Canberra. But who knows? We need support to be able to do that. On the educational side of things, we are a registered training organisation and some of you would agree that being an RTO is difficult. It is not an easy thing. You have got compliance requirements from ticking and putting your i's and t's together. It is a challenge, and we get no operational funding for that.

It is very hard to get money out of the training component of the government, because leadership is not necessarily a qualification that has an employability outcome. So we need to get on the radar of the education department to get leadership as important as having a cert III in hairdressing. It is very difficult to assess, because you can see a mechanic fix a car. How do you see a leader lead over a short period? We do not know what they do when they go home after our course is finished. So we have to be, again, very careful in giving that leadership qualification. We do want to be here for the long term but we do need government support and recognition of us being here.

We won this year ACT's small RTO of the year, which was a really nice accolade for the organisation. It was the first time, and it was because we have the PR company. They said, "We need to start getting you awards and getting you out there and getting known." I know that if I went into the Northern Territory next week and set up an office I would have the full support and backing of the Northern Territory government.

Whether it is right or wrong for me to say it, people come to functions but do they invest in what we do? The answer would be no. Do they buy products off us? We ran a youth leadership program this year which was really successful, and we got, I think it was, \$55,000 to do so. This year, when the grant funding came out, that funding was chopped up and put into seven lots of \$10,000. Organisations like ours cannot work on \$10,000 lots. By the time you write a submission for it and you acquit it and you do all the things that you should do with it, it is not even worth my time putting pen to paper. So I think that we need to have a look at how that can be stretched a little further.

We have never been engaged by any ACT government department to run mentoring, leadership, development. The schools have engaged us to some extent. That is partly our fault too, because we need to get out there and let people know who we are and what we do. But it would help if the government did back what we do.

**MR WALL:** You mentioned the experience of graduates of the leadership courses that within 12 months of completing study with the centre a large majority of them end up with about a \$13,000 increase in salary. Is that through seeking alternative employment and progressing outside of their current employer, or is that generally within their current work environment?

**Ms Towart:** I could not answer that wholly and truthfully, but my gut feeling tells me that it is within. It is about confidence as to what they are achieving at the end. It might be confidence to apply for a promotion, confidence to say, "You know what, I really want to go back to my home community and take all the stuff that I've learnt and put that into practice," or it may be that they are getting a promotion or they are

applying for something else that they have a real passion for. It is very vague as to know where that is going, but one would hope they are doing something that they love and putting their hands up and saying, “I want to have a go.”

**MS BERRY:** I want to know how the work you do translates into the work environment. I am reading about one of these fellows who talks about how things have changed within the commonwealth government public service and that although racism still exists it is getting better but you still need to be vigilant. What do your graduates take back to their workplace after being with you? That is probably something that you would need money to assess, but you must have some conversations with people about how they are feeling.

**Ms Towart:** I am happy to share with you the impact assessment that KPMG did on the centre. Our next step is that we want to do a social return on investment piece. It is very hard to track an individual to see where they are and why they are there. That is why we are changing things up in the new year, when we will go into a community and deliver for a community so we are able to see what the impact is on that community in leadership. Are they getting better incomes and housing? It is about all of the social indicators we need to see. We are unable to measure change on an individual; we need to go and do that bigger piece. When we do, we hope one of those will be on a Canberra project.

**MS BERRY:** It will be interesting to know, because some of the evidence we heard yesterday was around the cultural environment within the workplace and how pockets of departments celebrate NAIDOC week with the focus just on that one week and that needs to be spread out across the whole year.

**Ms Towart:** Yes; I would agree with that.

**MS BERRY:** How does that happen? Is it through people who have come out of your programs working with local community? How does that impact on recruitment and retention and reducing racism and discrimination?

**Ms Towart:** It is a very interesting question, because, as you say, it is workplace to workplace that you come across different strengths and weaknesses across the board. Do I believe activities of celebration should be done weekly? Yes. Do we acknowledge people’s contributions to their workplace? Probably not as well as we should. Do we say thank you enough, or is that just a job for the sake of doing a job? “You get paid for that so I should not have to say thank you for it.” I am very big on reward and recognition, and I do not think that happens across the board, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous. I do not think we do acknowledgement well.

One of the things that we do—and some days, I can tell you, it is a big pain in the bum—is that when somebody gets up and speaks, we acknowledge you for speaking and we clap. It is just as simple as clapping. And, at the end of each day, we acknowledge what people have done really well and what people can do better next time. It is that whole sandwich approach. I think there could be some really good lessons learnt from just doing that in the workplace. As the CEO of this organisation I have only 12 staff, and I can only imagine how that would be on a bigger scale.

My husband came home from work yesterday and he said: “Oh, the big boss came down and he gave his staff \$150 to go and buy morning tea. That was from him personally.” He felt that contribution was amazing, that he had spent his own money to put on a morning tea. But the conversation then was: “He’s a nice bloke. I see myself working for him for a long time now. Maybe I might put my hand up for that EL1 road.” And the boss is a non-Indigenous guy. I just think that there is so much more that we can do in that space that we do not do well enough—just a simple thankyou.

**MS BERRY:** Some of the evidence we have been getting is that we have spent a lot of time talking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, but we have not worked out how we are going to deal with the employers, the people at the top. What are we going to do with them to get them doing—

**Ms Towart:** Yes, and that is going to be your hard thing. I would say to you that the mentoring program we have is certainly worth looking into a bit more. It is around how you have that relationship. One of the things I have found, though—unfortunately we get it from time to time—is that I get people ringing me three or four days before a course starts. A cert II for us is about \$8,000 that we spend on the whole kit and caboodle. An employer only has to give them the time off. We cover their Cabcharge, their plane, train, helicopter or whatever they need to get there and all of their accommodation. We do not stay in crappy motels because it is about a leadership program. We want to give people an experience as well. We have graduation gowns. Somebody said to me, “I don’t have anything to wear; I don’t feel that I’m in the right space,” so we bought graduation gowns. Whether it is academically correct, I do not really care, but it puts everybody on a level playing field down to the toilet paper, if you like.

Unfortunately, we get employers going: “Why would I want to send my employee off to a certificate II in Indigenous leadership? I’m the leader around here.” They make them take their own personal leave to do that. I have no worry about ringing up the secretary of the department or even the minister’s office and going, “Are you kidding me?” This is an accredited qualification. It is not coming from any of the community organisations where they lose their employees for weeks and it is tough. This is coming from government departments who are saying, “You need to take your own leave.” And most people do, because they want to have that change.

I think it starts where managers are scared of the word “leadership”. They are scared because they think somebody is going to come in and take their job, which is not the case at all. We are teaching people about representation, communication, diplomacy, time management, networking, media. It is very hard to put leadership into a business services and community services training package. We are giving people skills to be able to take out from time to time to use at different times. But I guarantee you that you will get a better employee. It has to start from those guys thinking, “This is about how I can help somebody.”

It may not be moving onwards and upwards; it is making them better in the position that they are in or getting them to think about where they want to be that would make them happy. It might not be in the public service. It might be in parks and gardens where they are outside doing all sorts of wonderful things, or it might be inside and

they have this beautiful, creative mind where they have just finished at UC and we have an opportunity to build and grow that person. But it has to be supported. We have got three great educational institutions here in this region, and I do not know that we pick up that talent as best we can and nurture them while they are going through those degrees.

**MS LAWDER:** We heard evidence from people yesterday when we talked about losing employees to the public service through a bit of competition but that one of the attractions of the ACT public service is that people feel as though they are doing something that will assist in their local community. I have been involved with a number of committees, and often Aboriginal people on those committees are selected because they are leaders in their own community. But often they have expressed to me that they feel a little uncomfortable purporting to represent the entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of Australia, Canberra or whatever. Forgive me if I have the terminology wrong, but they have kinship groups and skin groups and different communities, even within small areas. Do you touch on that in your leadership training?

**Ms Towart:** Yes. The first thing that we do is teach history. It is thought that just because you are an Aboriginal person, you know your history. Well, it was not taught to me in school, and especially people that were born in the 1970s and 1960s do not know what the truthful history is. So we always start from that point.

We also have, I suppose, an identity issue. Here in Canberra, there is not one traditional owner group; we have several. We still have not got to an outcome of that, I think. I think that is the great thing of us being at the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Centre: we are a mutual non-political group everybody can come to and not be afraid that they are going to be yelled at or whatever the issues might be.

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a whole, as a nation, we do not have one thing. We have got an Aboriginal flag and we have got a Torres Strait Islander flag, so there are two flags. If we take Noel Pearson up in Cape York, he was never voted by his people to represent, so there have always been those issues around Noel. We have those issues here in Canberra. We want to talk. In teaching the subjects around representation, communication, diplomacy and conflict resolution, we are hoping that they will learn skills to be able to come out the better side, to be able to deal with those situations of conflict.

Do I think that lateral violence is rife? Hell, yes. And it is rife across the community. Who is going to get money for a welcome to country? Who is going to get money for the barbecue sausage sizzle? There are things where we as Aboriginal people need to come up with a solution, and I am not sure who is going to be brave enough to put up their hand to say so.

We are also here in Canberra where we have the National Gallery, we have the National Library, we have lots of national institutions, but we do not have one building that represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here. I think that is a big miss and a big opportunity—for us to have something here in Canberra, in the nation's capital, where the political and power movement of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander people is, so that it is ingrained in us. This is a meeting place. I live in Jerrabomberra. My street name is “Minda”, “Minda” meaning home.

So there is lots of representation from Indigenous cultures here in Canberra. I do not know the answers to that, but I know that it is important to start to have the discussions. That is why we have called ourselves, with the products that we are putting out now, “generation T”, which is that generation transformation. We have got this generation to transform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be the best that they can be, to be represented well, to have constitutional reform and recognition and to be proud of being who we are and what we represent.

**MS LAWDER:** The statistics seem to show that in the ACT public service many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are in sort of lower level positions but certainly administrative-type positions. Just as in the disability sector, where they have got a “nothing about us without us” sort of mantra, in Aboriginal policy, you would hope that there is a similar thing. But how you overcome that reluctance to speak across various groups to try to get a better outcome, I think, is definitely worth exploring. I think that will be the goal—to get more policy involvement from local—

**Ms Towart:** We have here in Canberra some of the most senior Aboriginal people within the federal and state governments. It would be an ideal opportunity to get people having a conversation. We have got the NACCHO. We have got Indigenous community volunteers, we have got AIATSIS, the AILC and Reconciliation Australia. Why would we not get them all together to have that conversation around how we change?

We also have that senior executive level opportunity and committee to put forward. We have Aboriginal people like Leah Armstrong, Tom Calma, Kerrie Tim and others like Robyn who you have got working in the new sector. It just seem to me to be an opportunity that one has not taken a real strong hold of. Let us work through some of the questions that we need to find answers to, or at least work on a solution. I do not know; it just seems like a wasted opportunity to me. Being a CEO of an organisation is quite a lonely spot. We should work on that connection because, as you say, we are all competing for the same staff. We are all competing for the same outcomes for those staff. But we do not have a conversation and ask, “Hey, what do you think about this guy? He’s applied for a job,” and find out, “He’s got this skill, that skill, but he needs to work on this skill.” We do not pick up the phone and have those conversations.

**THE CHAIR:** Perhaps we could talk a little more about after your graduates graduate. Are you sponsoring some networking through social media amongst them or offering ongoing mentoring?

**Ms Towart:** Yes. After one of our alumni graduates, we have a leadership forum called leadership plus. It is a program that has been sponsored by Westpac, the Telstra Foundation and Rio Tinto. This year in November we worked together with just over 150 alumni and that number should have been greater, but the problem is that there is no professional development money that enables someone to say, “Hey, I would like to come. Can I get a leave pass for a few days to go and do that next step for me?”



They have not had to pay for our leadership development program, but those that are employed cannot pay for a two-day, three-day event. We do have scholarships for those who are not employed to come so they do not miss out. But we miss out on having those connections.

In Canberra we have had many alumni events where we invite people to come along to network with others. In respect of the profile of the organisation this year, with our restructure we are putting on a new alumni relations person to take that on—what does it mean to be an AILC alumni? Even for me, I go to this annual dinner. When I walk into the room, I am scanning the room wondering, “Is there going to be another Aboriginal person in here or is there going to be another female in here?” If so, I go directly on a beeline to that person. The idea that I have is sort of like the OAM pins that people have in that they are recognised as an AILC alumni because it is a national program. Then when they do walk into a networking event they actually can scan the room for something else other than just the other black face in the room or the other gender that they are looking for. So there are big things happening for the alumni in the new year.

We will also launch a new leaders link web page where we can put up things like job applications and people putting up their CVs. It is sort of like a Facebook page with having networking opportunities—having, I suppose, lunchtime seminars over at the cultural centre, having, I suppose, the important discussions that we need to have. They will be on a monthly basis, not just for the NAIDOC Week or Reconciliation Week celebrations. So we do want to engage our alumni more. We have just never had the resources to be able to do that.

**THE CHAIR:** Are they connecting much on LinkedIn?

**Ms Towart:** Yes, I would say that 19 out of 22 graduates in one of the groups were in attendance at leadership plus; so they do connect all the time. They do speak to each other. I think that is one of the great things about having a national program. It is that they get to meet like-minded people, not just people living in the same area but also across Australia, that have the same issues and conversations that need to be had. Yes, the online stuff is great. Here in Canberra we could say that, yes, we have the capacity for online stuff. In remoter communities, the answer would be no. However, I was Skyping with a young lady in Katherine last week and I met all her family on her iPad. I suppose that that is the power of social media. I could stand up and say, “My name is Rachelle Towart and it has been 45 minutes since I last looked at my iPhone,” because I am an addict. As many of you across the room would also say, it is the social media revolution.

One of the things that I think we are going to come up with in the near future is a challenge around communication. My daughter probably just scraped through it, but they do not know how to have conversations across the room like you and I are having now. They know how to have conversations with their fingers. When I got home from school, the first thing that I wanted to do was pick up the phone and ring my friend that I had spent all day with. My mum and father would say, “I’ve been trying to get through and the phone’s always engaged.” We did not have call waiting when our phone was connected.

But I think that that is the risk for this next generation—how we are going to communicate, because they do not know how to have conversations. That is really going to be a bigger issue for employees and employers. I think we need to start thinking about that now.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Wall.

**MR WALL:** Thank you, Dr Bourke. You mentioned that AILC has started providing mentoring training to the Victorian government?

**Ms Towart:** Yes.

**MR WALL:** To set this in relevance to what we are looking at with this inquiry, what was Victoria doing previously before they engaged your services?

**Ms Towart:** They were not doing anything. We came up with the mentoring program. It was written by a local Canberran woman. We knew that we had something of really great quality. We piloted it in Alice Springs and we did some tweaks around it. It comes up as a three-day program. People say, “You know what? Three days out of my life; we just can’t do it. We just want to do one day or two days.” But the program has been developed over a period of time for a reason. Organisations need to make a commitment: is the development opportunity, the outcome, really, really what I want, or am I just going to wing it because I need to do it? I think that is what cultural awareness has become. I think it is ticking boxes and being able to say, “Yeah, we have all done cultural awareness.” You see some people who say, “I’m just here because I’ve got to be here. It’s part of my KPIs and that’s all that I’m going to learn.”

But I think this program is an extension to cultural awareness. It is, again, how do you have a relationship with somebody? How do you support somebody to get to the next level? There was one thing that I learnt very early on. I used to have to catch the bus to one of my first jobs, because I did not have a car. I had \$3 on me. That was my bus fare home. I had been invited to go to a meeting. I was a 17 or 18-year-old girl. I was more or less embarrassed to have to go into this meeting. I was going to have to buy a coffee and then how was I going to get home, because I did not have the bus fare?

I think these are the things that we just do not think outside the box about. How is this person going to get to work in the first place? How is this person managing when they are thinking that I have the same clothes on that I had on yesterday? There are all sorts of little idiosyncrasies that we just do not think about because we are all involved in our own space. I am lucky that I have got some of the stuff that I learnt. I would always say if I am taking my staff out to a meeting, “Come to coffee; it is my shout,” before they even had to think about putting themselves into that spot of not having the money to be able to do so. I think this program is giving the employee and employer a little more than other cultural awareness stuff. I do not know whether other cultural awareness outcomes would tell you that sort of stuff, whether it be for Indigenous staff or non-Indigenous staff.

We have been told by an international company that our diversity and mentoring program can be used for any Indigenous culture in the world. So the skills that you get from our diversity and mentoring course you can also use with your Indian staff or

something like that. The feedback that we have had is that the trainees go in for two days. They do their work on mentoring processes. Then they come back in eight weeks' time to do the third day. That has actually worked out really quite well because it has enabled people to go back to their workplace, put their mentoring and their learning into practice and then come back in that time and say, "This worked for me, but how did you go?" They can have those conversations around getting the mentors together.

They are all Victorian. We have been into places like Shepparton, Geelong and others where the mentors get together themselves now. They can ask their peers, "How can I work on that?" I think we need to define very early on in that program coaching, mentoring, leadership and management. There are different things that people do. One person might be a great mentor and another a great coach. There are very different things about that. We get people to think a little outside the box in terms of what is mentoring as well. People think they know what mentoring is, but sometimes they really do not.

**MR WALL:** It is more than delegation.

**Ms Towart:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** Yes, I think it is great to hear you talking about mentoring and giving some of the examples that you have given. I think that when some people think about mentoring, it is a case of, "I'll just watch and when you do something wrong, I'll let you know."

**Ms Towart:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** They do that instead of actually forming some ideas together and having a conversation about how things can be done better. I think some of the evidence that we have been hearing from other people through this is about how do we get that? It is not just about cultural awareness; it is more than that.

**Ms Towart:** Yes, it is. It really has to be more than that. If you are going to succeed, it has to be more than cultural awareness training. It is not enough.

**MS BERRY:** Yes. Regarding the iPad or iPhone issues, I was talking with Ms Lawder earlier and saying that we have a tech-free Sunday, 10 till 5. I recommend it. We have to talk to each other. Sometimes it is unpleasant, but we do it. But I recommend it as a tip.

**Ms Towart:** Thank you. I shall take that on. There is only my husband and my daughter at home. Sometimes we get home and we are straight on to the computer doing other stuff. I have a 7 o'clock rule. It goes off at 7, but sometimes I sneak it back on when everybody is asleep so I can get some work finished. But I try my very best.

**MS BERRY:** Yes, but you are right; it is going to be a challenge, I reckon. I think it

is harder for parents because then it is another thing that you have to enforce.

**Ms Towart:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** Sorry; I am off the track.

**Ms Towart:** Yes, I totally agree.

**THE CHAIR:** We are all done.

**Ms Towart:** Awesome.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Ms Towart, thank you for being here today. In a few days the committee secretary will send you a proof transcript of today's hearing. You will be able to suggest corrections. The proof transcript will assist you in identifying any questions that you have taken on notice. I do not think there have been any but you might think of one. We are now adjourned until 1 pm.

**Ms Towart:** Could I just add something else?

**THE CHAIR:** We are not adjourned.

**Ms Towart:** No, I just wanted to add thank you very much for the opportunity to give my sort of two-cents worth, if you like. One of the things that we need to recognise is that we come along as Aboriginal people and we give away so much of our intellectual property. I think that even when you are getting Indigenous people within the room, that needs to be really acknowledged that this comes for free and it is something that we are always giving. I think if you are to be successful and succeed at this process, you really do need to acknowledge the intellectual property that people are, I suppose, giving from their head and their heart to make a next assumption of what would work in the future. Please do that with your Aboriginal colleagues that you are getting in this afternoon. That is all. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Now we are adjourned.

**Meeting suspended from 11.31 am to 1.03 pm.**

**FAHEY, MS ZUZETTE**, Indigenous Education Officer, Melba High School  
**CHONG, MR DARREN**, Aboriginal Natural Resource Management Facilitator,  
Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate  
**GRAHAM, MRS LYNETTE**, Case Worker, Care and Protection Services,  
Community Services Directorate  
**ROBINSON, MS GINIBI**, Project Officer, Employee Relations, Education and  
Training Directorate  
**LACEY, MS RAE**, Indigenous Liaison Officer, ACT Corrective Services  
**SWAN, MR LYLE**, Indigenous Education Officer, Belconnen High School  
**NEAN, MR PHILL**, Senior Manager, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and  
Student Education, Education and Training Directorate  
**JORDAN, MS VERONICA**, Community and Visitor Programs, Territory and  
Municipal Services  
**KEED, MS TANYA**, Indigenous Probation and Parole Officer, ACT Corrective  
Services  
**FRASER, MS ANNA**, Administration Support Officer, ACT Human Rights  
Commission  
**KEED, MS DEANNE**, Justice and Community Safety

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome, everyone, to this roundtable discussion for the inquiry into ACT public service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. We are delighted that you are here, and I am very proud of you all.

The committee has some questions for roundtable participants, who, I note for the record, are ACT public service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. One or more of you may wish to respond to the committee's questions, and it will be open to other participants to comment further. We aim to conclude at 2 o'clock.

As roundtable participants, you are like witnesses participating in an Assembly committee inquiry. This means that you are afforded protections and obligations by parliamentary privilege. The obligation is to tell the truth, and the protection is freedom of speech. I draw to your attention the privilege statement on the pink cards in front of you on the table. For the record, can each participant confirm that you understand what is said in the privilege statement?

**Ms Fahey:** Yes.

**Mr Chong:** Yes.

**Mrs Graham:** Yes.

**Ms Robinson:** Yes.

**Ms Lacey:** Yes.

**Mr Swan:** Yes.

**Mr Nean:** Yes.

**Ms Jordan:** Yes.

**Ms T Keed:** Yes.

**Ms D Keed:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** The proceedings today are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes, webstreamed and broadcast live. Before we proceed to questions from the committee, would any participant care to make an opening statement? Okay. Firstly, we could talk about how people came to work in the ACT public service and why you decided that the ACT public service was a good place to work. Would anybody like to kick off and talk about that to start with?

**Mr Nean:** I worked in education in New South Wales for 27 years before coming to the ACT, both in schools and in state office. A position came up in the ACT Education and Training Directorate to manage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. And having done quite a lot of that work in New South Wales and in other jurisdictions before, I applied and, hence, did the big move from Sydney to Canberra and have been here now for eight years.

**THE CHAIR:** Anybody else?

**Ms Robinson:** Yes. I actually applied for the assistant manager position at the time in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education under Mr Nean as my manager. And I did that because the people in the community actually asked me to apply for the job when it was advertised. That is basically it. I had an interest in the area, but because community members had actually asked me and said, “You’d be deadly in that job,” I went for it.

**Mrs Graham:** I was in the commonwealth prior and I was with New South Wales education. I could not get into the ACT government at all until I applied for a position when I was in New South Wales education. There was some Aboriginal funding through the directorate, and I applied for that position. And fortunately I have been with the Community Services Directorate since.

**Ms Fraser:** I had been home for 14 years with my children, and it was a good entry level into the ACT public service, because I did not have any other formal training that I could possibly get a career with when my children were school age.

**Ms D Keed:** I also started a traineeship, the same one as Anna also started in. And I thought that it had good opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

**Ms T Keed:** I was working with the Department of Community Services, DOCS, in Queanbeyan at the time. I wanted to be with an Aboriginal unit anywhere. So I applied for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service unit, which has now been changed. But I wanted to work with an Aboriginal unit to see what it was like working with our kids and trying to place our kids. So I worked for them for five years before moving to probation and parole.

**Ms Jordan:** I came into a traineeship in July 2012 and completed that in July 2013. I thought it would be a great way to get into the government and also work with

Aboriginal people within the community.

**Mr Chong:** I guess I was kicked out of high school. I worked in demolition and metal fabrication for about eight years. What inspired me was my father, who had pretty much no education. He worked all his life. I wanted to get into a position where I was able to help him explain the issues that he has as an Aboriginal man to, I guess, the government.

**Ms Fahey:** I started working in the ACT government. I fell into an awesome job as the Aboriginal liaison officer in education about seven years ago. I was doing shift work while I was having children and raising them. Once they settled at school—I was very pleased with the Aboriginal liaison officers that we had in the school system at the time who had worked with my nephews and nieces and children—I wanted job security as I am not a younger person anymore. I wanted to work in education because I had a great education, very supportive family, and I wanted to help our kids enjoy that same right that they have so that they can grow into cool adults.

**Mr Swan:** I might be the-odd one out, I suppose. I have been employed in ETD now for going on seven years. And the reason I become a part of the ACT public service was that I was unemployed from 1998 till 2006, till I took this job. And before that, my employment was with community organisations, which the former Liberal coalition party, when they got into power in 1996, capped all funding for, and we were all put on the unemployment line. So I decided to take a career in the ACT public service as an Aboriginal education officer.

**THE CHAIR:** Maybe people could talk a little about their experiences with education and training or promotion within their current jobs and how that could help them or what experiences they have had with that?

**Ms Fahey:** When I actually started with the section, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education unit, I was originally based in high schools and I was at a higher level than I am now. With my belief in early intervention, I took a backward step but, for my morals, it has worked out well. At this stage of my life I am very happy where I am but in a few years I would like to go back further up the line. And there is not a lot of special education. There are not a lot of steps for me to be able to aspire to, which is what I find sad. I would like to see more options in my directorate at different levels for our mob to be able to move further up the line; otherwise we have to go sideways and go into other directorates. I do not really want to have to move out of education. So I am not quite sure what I will do. I will probably move into health or something in a few years.

**Ms Robinson:** What Zuzette said, I reckon, ties in really well with the launch on Tuesday of the Education and Training Directorate's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment action plan. One of the key actions is looking at supporting pathways, and real pathways, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, both in identified positions and mainstream positions. In the role I currently have in HR, I think there is a real push, probably for the first time, to increase the number of Aboriginal staff and pathways into education, and real pathways into education, for community mob but then to look at career pathways as well and supporting career opportunities. I think we are at the start, having gone through some real changes and

some challenging times, to be in a position where for the first time, as a collective, our career aspirations will be supported and there will be a genuine commitment from the directorate to create some real pathways.

I think part of that is in the launch. It is not just a bureaucratic-type document but it actually has the voices in it of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and non-Aboriginal mob too, about what the directorate would look like if there were real career opportunities, if there were pathways for community mob into education, if there was appropriate cultural supervision, mentoring, induction, the whole gamut. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff were also asked to share their stories and their journeys in education. So that is part of what was launched the other day.

We have got an email address as well, our mob, and that will be part of a whole range of promotional materials that will support community members into pathways in education and then current staff to look at career opportunities as well. So I think that is where we can actually start looking at yarning with every staff member from an HR perspective and really asking the questions: where do you want to be? Where do you want to go? What do you need to be supported to apply for a position that might be at a higher level? What can we do to support that as well?

**Ms Fahey:** Just in response to Ginibi, the launch of our new employment strategic plan is very exciting. It is interesting, though, as a worker at the coal face, that so many schools want a piece of us. I do not understand why, then, the government cannot actually create more positions. That would be a really good start. We certainly would not have any schools without a teacher in the years 3 and 4 units. They certainly would not go without that. So they want Aboriginal education workers, but there are just not the positions created.

**Ms Robinson:** That is actually one of the actions in the action plan—to work with schools and to work with central office sections to create identified positions. That is one of the plans for next year—to actually work with every single school. A challenge was put out to schools at the launch for them to start thinking about the issues. “Who are your community members?” “Who are you connected to in your community?” “Are there people connected in your school community who would be interested in a career in education?” Our part would be supporting schools to identify at the start, looking at learning support positions and then looking at pathways for those staff. Where there may not necessarily be more funding for the creation of identified positions, we are looking at working with schools on their current staffing allowance to create identified positions within that—and with central office as well.

**THE CHAIR:** What about people’s personal experiences that may have been less than ideal, where they have had difficulties with getting access to study leave or to training? Has anybody experienced that in any particular way?

**Ms Fraser:** I came into the ACT public service through the traineeship from last year. Due to a formal complaint which I had to put in against my unit, I am at a standstill now as to any pathways that I see. Currently there are no opportunities for me to progress from entry level. So yes; I am a bit stuck at the moment.

**Mrs Graham:** I have been in the directorate, like I said, for three years. They say a



person has four different jobs before they find out which job they really want to do. Finally, I think, since I have come into the directorate, and working, I actually enjoy what I do and working with the community. For the last three years I have been wanting to do my BA in social work, but to get there I had to do other previous training, and because I am on contract, I could not get the opportunity to take study leave, study bank. And if I did, I would have to cut my hours: instead of working full time, I would have to work two to three days. I have a family; I have three children. I was already on, at the time, a low wage—\$50,000 a year. And I could not.

But with a new role, a new position, like I said, hopefully now I will have an opportunity next year to do the study. Like I said, I did not have those opportunities even as I was growing up, and even in previous positions. Like I said, I have got three children. I like to see them and I like to be a leader for them. Like I said, my daughter just finished year 10 and now she is going to college. She is talking about university and doing psychology. Hopefully, like I said, from next year, I will, but I just want you to know how hard it is when you are coming in on contract. Whether it is Aboriginal funding that you receive to do some community work or something else, when you come in on contract, as ambitious as you are and as much as you want to work your way up, you cannot. You can be on contract for two years, three years.

That was hard for me; I found that I had to make a choice as to whether I continued putting food on the table or continued. That is what I found really hard with being on contract all that time.

**THE CHAIR:** Anybody else?

**Mr Nean:** Just from a different angle, what I have noticed in my role is sometimes the inflexibility of government agencies to support or even to explore different options around training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Having come from New South Wales, as I mentioned earlier, one of the things to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers in New South Wales was to release those potential teachers or students from their workplace for a block release for a total of 12 weeks per year over a four-year period with the result of getting a bachelor of education. Coming to ACT, I found that that does not exist. We have one staff member at the moment who is in her third year of a teaching degree; but doing one subject per semester, with no full-time or part-time release to undertake any more subjects, she will finish her degree in eight or nine years time.

To me, that starts to raise questions about the seriousness or the level of commitment that government agencies have to employment opportunities or employment strategies around increasing numbers, nurturing people. Yes, we want people to stay, and I think Lynette spoke about some of that earlier. But it is a message that says, “You can undertake your training, but you can only do it for one subject per.” If we looked at opportunities outside of the ACT—I support the partnerships that we have with local universities, but they are not the only universities in Australia that we can be accessing to increase numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates in any area. We need to look a bit further or ask some of the people in universities to change their thinking or think differently around their partnerships and around their strategies.

We can do it. Four years. We have a number of different graduates across government. At the same time as that is happening, while those people are on release, we build the capacity of our community to backfill those positions so that we are actually growing the skills of our community so that when people graduate they are employed full time in permanent positions and you have a group of people who can come in without a whole heap of training. That then becomes almost a very strong cycle that we can put in place in the ACT with very limited resourcing being attached or associated, or any new money found. It is around partnerships with universities or tertiary institutions.

**Mrs Graham:** Following from what Phill was saying, like I said, for three years—to do it at ACU, it is only two years to do the bachelor in social work. For three years I have been trying to chase that dream of mine to complete that. Now that I am in this new role in the Community Services Directorate and I have been given these opportunities next year, to me, I am willing, once I finish the degree, to put it back in the Community Services Directorate. Getting that support and knowing that I am still bringing an income home to my family and I do not have to decide between putting the food on the table or my studies, to be selfish or whatever I choose between the food or studies—now, like I said, from what Phill was saying, I have been given an opportunity where I can actually do both. It takes that stress off me. I do not have to worry about bringing an income in, but it also gives me an opportunity, like I said, to fulfil the dream that I want to do and then give it back into the directorate—come back with all those skills and knowledge that I have gained and work my way up in the directorate, hopefully. Like I said, if you are given an opportunity, as a parent, you just know that you can do that for your children and still earn a good income.

**Ms Jordan:** I would like to talk about the traineeship that I was on. I have just made a few points here that I would like to read out. Hopefully, the other trainees will agree with me.

The first one is that the trainees were told that they would get mentors through the traineeship, but many did not, and those who did did not get them straight away. I did not really get a mentor until after the traineeship had finished. No 2—being on 12 months probation for the traineeship and then having to go on a further three months probation when a position is found is a very long time to be on probation. I cannot actually go off my 12-month probation already; I have actually got to be on another three months probation when I am permanent. No 3—permanent positions have not always been found directly after the traineeship. This uncertainty of what job and where can be extremely stressful, because you are not sure where you are going to go and what is happening. No 4—not having clear advice about who is best to go to with any work issues adds stress to already confusing situations. Providing extra networking opportunities both within and external to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander work community would help instil a feeling of support and belonging.

There are just a couple more. Ex-employees, particularly those who have left through disappointment and a lack of support, should be approached to identify ways to improve employment services. And, No 7, finding ways to share cultural experiences with all staff would promote a healthier community.

They are some points that I thought I should bring up. I would like to say that with my traineeship in education, we did a certificate III in government, and I think that helped

me. I had no clue about the government at all, how it ran. That really helped me understand a lot of things; that was pretty good. Where I am sitting now, there is no promotion for me to go anywhere, so I am sort of stuck in one little place. Also, I have had lots of training through the traineeship. Wherever there is a course that I feel I need to do to improve my skills, they have no problem with it; they help me with that. I have done my basic ESL and I am also a bush fire fighter. So they are a couple of things. But there is no pathway for me now; I am sort of stuck there and I have nowhere to go.

**Ms Fraser:** I was lucky enough to receive a mentor. When I had a problem with my workplace, she was able to point me in the right direction as to who to contact. I was lucky that she knew people higher up in the government who were able to help me with my formal complaint. My permanent position is with the unit I originally started with. I cannot return to that workplace as it is culturally unsafe for me to do that, so there is no option for me when my position finishes with the Human Rights Commission. There is no option for me but to go back to the place where I and a previous trainee had problems with racism and discrimination. So right now we are stuck. I know that with the Justice and Community Safety Directorate it is mandatory for everyone to do cultural awareness training, but that was not offered to us. Well, it was, but it was questioned because of our Aboriginality and whether or not we really needed to do it.

**Ms D Keed:** I would just like to add to what Anna was saying. Before starting this traineeship—the workplaces were going to get a trainee, and I did a traineeship before Anna Fraser did—before you would enter that workplace, whatever directorate, whatever workplace you would go into, the people that you would work with had to do cultural awareness training. But it is mandatory for them to do that anyway. In saying that, Anna and I had a really horrible experience with our previous workplace and since then have been pushed around to workplaces where we really do not have a role. It is not our position. We are just there to help anyone.

In saying all of that, we got a bit of feedback from the whole process. A lot of what they had done at our previous workplace was that they implemented all this stuff after we left. There are no Aboriginal workers out there now. We are not there, but they are doing all this stuff for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Should not things like the RAP be implemented before we go out? The cultural awareness training should be for everyone, not just for us because we are going out there, but for themselves. It should be two-way learning. We have learnt a lot in that workplace. We are stuck. We are at these positions we do not own, and we have to return to our workplace, even though we do not feel comfortable to do that. So there is just nothing, because they are not our real workplaces. There is no development plan or anything.

**Mr Swan:** Like I said earlier and reiterate now, I have been employed with ETD in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education section for the last seven or so years. I have not been afforded a promotion in any way since being there. I am classed as an ASO4. I have applied for higher level positions but have always been overlooked because of the ingrained cronyism within the ACT public service.

**MS BERRY:** I am just wondering whether anybody else has had any experiences relating to racism or bullying because of their culture or the culture of others within

their workplace.

**Mrs Graham:** Like I said, Deanne is 22, 23. But even I, a mature age person, still need a mentor. Like I said, I was the only Aboriginal person in the previous position against 16 non-Aboriginal people. They are all university educated with masters, and here I am, I did not even finish high school. But throughout life, I did studies and got there on my own. And you do not realise it. Here I am—and it is not only the colour of my skin, it is everything—and they have all been well educated. I am educated now but, in saying that, I have requested an ASO mentor because I felt out of place. These young guys are struggling through their workplace and even at a mature age I am asking for a mentor. I was never given one. I was lucky, like I said.

In this new role, like I was saying earlier, I have been given more opportunities and I have already got the mentor in place and have been given study opportunities for next year. To me, an Aboriginal woman, I am doing my family proud and my culture proud and serving the community. Yes, we all need mentors, mature aged and young people as well.

**Ms Fahey:** In response, Yvette, to your question about facing racism, I have been very fortunate in all the schools that I have visited. You get some. I am pretty thick skinned. I just sort of glance past it. I go to every school and look straight away for my champions and allies, and I focus on them. They are not always, as I explained to some others, the principal or deputy either. Sometimes they can be the front office person. But I did have, one time—I laugh at it now, but I was a bit shocked at the time—one very respected and highly trained teacher in ACT education say to me, “You know, Zuzette, I can’t believe you’re Aboriginal. You speak too well.” And after I picked my jaw up off the ground, I just got about my business. I did remind her, though, I was educated in the ACT government school system.

**THE CHAIR:** The other day we had the public service commissioner tell us there had only ever been one complaint of racism in the ACT public service. Given that the Human Rights Commission campaign “Racism. It stops with me” talks about one in five Australians experiencing hearing race hate language and one in 20 people having been assaulted because of their race, obviously there is a level of racism out there in the community. That must be reflected at some stage within the ACT public service. So why do you think there are so few complaints?

**Mrs Graham:** Because they come in under contract, and they know if they say something, the contract will end and they will be back on the unemployment line, with a bad reputation.

**Mr Chong:** I do not know. I think is it a good question. It is quite confronting, whether you are in the ACT public service or not, racism. And I have been pretty lucky, but I have been around it, where I have seen people affected by it. From my point of view, I see a lot of our people that do not have enough confidence to come forward and understand what the processes are to go forward. It has really been in that environment where they feel safe, confident, where they are understood to a degree, that they can go to maybe their RED officer or their HR. Outside of ACT government, if we were just average Joes, obviously we would handle this a lot differently. But we have got to handle it in a bureaucratic manner. So it is for us to understand how do we

do this ourselves. It is quite a lot to take in.

**Mr Swan:** Probably because of lack of support. A lot of Aboriginal public servants are isolated within some sections and departments.

**Mrs Graham:** That is right.

**Mr Swan:** So that isolation can create a lot of mental issues with them and, therefore, they are not confident.

**Mrs Graham:** What most of these people are saying is that you are confronted in your workplace but it is culturally, where you just go and tell another Aboriginal worker. You moan and whinge about it there. Like I said, it is that lack of support. You do not know who your RED officer is; you do not know who to go and approach because you are only that little pebble. Most of the time, eight out of nine people I know would rather resign than put a complaint in because it becomes hard. A lot of the people cannot deal with the process once they put that in and they would rather just leave the department. I think the process has got a lot to do with it as well when you put a complaint in.

**Ms T Keed:** I am lucky. Where I am, the AMC, my work colleagues really are supportive. But what I would like is more cultural support. I would like to attend the meetings and the network meetings and be involved with some of the Indigenous stuff that is happening on the outside. Being over there, I am isolated a little. Even with what Darren said about the bureaucrats, it is hard.

Being an Aboriginal person, working where I am working, still being a part of the community and trying to be a bureaucrat at the same time, trying to stay grassroots planted, I struggle with it every day. Where I am, the mob inside there keep me planted, for sure. They keep me planted. But then I could lose focus of the bureaucratic side of it too. I am still under that legislation and the guidelines and stuff of the AMC, and it is hard. It is hard with the community stuff and where I am at.

I would like more cultural support with network meetings and whatever other meetings. I do not know what goes on out there, but I would like to know what goes on out there.

**Ms D Keed:** I believe that it is lack of support. From my own experience, if I have come up with something that I need to talk to my supervisor about, I have not felt comfortable enough to talk to them, especially in my previous workplace, with the racism. I could not talk to my supervisor about it. When the issue did happen, I felt like I was the person who had done something wrong. I had never said a bad word about any of those people that I worked with. But I was never once supported.

**Ms Fraser:** In our unit, our HR person was actually the one who made the racist comments against us. And my own manager, direct manager, asked our senior manager if she had to do the Abo training, and I had to pull her up and say something about that. Our RED officer was always out of the office. So we could not go to that person. Luckily, like I said, I had a fantastic mentor who knew Andrew Kefford, the commissioner. So I was able to speak with him. If I had not made that connection, I

do not think that our complaint would have been taken quite so seriously. There were numerous emails between the head of HR, me and my other colleague. Communication was not happening very fast. But I noticed as soon as I cc-ed in Andrew's name, they were quick to respond to the emails.

I was due to leave my current workplace and go back to my previous workplace, and I emailed them four days before and asked if they had found me a position, which they had not. Luckily, where I am working now came up with the work that I needed but, like I say, that is not a guaranteed position. So at the end of June I will have to go back to the previous workplace.

**Ms Lacey:** Hearing the comments just reinforces my opinion that all cultural awareness training must incorporate challenging people's opinions and attitudes. I am not criticising the cultural awareness that takes place. But I am aware that one of the sections of government in this jurisdiction conducts cultural awareness via computer, on the screen. How can people's attitudes and opinions be challenged? Unless we incorporate challenging people's attitudes, you can sit through training and not engage at all. It is a level of ignorance. I have been told that I am not a real Aboriginal because of the colour of my skin. My mother happened to be English and Australian Aboriginals happened to have a recessive gene. Not many people are aware of that; I think we are the only Indigenous people in the world with a recessive gene. I am very proud of my Aboriginality. My grandmother—who, by the way, had brown skin—encouraged me to be proud of who I am. But I digress, and I apologise for that. I am really passionate about having people's attitudes challenged.

**Ms Robinson:** One of the biggest challenges for the government, following on from Rae, Deanne and Anna, is challenging the attitudes. But it is also having the support of senior leadership and knowing that senior leadership basically have your back. I know that I have been in situations where that has happened, and I have felt valued and supported. I have also been in situations where that has not happened and my whole sense of self and ability to do the role that I am employed to do have been shattered—because you do not have that level of support that you need.

That then ties into the fact—I know for me and I know listening and yarning with other mob too—that a lot of our skills, the skills that we bring to our roles, whether they are in identified positions or in mainstream positions, are often not recognised. They are the skills of community, connectedness, building relationships and walking the two worlds, basically. That is about being in the community and available in the community beyond the 9 to 5 but also being a public servant and working by a code of conduct. We are often placed in positions that are very challenging personally. I always have said that I work for the community; I am responsible to my community first and foremost and I am answerable to my community first and foremost.

Tying it back, for me the support of senior leadership makes or breaks how I am able to do my role—knowing that I either have that support or do not have that level of support that is needed. And having leaders who are willing to take the time to listen and really hear and engage is important.

**Mrs Graham:** Just to tie it up, in my previous positions—I will have to start crying about it. I brought my son in—came in sick from work. My boss knew that, and she

asked my son to leave the premises. I said: “Why? He’s sick.” I said: “Everyone else’s kids come in after school. Everyone else is allowed into the workplace.” She said, “No; Lynette, you need to stay in here and your son needs to go out and sit in the gutter out the front.” I lost it. I just defended my son. I said, “At the end of the day, if he’s going, then I’m going.” Like I said, no workplace is more important than my children.

That was senior management that did that. I rang her boss. “Oh, Lynette, I think you might have taken it out of proportion.” I said: “No, I didn’t. I’ve got witnesses.” There were five witnesses there and they were all too afraid to step up. So the answer to your problem of why we do not do it is: because you do not get the support. I ended up leaving the job. I left that job because, like I said, my children are more important.

You grow up with discrimination all your life. Places you go remind you of things back in your childhood. I knew the discrimination board was there; I knew the process I had to follow to do that. When I did not get support from the people that were around that listened to that, that heard that, and I was standing on my own and had to fight on my own, I still went ahead and put the complaint in, but everything was all on their grounds, on their time, on their turf, wherever, and I withdrew my whole application from the discrimination board.

In saying that, I guess it was culture for me. It was about not feeling supported and it was about the bureaucrat that I had to go through in regard to all that. For me it was easier to leave the job and be unemployed rather than go through the whole process and the bureaucrat. And like I said, I was isolated from the rest of the staff, who took that side over me.

**MR WALL:** Since we are running out of time, I might just ask everyone if they can fill in two points: what drove them to come and join us here today to share their stories and what would you like to see changed or what result would you like to see come out of this committee?

**Ms Fahey:** What brought me here was that through my childhood I was encouraged to stand up and be counted to vote, and I still very strongly believe that. Every opportunity I have, every chance to have my say, I will take, and I strongly encourage all my students and their families to do the same. What would I like to see change? Ginibi touched on some of the skills that we bring to jobs that are not in duty statements or selection criteria but are definitely why we are put into those jobs and why, in my directorate, schools are screaming out for us. I would like that to be formally recognised with our Liberal opposition and the appropriate remuneration. Thank you.

**Mr Chong:** I come here really to support my mob here. Really, I enjoy my role. I have got it pretty good. They are culturally sensitive—both with my previous role in ACT Heritage and now in natural resource management programs. They are really fantastic. I am the only Aboriginal person there; when I need time out, they give me time out. I get the job done; they are happy. I guess what I would like to see is more flexibility, support and understanding in the workplace.

**Ms Fahey:** PS: I do love my job. I love it.

**Mrs Graham:** What brought me here today? I know a lot of young people are coming through today and I wanted to share my experience. But also, like I said, with three years of trying to get study leave and make choices between my family and study—I would like to see that change. When you come in on a contract, maybe they could look at those opportunities for study as well. What changes would I like to see? I would like to see more permanent positions identified that are specifically areas to work and to support our community. Like I said before, coming from the role that I previously was in, I know there is a greater and bigger need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to be out there and connected with our community. Like I said, it is the face that us mob go to that makes it familiar. They are the changes I would like to see happening.

**Ms Robinson:** I guess the reason I came today is that I am hopeful that we will get from this hearing some real outcomes. The whole-of-government employment strategy is really good, but it has not had the teeth that it should have had and the outcomes that it should have had so far. My hope is that what comes out of this will be something that will hold directorates more accountable. What needs to happen is ongoing conversations about the issues that have been raised today. It is important that there are real, transparent, honest communications rather than what normally happens, which is people saying: “We are doing this. We are ticking that box. We are performing here.” It is actually asking what is not working and how we can make it work. It is not just saying it is no good, but asking what we can do.

That has to be done with us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. I would like to see, as one of the outcomes, our senior leaders in all of our directorates having conversations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff—and not just people in positions where there is easy access to people, but across the board so that there is a more genuine understanding of the issues that we face.

**Ms Lacey:** I am here because I was invited, and my general manager, who is particularly supportive of Aboriginal staff and particularly committed to working at reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system, told me I should be here. What I would like to see change is people’s attitudes. What I would love to see happen is for the government to educate this jurisdiction in respect to Aboriginal issues. I have heard people say, “There are no Aboriginal people in Canberra.” We come in all colours, shapes and sizes. And I would love to see a day when these two beautiful young women are not referred to as Abos in the workplace. That really is distressing to all of us who have had that lived experience.

**Mrs Graham:** It had the three trainees here all in tears.

**Mr Swan:** I am here, too, because I have been invited. But, as with some of the speakers, I think there should be Aboriginal-identified positions in the senior hierarchy that could really monitor Aboriginal people in the ACT public service workforce and be supportive of Aboriginal people in their roles—and also someone up the top that has a bit of nous that can have a bit of say with the politicians and hierarchy of the public service.

**Mr Nean:** My name is Phill Nean. I am here because of an interest, a continued



interest, to contribute to change and to being a change agent, not a secret agent. One of things I would actually like to see happen picks up on what a lot of people have said. Hopefully in a real way it addresses what Anna and Deanne have both experienced recently and what we have all experienced. You hear people talk about going to cultural awareness programs or going online to do a cultural awareness program.

Cultural awareness, cultural whatever you want to call it, for a lot of them stops at the end of the course, whereas real engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with people from other cultures or with people with disabilities and so on actually happens when they come and walk with us. Come to a game of football with us. Come to a dance with us. Come to NAIDOC Week with us. Come to Reconciliation Week with us, not just leave it for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people to organise and then celebrate something that is significant to us.

Come and be with us, the same way that senior people go to events for non-Aboriginal people or they go to NAIDOC Week for five minutes and then talk about what a wonderful event and what a wonderful time it has been. That is the warm fuzzy stuff which does not really contribute to sustained relationships and bring about what Rae was talking about—attitudinal change.

**Ms T Keed:** I am here today because I want to see change. I just want it noted for the record that we have got three tearful young people here today. It breaks my heart that we have got to sit through this and that it has got to come out this way when our Aboriginality and our positions in our workplaces should be enough to say that we are all educated in our own way. Our positions are specialised enough as it is.

When I got the job at DOCS, when I applied for the job at DOCS, my certificate was my Aboriginality. I reckon that should be a specialised thing on its own, because we are all specialised workers. I am an Indigenous liaison officer at the jail. I am proud to be out there. It is a deadly place to work. It is a good group of people, but still our young people have got to go through racism and discrimination. Deanne went through it at school and it breaks my heart to see her sitting here today. Anna is sitting beside her. One young girl had to leave. I just want it noted that it happened here today.

I just ask when this Aboriginal community in the ACT is going to get up and start rising up, because we need to. We are a proud mob. We are grassroots level. We need to stick together and tackle this head on. I just hope the government is not just going to be ticking the box here today. The first time I met Chris Bourke, he sounded like a deadly bloke. He looks like a deadly bloke. I just hope, brother, that you are going to come to the party and support us in making big changes here today.

I would like more cultural support in workplaces. Cultural awareness, yes, but it is not our place to go out there and educate the white man on what we like. Get to know us. Do not be frightened. I am not scary. I can sit on both sides of the fence. But what is hurting me today is sitting here when we have got three young people who are probably scared about what is going to happen, the backlash when they walk out these doors today, and fearful of what is going to be in their workplace. I just hope the government supports them and I certainly hope the Aboriginal community is going to stand up and support these young people today.

What happened here today was brushed under the carpet—the discrimination and the racism. It is happening. It is happening. My kids went through it at school. We moved down here and we were told we lived in humpies on top of the hill. I am not frightened of my grassroots. I am proud of where I am from. I was born and bred on a mission. My family still lives there to this day. I am proud of it. I am not going to discard my Aboriginality or my identity for anybody, because that is who I am and that is what makes me.

But I hope, like I said, that this government is not just going to be ticking the box from today onwards. I come because I want to be part of a change. One day I would like to be sitting in a SOG C position or SOG B position. My ambition, mate, is that I am going to head for it, because I know I can do it. I am third-year social worker degree. That is what I had to do to get the—I did social work for 10 years. But I have got to get the certificate to say that I can do it. It should not be like that. My Aboriginality is a specialised position. I just hope that people are out there and listening to this. Be proud of who you are. The government do not dictate my Aboriginality. One day, mate, I will be up there one day. I just want you to know that.

**Ms Fraser:** I am Anna Fraser. I am here today because of my experience and that of my colleague. We did put in a formal complaint, which was very intimidating to do. We were lucky to have two great senior Aboriginal men in our community to help us through this whole process. We spoke to so many people. It took us so long to write our formal complaints. We finally put them in. Really, this has been going on since April. It is now December and we do not have closure to our permanent place.

Personally, as a trainee I met some beautiful, strong Aboriginal people, some of whom have left the traineeship program. Some completed the traineeship program. I would not like to not recommend the traineeship program to any future Aboriginal person. I want to improve it for the next lots of trainees to come through. I am currently working at the ACT Human Rights Commission. I guess I was happy to come here because going through our complaint and hearing people talking with the wider community as to why people are not putting in complaints to discrimination issues is because people are confused and not supported.

In my current role we are going to start to do some capacity building projects which will be underway next year for Aboriginal people in the workplace—who they can contact for a good outcome of their complaint to make sure that they have support, because it is a long process. It is a daunting process. No-one likes to make a fuss. Deanne and I did make a bit of a fuss, but I am proud I did it. I am happy to do it. I am happy to change the workplace that we did work in. They were able to address a lot of systemic issues in that workplace. Every member of the ACT goes to that workplace. Whether you are Aboriginal or whether you are Muslim, what we have highlighted has made it safe for every nationality, every culture of Canberra to be able to walk through those doors and feel comfortable.

I am proud that that was done. There is a lot of work done in the office with pulling up of inappropriate conversations that might be leading towards racism or just bad talk about any culture. If that is one thing we could change through this process we have been through, then I am happy with that.

**Ms D Keed:** I am Deanne Keed. I come here today because I believe that my personal experience could somehow contribute to the change that hopefully will come. Also I would like there to be more support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, not this tick the box, like someone else has said. I would like it to be genuine and for there to be two-way learning. I like to think that when I go into a new workplace I will learn. I get to know the people but in return I would like them not to be fake.

In saying that, I am now at the Public Advocate's Office. They are such lovely people. They are really down to earth, easygoing people. I would like there to be more people like that to support Aboriginal people throughout the ACT government.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Participants, I would like to thank you all very much for being here today. It has been hard work. I am very proud of you, proud of your contributions. I would also remind you, just taking up one of the points that Tanya made, that the privilege statement protects you—protects you—and it would be a matter for the Assembly if you were intimidated or had any repercussions as a result of your evidence today.

In a few days the committee secretary will send you a proof transcript of today's hearing. If you have got more to say or think about things that you wish you had said—which is something I always do—please send an email to the committee and that will form part of our evidence.

The committee's roundtable is adjourned. Thank you very much.

**The committee adjourned at 2.13 pm.**