



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

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

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2014-2015](#))

Members:

DR C BOURKE (Chair)
MR A WALL (Deputy Chair)
MS M FITZHARRIS
MS N LAWDER

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

MONDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2015

Secretary to the committee:
Mrs N Kosseck (Ph: 620 50435)

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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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.32 am.

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Women and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Social Inclusion and Equality

Community Services Directorate

Chapman, Ms Sue, Director-General

Sheehan, Ms Maureen, Executive Director, Service Strategy and Community Building

Forester, Ms Robyn, Director, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Saballa, Ms Melanie, Director, Service Strategy and Community Building

Manikis, Mr Nic, Director, Community Participation Group

Doyle, Ms Bridie, Senior Manager, Office for Women

Matthews Mr David, Executive Director, Housing and Community Services
ACT

THE CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services inquiry into the annual and financial reports for 2014-15. Today the committee will be examining the following components of the Community Services Directorate annual report: community services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, multicultural affairs, women, and housing.

Minister and officials, could I confirm that you have read the privilege card that is lying on the table in front of you and that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Berry: Yes.

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

Ms Berry: Yes, I would. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to talk about these portfolio areas. They represent some of the most exciting and important work being carried out by this government for our community. This government has made a commitment to do better for our community. The Chief Minister has created the new portfolio of social inclusion and equality and he has made me the minister assisting on social inclusion and equality.

We want Canberra to be a fairer and more inclusive community. We want to do better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Canberra. We want to create welcoming communities for people who are feeling isolated. We want to create safe communities for women and children who live in fear of violence. We are a human rights jurisdiction that believes in same-sex marriage. We show our support for people

with a disability by being the first jurisdiction in Australia to move our whole population to the NDIS.

I am proud to be responsible for many of the resources that can make a real difference in people's lives. Our public housing and homelessness services continue to provide targeted support to Canberrans. Ninety-seven per cent of all new public housing tenants are those in greatest need and 95 per cent of tenants are in receipt of rental rebates. The public housing renewal program is transforming public housing. Every effort has been made to support a smooth transfer experience for tenants, and Housing ACT is working closely with the public housing renewal taskforce to achieve this.

Page 100 of the directorate's annual report has a good case study on how we are working with tenants. Laurel Dakin moved into her ground floor flat at Owen flats in Lyneham in 1988. As part of the public housing renewal program, Mrs Dakin was offered a choice of two older person units in the inner north, and fell in love with one of those at first sight. It has a secure courtyard, a nice garden and is close to bus routes.

Other major construction successes include the completion of Common Ground Canberra. All of these 40 units are now occupied, with half going to people who have been battling homelessness and a further 20 are affordable rentals.

Turning now to multicultural affairs, events such as the 2015 National Multicultural Festival, which has attracted more than 270,000 people over three days, continue to be a beacon of our celebration of diversity. Just as strong a statement was a formal declaration in June of the ACT as a refugee welcome zone, which is being put into practice as we prepare to welcome Syrian refugees. We have just seen the great result of the robust community engagement in our city from the deliberations of the One Canberra Symposium held on 30 October 2014 and the subsequent release of the one Canberra report.

One of the most significant current areas of focus for our community is family and domestic violence. The Office for Women is helping to shape the ACT government's strategies for this area of work both at a local level and as part of a national response. One of the guiding documents for this is the second implementation plan, or the 2IP, of the ACT prevention of violence against women and children strategy, covering the period 2015 to 2017, which was launched in August 2015. Development of the 2IP relied heavily on what our community experts told us we needed to do to improve our current responses and prevent women and children from falling through the gaps, with tragic results.

The past 12 months has been a productive period for the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, including the launch of the inaugural ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement 2015-18, which was developed in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. The agreement sets out the ACT government's commitment to working with the community and stakeholders to develop strong families. Among the initiatives that support this is the ongoing secretariat support to the elected body and the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholarship grants, resulting in a record of over 80 community applications.

Finally, I refer to community services. The human services blueprint released in 2014 is improving the way human services are delivered across Canberra. The community would be aware of the work underway through the three better services initiatives: the west Belconnen local services network; strengthening families; and the human services gateway. I want to share with you one testimonial from a family member involved in strengthening families:

I would say that Strengthening Families is wonderful ... it helps us believe someone is listening and willing to help get things done ... you're treated like more than a case file number, you're being supported. And it takes away huge stress and depression. I support this approach completely.

Chair, that is my opening statement. My officials and I are ready to accept questions from the committee.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. On page 54 of your report it states that Therapy ACT has 385 clients with autism spectrum disorder, which make up 13.48 per cent of your clients. How has Therapy ACT's treatment of autism spectrum disorder changed in recent years, as more is known about these conditions?

Ms Berry: Chair, I have just been advised that that is a question for the Minister for Disability.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Mr Wall, you can ask your substantive question.

MR WALL: I would like to go to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs.

Ms Berry: The information I have in front of me is based on the program.

THE CHAIR: We might go to Ms Fitzharris whilst we reorganise ourselves.

MR WALL: Can we be clear as to what we are talking about at this point?

THE CHAIR: We are starting with Community Services. Community relations, which includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, is scheduled to start at 10.15, followed by multicultural affairs, women, and then social housing services after 12. Ms Fitzharris, please begin.

MS FITZHARRIS: Good morning. Could I get an update from the minister on the Community Services strengthening families program, and in particular the better services network trial in west Belconnen? How is that going and what do you expect to see happen over the next year as well?

Ms Berry: The strengthening families program comes out of the human services blueprint. The blueprint started last year, in 2014. It had been supporting 30 families, which involved 134 family members. The initial data, including the example that I read out in my opening statement, indicates that the initiative has been effective in reaching those high-need families.

In 2014-15 strengthening families responded to 13 escalations, relating to issues such

as service inflexibility or a lack of understanding that was required to meet the complex needs of some of these families. In 2014-15 there were 132 lead workers who were trained across government and non-government organisations. This included all of the government agencies that would have been involved with these families, including health and education. So there has been an all-of-government response to the complex needs that some of these families have been facing throughout their lives.

During 2015-16, a further 24 families have been included in the program, which includes an additional 117 family members. Over 30 per cent of these families who have been supported by the initiative have identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and 58 per cent of the families in that program are single-parent families.

With respect to the better services work in west Belconnen, we have had some great feedback from people who have been involved in that work. Samantha Kourtis, a local chemist at Capital Chemist, Charnwood, has just joined up as a business partner to the better services network. I had a chat with her a couple of months ago and she told me that, because she knew about the network, when one of her clients needed some support she was able to direct that client to the supports that they needed, outside what she could provide.

I have had some positive feedback from Kim Davison from Gugan Gulwan, who has lead workers as part of the strengthening families program, about the success of the program from her point of view. Shona, who is the head of the child and family centre at Kippax in west Belconnen, has also been involved in the program and the network, and has also provided some positive feedback about how the program is supporting families that she has come across. So there has been really great feedback on strengthening families and better services. It is really changing the way that we support vulnerable families in our community.

MS FITZHARRIS: How many business partners are involved in the trial?

Ms Berry: It is growing every day as we are trying to recruit more. I might ask one of the officials if they have those numbers here, and perhaps who the business partners are at this stage.

Ms Saballa: As the minister was saying, the west Belconnen local services network has achieved significant growth and buy-in from across the community, and that is due to a number of really important things. Firstly, the local community feel very much engaged in and a part of what is happening in the local services network. The other thing is the very strong commitment by local partners to engage in such a great initiative.

The model itself was designed in late 2014 by a group of 15 local service providers to ensure the relevance of the local context. Since then the network has gone from strength to strength. I would need to check exact details about the number of local service providers and businesses, but if the minister is agreeable, that is a question that we could take on notice.

Ms Berry: Yes, I think that would be useful information to have. With respect to the commitment from the local community to the local services network, when we launched the network at Kippax there was a young fellow down there who was busking. He was spotted by department officials and they invited him to come and busk during the network launch, and invited him to be a member of the network, as a young person who lives in west Belconnen. He has now joined as a youth member, as part of the network. So we are trying as much as we can to broaden it out. But there is certainly a commitment from the community to be part of this and to be part of the network.

Ms Chapman: The member agencies that started this were the National Health Co-op, UnitingCare Kippax, Belconnen Community Service, Australian Red Cross, Inanna, Kippax Fair, a local resident—whom I have met, and who is very active in the school system there—and ACT government directorates. We started with six members and now we have 35 members of the network. So, as the minister says, it looks like we are going in the right direction.

The most important thing we should probably say about the network is that even though there are ACT government representatives on the network, it is actually driven by the local community. They have taken the lead, they chair it and it is their network. But we certainly can get the full list of names for you.

MS FITZHARRIS: What would it mean, for example, for the local chemist to be involved, given that some of the clients of the various services would come into the chemist quite frequently? How does having the chemist involved strengthen the overall network?

Ms Chapman: I have attended one of the meetings of the network as an observer. One of the key things about having the network members is that the network members themselves can go out and talk to other businesses or other organisations and say, “This is what the network is about.” So they become the champions of it. That is the first thing. So the network members actually have a responsibility to grow the network. That is their job, in part.

The other thing, of course, is that because there are so many providers of a variety of services now involved, they can identify certain things. For example—and I do not know whether this is a fact because I have not talked to the chemist—if they see a lot of young people not in school, hanging about outside that area, that is something they can take responsibility for, talk to other members of the network and say, “I’m concerned, so let’s talk to the school.” So it is about participating in an active sense rather than just turning up for meetings.

Ms Saballa: I would be happy to give some advice about the commitment to community that was launched recently. Again that has come about very much by way of key themes from the local community and also that local services network and the network leadership group. There was a great deal of community engagement about the strengths of west Belconnen and areas that they felt we could really work on as a community.

In August 2015 the local services network launched their commitment to community.

It focused on four key themes. These themes are the themes that have been raised by the local community, and will now form part of a range of strategies and actions. So it is really local responses to local needs. These four areas include creating the best possible start for children. This will provide services to address low physical, social and emotional language and communication skills for children.

The second area is supporting strong families. This will provide services to the high number of low income and single parent families in west Belconnen. We know that 25 per cent of families in west Belconnen are single parent families and 81 per cent of those families are female-headed households.

A third area is employment pathways for young people. This will address the high level of unemployment of young people aged between 15 and 25 years in west Belconnen. The fourth area is connecting older people in the community. This will provide services and community support to the 34 per cent of people living alone in west Belconnen who are over 65 years of age, with a high proportion being widowed females over 70 years of age.

Again this was based on very sound work that we did in the development of the network, looking at data, looking at the demographics and also, very importantly, talking to local residents of west Belconnen to find out what the needs of the community are.

MS FITZHARRIS: With the trial, do you anticipate it going into a next phase within west Belconnen or perhaps rolling out a similar model across other parts of the city?

Ms Berry: Having regard to the way the trial has been going so far and the success of the trial, from the comments and input we have had from community members, organisations and government departments, this is certainly something that we could push out to other areas of the ACT, and really change the way that we provide support and services to people in the ACT community who need them.

THE CHAIR: I have some supplementaries. One of the key features of the strengthening families program is the lead worker who is chosen by the family. Which areas do those lead workers come from?

Ms Berry: Which areas?

THE CHAIR: Do they come from your directorate or community organisations or Housing?

Ms Chapman: They come from a whole range of areas. They come from the non-government sector in terms of service providers who are already working with some of those families. We have trained up lead workers from that sector. We have, I think, two trained lead workers from Gugan Gulwan at the moment to help from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective. We have lead workers from Health, education, Community Services. They cross all of that spectrum.

It is important I think for the committee to recognise that the human service blueprint is a longer term strategy that is actually not just about CSD. It is how human services

in all of their parts actually work together. From a government perspective that is Health and education and justice and CSD but it is also the non-government sector, which provides services in the human service continuum of service. So we try very hard for it not to be just something that CSD alone is doing because we cannot do it by ourselves.

Ms Berry: Talking about the lead worker, as you mentioned, that is somebody who is chosen by the family and is typically somebody whom they have met through a government service or another organisation like Gugan Gulwan. Calling that person a lead worker—it is just a definition but really what they are doing is supporting that family through everyday activities that each of us might take for granted. It might mean just getting up in the morning, getting breakfast and having some consistency in their family's life, getting their children to school, working out how they communicate with their schools.

A lot of these participating families have a lot of different, complex needs that will need support—mental health illnesses, housing difficulties, educational support and they may have experienced domestic and family violence. The person who is working with them is really finding out what that family's needs are rather than telling them what they need. It is actually building a relationship with that family, finding out what their needs are and then providing them with supports or directing them to services that can support them through that.

THE CHAIR: It was mentioned that there was training provided to those lead workers so that they can undertake this role. What has been the nature of that training?

Ms Berry: I have attended a couple of the training sessions for the lead workers and it is pretty intense training. As I have described, a lot of these families have some complex issues in their lives that need support. So the training that is provided is wide and varied. Maybe somebody else can provide some more detail.

Ms Saballa: I would be happy to. As the minister said, yes the training is comprehensive for the lead worker approach. And as you would be aware, the methodology or approach of lead workers in working with families experiencing complex needs was an approach that we developed with families when we developed strengthening families very early. That was listening to families and really finding out their experience of the service system and what worked for them and what could work better.

What we do with that training for lead workers for the strengthening families approach is really focus on how you best work with families, how you engage with families that are strength based, how you engage the whole family so that it is not one of the parents or both of the parents or partners but is actually looking at the needs of a family as a whole. It is also about how you develop a family plan with that family that really takes account of a family's needs and aspirations and some of the barriers to achieving those. The lead worker really plays a very critical role in working with that family.

I quickly share some family comments about a lead worker and how that has assisted

them. Families have commented that lead workers have empowered their families to choose their own lead worker and how wonderful that has been for them. They have found that service responses are faster and simpler and the whole family can be involved. Children are seen as equal members of that family and they have a say in what is happening going forward. Families feel that they have been really well supported to realise their resilience, and that is so very important when you are working with families with high and complex needs.

They also feel that they are the keepers of their information because one of the things that we heard from families was that when you have families with high and complex needs they are accessing a range of great services across the service system and they share their story many times. So strengthening families has really worked to change that.

Going now to how lead workers are supported, there is specialised training. As you indicated, it is from across the community sector and also ACT government directorates. The other thing that works really well is that there are reflective sessions for lead workers because, as you can appreciate, they are working with real stories in real people's lives and really looking at how best they can support those stories.

There are also a number of practice leaders. That was what was funded in the ACT government budget. Those practice leaders have a very strong role in looking at the service barriers, supporting the lead workers who are doing that on-the-ground work with families. So really what we have been able to set up as part of strengthening families is a structure that makes sure the strengthening families approach is well supported across community and also across government.

THE CHAIR: Is that training accredited?

Ms Saballa: No it is not accredited training as far as I understand but it is training that we have developed based on the pilot of the strengthening families approach, also the independent evaluation and also, of course, the very positive outcomes that we have received from families that have participated. But we have rolled that out over quite a period now and had really strong results from doing that.

THE CHAIR: Is that training reflected in classification of your workers?

Ms Sheehan: The classifications of the workers vary because it is the family themselves that choose the worker. For example, if it was a family in public housing that had a close relationship with their housing manager—that is an ASO5 classification—many of those housing managers have an associate diploma or even a degree in human services but not necessarily. If it was someone from the justice system there might be a different qualification. If it is someone from a community organisation or care and protection they might be a social worker. There are many different qualifications and training that people have had along the way but again, because it comes from the choice of the family, we could not mandate a particular classification for the worker because that would really fly in the face of the family's choice about who is the best person to support them.

Ms Chapman: One of things I would say about the lead worker is that they are

actually given the authority, irrespective of what level classification they are, to find ways through the service system. So they are actually empowered as the lead worker to go in and say to whichever directorate or whichever agency, “This is not working for this family. We need you to do X or Y or Z.” If the lead worker cannot find ways through the barriers at that level they have the authority to escalate it to much more senior people. Even if their classification is not the same, they have the authority of the role to assist the families and to get outcomes for the families.

Ms Berry: That is the clarification there. The first part of that training that I attended the other week—there was lots of training—was about building a trusting relationship and how much sharing is too much sharing when you are having this relationship with a family. The lead worker is not there to provide the counselling services for somebody who may have been experiencing domestic or family violence. Their job is to get the family or the people who are experiencing that to the organisation that can provide that provisional support.

MR WALL: I have a few follow-up questions if I could. Minister, for the strengthening families program, what outcomes or objectives are being sought? I guess in essence, what does success look like? How do you measure this program and say, “It is working”, “It is doing okay but could do better” or “It is not achieving what it ought to”?

Ms Chapman: If I could start.

Ms Berry: Yes.

Ms Chapman: As a general kind of overarching outcome there are probably two or three high level ones. The first is to prevent families cycling in and out of the same issues again and again and again. It is not just addressing the one time they turn up and say, “I have this problem. I cannot solve it.” It is actually to look at what has created that problem and to work right back and say, “What are the precursors?” In health, it is the social determinants of the health outcome. It is the social determinants of the human services outcome.

One aim is to actually work out in a whole-of-family way what are the things that are creating those issues for the family. One aim is to stop that cycling through again and again and turning up at different doors and asking slightly different questions and, as Melanie says, come back and go through the whole story again. That is the first thing.

The second thing is: if we can help families become stable families, able to achieve the outcomes they are looking for for that family, then that prevents families spiralling out of control. For example, it may prevent children coming into care. For children to go into care is a very traumatic and expensive thing for the service system to deal with. If we can prevent that happening or if we can prevent people getting chronically ill, which causes a drain on the health system, there will be impacts on the sustainability of the service system over a period. It does not happen immediately.

The aim of the whole better services, the whole blueprint, is a triple aim: good outcomes for an individual, good outcomes in terms of the community, the service system, and then good outcomes for the whole system. What are the benefits for the

whole system? It has a range of outcomes starting with what is the outcome for the family that we are looking for but then overall what is the outcome for the service system in terms of managing the system in a more sustainable and streamlined fashion.

MR WALL: What is the duration of the engagement of the lead worker with the family? Is it open ended?

Ms Sheehan: It depends on the needs of the family. The thing about strengthening families is that they are all families that have had lots of services from the service system over the years but what the family says is, “But it just has not worked for me”. The point is for the family to say, “This is what I want to achieve in my life.” Then the lead worker helps them get services to achieve that thing.

The answer to the question is: as long as the family needs to achieve the goal and the services for them to be able to maintain the goals that they have set for themselves. It is not so much about it being different for every family but appropriate to the family—right service, right time, right duration.

MR WALL: And how much money was allocated to the pilot program?

Ms Sheehan: The thing about strengthening families is that all of the services that are directly received by the family are already funded in existing service systems. The strengthening families extra funding was for the practice to employ pre-practice leaders who would then also provide the training to the lead workers. That dollar amount I can provide to you if the minister agrees.

MR WALL: How has the directorate managed it? You mentioned that the families can choose their own lead worker. I imagine some have chosen existing Community Services Directorate staff. Do they have to be an ACT public servant?

Ms Sheehan: No they do not.

Ms Berry: Gugan Gulwan has two lead workers.

MR WALL: For those that have chosen a public servant, particularly a Community Services Directorate staff member, how has the directorate managed that person taking on an additional role which might detract from, I guess, their current day-to-day employment position? How was that been managed internally?

Ms Berry: That is a good question.

Ms Sheehan: The organisations themselves have given the commitment to let the role take it wherever it goes. If it is a government employee obviously then organisations are large enough to make some accommodation in workload so that the lead worker can take the time they need. In community organisations we did find that the organisations were initially saying, “We are very keen to participate, but what happens if it does take us more time?” Natalie Howson, our director-general who is in education at the moment, wrote to organisations and said, “We understand that it might make an extra pull on your time. Because we fund you for lots of different services we are really happy for you to count that extra time against other contracts

that we have with you so that you are able to meet all of your obligations and you are not out of pocket.” Organisations have been very happy with that. Does that make sense?

MR WALL: It does make sense. The question is then: what other services have been missed out? In that funding envelope we hear, time and again as members of this committee, as members of the Assembly, that the funding does not necessarily go far enough to cover the need or the demand in communities. If this program is being allowed to be funded against other funding envelopes inevitably there is a service that someone has been trying to access somewhere else that is now under further demand.

Ms Sheehan: The thing that we have found from these families is that it might seem counterintuitive but actually the number of services that they have had has been huge. What they say is, “But it is not meeting our needs. It is all over the place, and it is people telling us what is good for us and what is good for our life.” The services stack up, up, up and the family is not getting where it needs to get where they say that they want to go. In this model, over time the families will use fewer services but it will be the services that they actually want.

It is not a question of other people having to stand in line because these families are getting more services. What they have told us is that they have had heaps of services, it just has not taken them where they want to go. This is about, as they would say, probably fewer services but getting the ones that they actually want.

MR WALL: The point I was trying to make is that it seems that the range of services being offered has been expanded by the strengthening families program, which I do not think anyone is critical of. The range of things that are on offer has been expanded.

Ms Chapman: No. If I may, the government funded the human services blueprint over 2014-16 in these three initiatives and it is different bits of money for the three initiatives of \$3.2 million to be allocated into the initiatives over those two years.

Ms Berry: So that is the three—

Ms Chapman: The \$3.2 million.

Ms Berry: Yes, but the three—

Ms Chapman: The human service gateway, the local services network and strengthening families are part of that. The services that the lead worker is working with the families to access, as Ms Sheehan said, the specific services targeted for their needs rather than turning up anywhere trying to get somebody to help them, are the services that we already have in place. It is actually using the service system across the human service system in a more effective and efficient way because we are taking them to services that they probably were using again and again and again and were still not getting a better outcome or they did not even know existed—

Ms Berry: Or they did not need that service.

Ms Chapman: or they did not need that service. So we are actually saying, “Here is

the service system. It has got all of these component parts to it. There are many aspects to it. Let's help them find the ones that meet." It is not new services. There is a new way of joining up the services which is what the lead worker and the better services initiative is about, as is the West Belconnen trial. It is actually saying, "What have you got in your community? Let's actually put it together in a way that makes sense for the community." There are not new services, there are services that exist and we are trying to make better use of the ones that exist.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder, a substantive question?

MS LAWDER: Under "community sector reform" page 18 of the annual report talks about "a program of reforms which have enabled red-tape reductions" A couple of points further down it talks about a simpler recurrent grant arrangement and financial reporting requirements reduced. Apart from those two items, the recurrent grant arrangement and the simpler reporting requirements, what else was included in the program of reforms which enabled red tape reductions?

Ms Berry: This is all part of the 0.34 per cent levy.

MS LAWDER: I understand that. I do not need the detail. I just was after that specific answer.

Ms Berry: What else has been provided in—

MS LAWDER: It says "a program of reforms which have enabled red-tape reductions." What else was in the program other than those two in the last dot point before strategic goal 5?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for the question. There has been a range of things, as you say. I will go to some of the additional ones. Small organisations that had funding of under \$500,000 used to have very extensive audit requirements. What is now Access Canberra was able to change the legislation for incorporated associations to reduce the audit requirements for organisations with under \$500,000 of income. That certainly reduced red tape for those organisations. With respect to service funding agreements right across government, organisations now only have to report financially once a year, so that has reduced the number of times that they have to report.

MS LAWDER: Yes, that is in the other dot point.

Ms Sheehan: Progressively over time we are now extending the duration of service funding agreements from three years to five years, so that has a tremendous efficiency for organisations in the reduced amount of times that they need to tender for services and report under those agreements. We have also transferred 47 agreements from service funding agreements into grants.

MS LAWDER: Yes, that is in that other dot point.

Ms Sheehan: Yes. We have also introduced a single relationship manager inside Community Services Directorate. What organisations had said to us was, "We receive disability funding, we have got homelessness funding, we have got housing funding

and we have got a different relationship manager for every different funding agreement. We just want one point of contact.” So we have introduced that and what that does is reduce the number of people that organisations have to deal with.

MS LAWDER: Great.

Ms Sheehan: The final thing, which is really very exciting, is that we have just purchased a business development tool, which is called the standards and performance pathways tool. This enables organisations, or us, to feed into the tool every possible external quality assurance or regulatory system that an organisation complies with. You put it in once and it maps the individual components of all of that quality assurance against every other existing quality system, not just in the ACT but across Australia. So at a moment we can see all of the systems that organisations are complying with and then that enables a reduction in the organisation then having to go and qualify against those different systems.

MS LAWDER: Was that purchase in the financial year we are currently in or the year of this annual report?

Ms Sheehan: In the year of this annual report. The expenditure was made in that year after consultation with the sector. At the moment we are setting up the first 30 organisations that will participate in that. Organisations are really looking forward to it, as you would imagine.

MS LAWDER: How much did that cost?

Ms Sheehan: On that particular tool, we have spent \$80,000 to date and the total amount will be \$180,000, including licensing fees, but I will just check that amount. Yes, it was \$180,000. We have spent \$88,000 to date on the tool itself and then there are licensing fees as we move each organisation in.

MS LAWDER: Is that for 30 licences or—

Ms Sheehan: There are 30 licences at this stage. We will have a look at how useful organisations find it and then we will look to expand the number of licences.

MS LAWDER: Does that include a training component—cost of training or—

Ms Sheehan: If training in the tool is required, we will certainly provide training. This tool is being used across mental health providers already in the ACT so a number of organisations that receive funding from the Community Services Directorate are already using the tool.

MS LAWDER: It was the standards and performance pathways tool?

Ms Sheehan: That is right.

THE CHAIR: We might move along to community relations, which includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, multicultural affairs and women.

Ms Berry: Just for the committee's information, there are now 54 organisations that are part of the Local Services Network in West Belconnen.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Perhaps we could talk about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and the assistance provided by Community Services Directorate. What sort of assistance does CSD provide to the elected body?

Ms Chapman: The CSD, through the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, provides secretariat support to the elected body, so helps with agenda setting, arranging meetings, consultations—those kinds of things. The office has also managed the third elected body elections, which were held during NAIDOC Week.

That week was an innovation last year in 2014. The office coordinated an extensive community engagement process, which included managing polling booths at the NAIDOC Week ball, Aboriginal Hostels Ltd luncheon, the AIATSIS family day, NAIDOC on the Green, Winnunga, West Belconnen Child and Family Centre, Belconnen Library, the Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre, Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation and the Alexander Maconochie Centre. So just supporting that election was a very large secretariat and organisational role. The office also supports the elected body to hold meetings with the ministers, other members of the Assembly as required and with stakeholder groups like the Human Rights Commission.

THE CHAIR: Do you see any improvements that could be made in this area? Is more support or different forms of support needed for the elected body from the CSD?

Ms Berry: The government is just about to complete a review that was conducted into the work of the elected body and the act that covers the work of the elected body. We did that as a result of a request from the elected body that it was about time for a review. I think they are in their eighth year now and it was time to see how the elected body was working and representing the community in issues that they could bring to government, involving the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the decision-making processes of government.

The elected body, as you know, was set up by the former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope at a time when the federal government had shut down all of the other elected bodies across the country representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members. The ACT government and Jon Stanhope decided that the best thing for the ACT would be to have an elected body that could properly represent the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Robyn, did you want to talk a bit more about the process of the review and where it is up to now?

Ms Forester: Yes. The review, as the minister has said, is just in its final stages. We are currently reviewing the draft report, which will provide us with a number of insights from the community forums and individual events that were held. We did engage an independent consultant to undertake that review for us and she has done extensive consultation right across the community and government. She has had individual meetings with people, including all current elected body members and former elected body members that have been in the elected body over the past seven

years. As I said, we are just reviewing the draft report at this point in time and we should have the final report early December.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. We might turn to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement. Minister, could you tell us how that agreement is going to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT?

Ms Berry: The whole idea behind the agreement is that it came from the community. It is not a government agreement in that it is not just ink on paper provided by the government. It is an agreement that was developed by the community in partnership with the government. Its intention is that through the implementation of the agreement the government and the elected body will be able to progress some of the issues that have been raised in the agreement over the life of the agreement but also into the future.

We are constantly reviewing how the agreement works and I was just reflecting this morning on one of the things that I can point to that we have already started to achieve as part of the agreement. At point 3 it says:

Acknowledging and valuing the role of traditional custodians, through the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, as the authority of culture and heritage

This morning the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services is opening or turning the sod on an Indigenous garden up at the arboretum which acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land here, the Ngunnawal people. It is those kinds of things. As we work through the agreement with the elected body all across government, we will be able to implement services that provide better supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT.

Ms Chapman: I might add that the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs within CSD is taking responsibility for coordinating the whole of ACT government response to the agreement and for completing the relevant evaluation and reporting on the progress of outcomes. The government directorates are required to explain how they will implement the plan in their directorates. The draft implementation plan, based on all the work that the office has done with the directorates, is going to be presented to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subcommittee of the strategic board later in November for their endorsement. Once that implementation plan is endorsed, that subcommittee of the strategic board will oversee how government directorates are delivering the outcomes they said that they were going to deliver over the life of the agreement.

Ms Berry: A couple of other things are coming out of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement. The whole focus of the agreement is on strong families and so the work that we have been doing through the Community Services Directorate and through the strengthening families program is a very important part of meeting that goal of strong families in the agreement. But there is also the JACS partnership agreement as well. Working through that will provide outcomes that meet the goals of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement as well.

Ms Forester: May I just add an additional point to that? One of the good things about

the agreement is that it is giving relevance to all the work that is happening across government. It is also allowing directorates to work better in partnership to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It has also given directorates that may not have always seen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business as their business a platform to improve the work that they are doing in those particular areas. So the agreement is not only a partnership between the ACT government and the elected body and the community; it is also providing a greater partnership for all ACT directorates to work better hand in hand.

Ms Berry: Just one more thing: part of the agreement and the work that I have been doing with the elected body was developing the one-pager following the budget so that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the elected body could see very clearly where government departments were funding services and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. That assisted the elected body, when they were having conversations with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, in communicating the work that they had been doing as an elected body and what the government was doing as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Does OATSIA have a role within the delivery of the government's ACT public service indigenous employment strategy?

Ms Forester: The OATSIA role in that is supporting Chief Minister's Directorate to deliver that program. But, of course, as you would be well aware, the majority of staff in OATSIA are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. So the staff, including me, have had a great input into trying to improve the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment program as well as retention and career development. We also provide the secretarial support for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee network, Muranga Muranga, and that work is done within OATSIA, supporting the network to achieve better outcomes internally for current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Wall, a substantive question.

MR WALL: Yes; I have a couple of quick follow-ons. Regarding the elected body, how many respondents were there to the review that we are undertaking?

Ms Forester: Formal submissions?

MR WALL: Yes.

Ms Forester: There was one formal written submission. There were a number of surveys that were completed. I just need to—

MR WALL: If you need to take it on notice, just give us a breakdown of the engagement that was undertaken as part of that review.

Ms Forester: Yes; we can provide all that to you. We will take that on notice so that we are giving you the correct information.

MR WALL: That is fine. I just wanted to clarify. You mentioned that the work would

be finished in early December. What is the expectation of that then being made public?

Ms Berry: I guess we wait until the review comes out or the draft. I understand that there is a draft, and as soon as that is available we will make an assessment. Of course, the government will need to respond to the review. We will have a look at the time frames, but it was always our intention to try to get something out before Christmas if we could. But it will be up to the government to respond to that before we can provide it.

MR WALL: It notes in the annual report that there was an increase of 50 per cent in eligible votes counted. How many votes were counted in the last elected body election?

Ms Berry: I think it was around 300, from memory, but we will get you the number.

MR WALL: That seems familiar to me as well.

Ms Berry: We will get you the exact number.

MR WALL: How many people were eligible to be on the roll or were on the roll as at the last election?

Ms Forester: To be eligible to vote for the active elections you have to be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person over the age of 18 who resides in the ACT and can provide proof of residence. You do not necessarily have to be on the ACT electoral roll to vote in the elections.

MR WALL: If you are on the electoral roll and you are an Indigenous person, you can automatically vote—

Ms Forester: The electoral roll does not determine a person's cultural identity.

MR WALL: So it is a stand-alone roll?

Ms Forester: It is not a roll. Basically it is if you are over 18 and you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person currently residing in the ACT and eligible to be on the roll. A number of members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community would be on the electoral roll. A number of them are not on the electoral roll, but if they can prove residence in the ACT, they are eligible to vote.

MR WALL: How many people, from the office's statistics, are residing in the ACT and would be eligible to vote in that process?

Ms Forester: Looking at the last census, something like 3,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be in that category.

THE CHAIR: That is 3,500 Aboriginal people?

Ms Forester: Aboriginal people over 18.

MR WALL: So voter turnout is still less than 10 per cent?

Ms Forester: Yes, it is less than 10 per cent. There are a number of reasons for that. One reason is that some people who may not be on the electoral roll did not vote in the ATSIEB elections fearing that there would be repercussions for them voting in the ATSIEB elections and not voting in other elections. Some of the other feedback that we have received from people is that they do not actually know a lot about the ATSIEB process and what the elections are all about, so we are trying to improve our communication and promotion around that. Other feedback to us is that people do not actually know who the candidates are; they are unfamiliar with them. Where there were polling booths in greater public places like the AIATSIS peninsula and broader places like that, people were saying to us, “We do not know who the candidates are; it is a wasted vote if we do not understand who they are and know who those people are.” The lesson for us is that we need to be able to promote more broadly to those sectors of the community that are still trying to understand what the ATSIEB process is all about.

Ms Berry: And that is what the review has done as well. It has provided us with a chance to give people more information about the elected body and the act; information that they probably would never have known before the review took place. That has been a good chance to talk with the community and the elected body about the work that they do, and learn about the different ways in which members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT want to be able to cast their vote. There was a huge increase in the number of people who voted this time around compared to the number who voted previously, because we changed the way that people were given the chance to vote. But from that, we have learned again that we need to provide other chances as well.

MR WALL: On that, my understanding is that the most highly patronised booth was the one at the AMC. That is my understanding of the report that came out.

Ms Forester: There were a large number of votes cast.

MR WALL: Almost the vast majority.

Ms Forester: Not the vast majority, but a large number.

MR WALL: I think close to 40 per cent of the votes were cast there.

Ms Forester: A large number from the AMC, yes.

MR WALL: That would highlight that the community engagement is substantially lacking in encouraging voter turnout. We had some legislative change in the lead-up to the election last July and also a change of the date when the election is held. What is now being considered in the lead-up to the next election, which is about two and a bit years away?

Ms Berry: The information that we have now, the information that we have been getting out of the review, will provide us with the information that we need to give

people a better chance to participate in the election of people to represent them on the elected body—keeping in mind that it is voluntary; it is not a compulsory vote. Over the past seven or eight years, we have been learning about the work of the elected body but also what the community expectations of their representatives are and how people want people elected to represent their views. I do not think we have done anything wrong. It has been something that both the government and the elected body have been learning a lot from, about how we best can represent and give a voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

MR WALL: I turn briefly to the other representative body, the United Ngunnawal Elders Council. For the reporting period, on how many occasions did they meet?

Ms Berry: Twice.

MR WALL: How is the elders council functioning at the moment?

Ms Forester: With the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, I would have to say their functioning is improving. They are getting more engaged, particularly with CSD and with the minister. They are still a body trying to find their way to be able to operate more effectively, but I would say that they are improving, and their engagement with both CSD and the minister's office is improving.

MR WALL: How much funding is budgeted for the elders council?

Ms Sheehan: There is no specific budget for the elders council, but they are supported through the operations of OATSIA so that means that public service time and effort go into supporting the Ngunnawal elders council.

MR WALL: There is also an attendance fee paid, it is my understanding, for members of the council, as well costs associated with meeting.

Ms Sheehan: There is. They receive a \$100 participation payment. But, again, there is not a specific budget for that; that comes out of the general administration dollars that are available in OATSIA.

MR WALL: Are you able to provide a list of the current membership of the council?

Ms Sheehan: Yes; we can do that.

MR WALL: And the attendance at the last two meetings that were held in the reporting period?

Ms Sheehan: Yes, we can.

MR WALL: How many meetings are scheduled for the current reporting year?

Ms Forester: For the current reporting year it is one a quarter. They have just recently had a meeting. There will be another one for the end of the calendar year, and there are two scheduled for next year. So it is four per year.

MR WALL: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: Ms Fitzharris, a substantive question?

MS FITZHARRIS: I gather there was to be an ACT-specific closing the gap report in 2015?

Ms Forester: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you expect to be able to release that this calendar year?

Ms Berry: I expect to be able to release the results of the report soon.

Ms Forester: We are currently in the process of gathering information from each of the government directorates. We are anticipating that a draft of the closing the gap report will be presented to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs subcommittee of the strategic board later this month, and we are hopeful that the report will be released before the end of the calendar year.

MS FITZHARRIS: Has the ACT done its own closing the gap reports before?

Ms Forester: Yes, we have. We have done them on a regular basis. Our last report was in 2013. We have been doing them every two years because the expenditure is available to us only every two years; it is not released annually. So the closing the gap report has been done on a regular basis. We will be moving the look and feel for future closing the gap reports to align directly with the whole-of-government agreement. It will become one of the reporting mechanisms from the whole-of-government agreement. One of the reasons for that is that a lot of the initiatives under closing the gap are not relevant to the ACT. Traditionally our closing the gap report has reported on the initiatives that are relevant to the ACT, but we have also included additional information that specifically relates to the ACT. Hence we are going to have the closing the gap report look and feel in line with our whole-of-government agreement.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are there particular limitations on collecting information in the ACT?

Ms Forester: A lot of our data is because we are using very small data sets. With some of our data we are unable to collect and go public with it because it does become very identifiable.

Ms Berry: Just on the closing the gap report, the ACT does very well compared to the rest of the country nationally, particularly around school retention. Is there anything else on that point?

Ms Forester: Yes. We do very well on a number of the indicators. With school retention, health outcomes, employment and a lot of that, for us we do quite well.

MS FITZHARRIS: To the extent that we are a regional hub as well, is there any measurement of the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may

come to Canberra very frequently but may not reside here permanently? Are you able to capture that?

Ms Forester: We do not specifically identify that data in what we do, but we know from what our service providers report to us that they talk a lot about cross-border issues, particularly when it comes to Queanbeyan, Yass and Goulburn people that use our services.

Ms Berry: Winnunga produced a report earlier this year which gave some detail about the numbers of services that they were providing with people who reside outside the ACT.

MS FITZHARRIS: Would you say it is largely in the health sector that those services are most used or could it be a range?

MS Forester: It could be a range of services. We also have the situation here where a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who currently work in the ACT live in the surrounding region.

Ms Berry: And the Women's Legal Centre said through their Aboriginal support liaison officers that they have a lot of people who access their services from outside the ACT and that those services come about mostly by word of mouth, because people know that they can get specific support from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person.

Ms Sheehan: I think the other one would be homelessness services. And there are some specific services, such as the boarding house network, which is designed for people coming to the ACT to receive a service. They can receive that support through Inanna.

MS LAWDER: What discussions have there been between other directorates about new or improved premises for Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation?

Ms Sheehan: Thank you for that question. There has been a lot of work done on the premises itself over the past few years, and community facilities used to sit with the Community Services Directorate so we were directly involved in doing work on the premises. Since the transfer of the property group to the Property Group in the Chief Minister and Treasury directorate, again they have been doing quite a lot of work with Gugan to look at suitable premises. Gugan provide services right across the ACT. Yes, they would like some additional space, but they are also looking at how they can provide services on an outreach basis. Again, it is not as straightforward as just finding a single place for Gugan to operate out of; it is also about assisting them to find spaces for their services right across the ACT where Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people would be going for other services anyway.

Ms Berry: I guess the short answer is that the Property Group is still working with Gugan.

MS LAWDER: Does your directorate remain involved in those discussions or has it shifted entirely to the Property Group?

Ms Berry: It is mostly the Property Group but I meet with most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups, organisations and individuals; I will have conversations with them and pass on that information to the Property Group, for Gugan Gulwan in particular.

MS LAWDER: And at this point there are no definite new premises?

Ms Berry: Nothing that has been identified that has met the specific needs that Gugan Gulwan has identified. I think there have been a couple of offers made previously.

MS LAWDER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Jones?

MRS JONES: No, I am not here for this.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps you could answer a very brief question before we close, minister, with regard to accessibility and the accessibility statement for this annual report. The accessibility statement just after the front page says:

If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like to receive this publication in an alternative format, such as large print or audio, please telephone ...

And a number is given. What sort of large print format are you offering people? And have you had any requests for that?

Ms Sheehan: Dr Bourke, I am not aware that we have had a request, and I cannot tell you off the top of my head. But with the minister's agreement I can certainly tell you what the availability is.

Ms Berry: Chair, just before we go, can I say that 378 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people voted in the previous elections for the elected body. And the additional funding that was provided for the blueprint and strengthening families in 2014-15 was 670,000. In 2015-16, it is 665,000 and for strengthening families 445,000. And in the 2015-16 year it is 469,000.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps you might be able to provide the breakdown for the various polling places during the ATSIEB elections as well, please.

Ms Berry: Yes, we can do that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Sitting suspended from 10.45 to 11.00 am.

THE CHAIR: We are on multicultural affairs and women. We shall start with some questions. Minister, perhaps you could take us through the support that CSD offers Canberrans whose first language is other than English and who have difficulties in

learning English.

Ms Berry: I guess the first thing that I would point to is the support that we provide people from communities through WESP, the work experience and support program, which is delivered by the ACT government's Community Services Directorate. This is a program that provides help for ACT residents who are migrants with Australian citizenship or permanent residency to gain office skills and training and work experience as well as confidence to enter the workforce and gain meaningful employment.

Some of the opportunities that it provides for people include improving their IT, their writing, office administration and particularly communication skills. It gives them practical job seeking skills, it prepares and familiarises participants for entry into the workforce, they get to have experience in an Australian workplace which might be very different to the sorts of experiences that they have had previously, it gives them opportunities to access and secure sustainable employment not just in the ACT but in the ACT public service as well and it establishes a number of personal contacts for them which then gives them the chance to apply for jobs outside the ACT public service.

There are some other programs. We provide support for people who need support with their English language. I will get one of my officials to provide some more detail on that.

Mr Manikis: We provide some funds to the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services each year and that organisation provides a series of conversation classes for Canberrans who do not speak English well, primarily for migrants that have been here for five years or more. The Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services also provides English classes for those people who come here under the humanitarian program and that is funded by the commonwealth if they have been here for less than five years. So we complement that initiative.

We also have been trying to build up the pool of interpreters here in the ACT for those new and emerging communities or languages. What has been happening is that there has been a diminution of the number of interpreters in some of the languages such as Dinka and Urdu and other languages, the languages of the wave of migrants or refugees who are coming in of late. We have got a program where we support people in the community to get training at CIT as well as get accredited at NAATI and we fund that as well.

These are just some of the proactive measures that we have put in place to ensure that there is the pool of interpreters as well, to allow those people in the ACT who cannot speak English to access services that they are entitled to. But there is no point in having a policy, which we do have, that people need to make interpreters available at the counter if there are no interpreters around to do the onsite interpreting. Certainly the telephone interpreting is easy because that is just picking the phone up and there could be an interpreter in Darwin or Alice Springs or somewhere that is on the other end of the phone but it is that on-site interpreting that we are trying to address here in the ACT. There is a lack of interpreters.

THE CHAIR: How successful has that community interpreter preparation program been?

Mr Manikis: It is in its second year now. We had 19 people come through in 2014-15 and I think there are 25 people going through in this current year. It has been reasonably successful. Many of those people get through the training at CIT to prepare themselves for the accreditation program and slowly we are getting the 19 going through the accreditation process. They have all been through the training at CIT and they are then getting their accreditation. It is not an easy task, accreditation at NAATI. The bar is pretty high, and so it should be. But slowly we are getting some success there.

Ms Berry: Can I add that, in relation to the ACT government's funding of different organisations, the work that they do off their own bat provides people from different communities the opportunity to learn English or have conversation classes. MARSS, for example, have set up a sewing group at Waramanga where a whole bunch of women who basically come from different communities come together and learn how to sew but also get to talk with each other in English. So they are learning how to speak English and how to chat about the culture in Australia that they would not ever have had a chance to do so before. They have been able to bring people together around a common interest, which is sewing.

The libraries, I know, across the ACT have a number of volunteers who work in them and have conversation classes for people to come in and have a conversation in English and get to practise the English that they are learning or learn better how to have conversational English. Whilst the government provides funding for different programs the community as well is playing their part in giving other people a chance to learn English better.

THE CHAIR: Is that CIT training at CIT Solutions or CIT?

Mr Manikis: CIT Solutions, as I understand it.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned accreditation as well. Is the directorate also supporting them through that accreditation process?

Mr Manikis: Certainly. It is \$300 for the CIT component and \$700 for the accreditation. It is \$1,000 per interpreter.

THE CHAIR: Your budget allocation is, what, \$25,000?

Mr Manikis: It was \$20,000 last year, or \$19,000, and \$25,000 this year.

THE CHAIR: Quite modest amounts?

Mr Manikis: Very modest amounts. We try to do as much as we can and that is why it is important that we make sure that where we target those very small funds it is where the need is in the community. It is those language groups that do not have the raft of interpreters out there. We are trying to build that up, for example Dinka for the Sudanese, trying to get as many Dinka speakers as possible. I think last year we had,

before we started the program, one male Dinka interpreter in the community, a properly accredited one, as I understand it. We are building it up. There are two or three now but we are slowly getting there.

THE CHAIR: And you mentioned Urdu as well?

Mr Manikis: Urdu, yes, and Farsi as well. I should have mentioned that as well. These are some of the languages of that group of Afghanistan and Iraqi migrants coming through.

THE CHAIR: That also provides you with a level of responsiveness to be able to deal with newcomers whom you may not have knowledge of their attempts before they get here?

Mr Manikis: Yes indeed. One of our objectives is to get people speaking English as quickly as possible—and I think that is important—but we recognise that from case to case that is a bit different, as is the capacity of people to learn English. It is important that people in the settlement process know where to go and all the rest of it. MARSS is the key organisation in this town that provides that service, along with Companion House and the Multicultural Youth Services. They play significant roles, as does Red Cross and the Canberra Refugee Support group. I must say that they do an absolutely fantastic job with humanitarian entrants.

But as far as individuals are concerned, there are different levels of English. You can have the formal classroom, you can have the conversation classes, as the minister has mentioned, in different settings as well. But it is also interacting in the social and cultural space where they become members of their local association and they might interact with different families that have been here for a long time. That is the role that those associations play as well in assisting the settlement process.

THE CHAIR: Are these interpreters employed as interpreters or is this volunteer work for them?

Mr Manikis: At the moment we do not have a critical mass. We encourage them to sign up with TIS and become a TIS interpreter after their training. But the idea would be that we then have a formal tool. Whilst we have an informal register at the moment we encourage them to sign up with TIS and get onto the TIS directory, and that way they can actually get paid as well for the jobs that they do.

MRS JONES: You mentioned MARSS and the great work that they are doing. I understand there has been an increase in funding ahead of the additional new arrivals that we are taking in in the upcoming year. Is that organisation supervised by the Office of Multicultural Affairs?

Mr Manikis: First of all I am not aware of any decisions that have been made about any numbers coming to the ACT.

MRS JONES: There are an extra 250 refugees that we are taking in. My understanding is that some of the services will be funded federally through MARSS. I am just asking you about the supervision of that body and how that is intended to be

managed from the ACT perspective.

Mr Manikis: Certainly. If we do get any numbers in then what happens is that, under the humanitarian settlement services program, which is a formal contract between MARSS and the commonwealth, as with any other humanitarian entrants that come into the ACT under the commonwealth's program, MARSS gets funded on a fee-for-service basis. There are eight major points but 12 services that they provide. For example, when they go and pick up the people at the airport that is a service that MARSS provides, as I understand it. What happens then is they put an invoice into the commonwealth and get paid for that. I am not sure what the exact mechanics are financially. Going to the question of who supervises what, it is a contractual arrangement between the commonwealth and MARSS.

MRS JONES: The management of MARSS—

THE CHAIR: Mrs Jones, we will stop there.

MRS JONES: If we could get that one point.

THE CHAIR: No, Mrs Jones, we will stop there. It is not really a supplementary about English and which classes. It is delving into other areas. It is more of a substantive matter. We will get there later.

MRS JONES: I want to see how MARSS is managed.

Ms Berry: The funding is through the commonwealth. That is the short answer.

MRS JONES: But they have a board or something?

Mr Manikis: Yes they have a board. It is an association like every other association. We deal with about 400 associations. When I say deal with them—

MRS JONES: That is fine. That is all I wanted.

THE CHAIR: Mr Wall, a substantive question.

MR WALL: I turn to the Multicultural Festival, which many Canberrans look forward to each year. There has been discussion previously as to whether or not it would be suitable to attract corporate sponsorship for this event. What is the current thinking in that space at the moment?

Mr Manikis: We have always had corporate sponsorship. It is interesting that the festival is being used by newcomers to town. For example, if you remember back in the days when DFO was around, when they first came to town they used the festival as marketing and lobbied in a couple of years worth of funding for us. Similarly, with IKEA—they are opening up next week, I think—at the last festival they put in some funding as well to promote the fact that they are in town. Icon Water has also provided some funding with their new branding, as well as LeaseMasters. We have quite a few corporates. We are not talking six-figure sums, but five, 10—

Ms Berry: But we would not say no.

Mr Manikis: We do not say no to any of it.

MR WALL: The annual report notes that it was estimated that \$7.8 million was injected into the ACT economy as part of the 2014 festival. How much for last year or for this year, which is part of the reporting period?

Ms Berry: This year coming?

MR WALL: The report talks about 2014.

Mr Manikis: Sorry, it should be 2015.

MR WALL: So that is the correct figure for 2015?

Mr Manikis: Yes. It was \$5 million the year before in 2014. It was \$7.8 million this year.

Ms Berry: That was nearly \$8 million over three days. Floriade—not that they were in competition at all—was \$4 million or \$5 million or something over three weeks. That is how proud we are of the Multicultural Festival.

MR WALL: How is that figure calculated?

Mr Manikis: There are formulas that our data people use for these sorts of things. It was properly done. It was independently done. It goes to a formula and we can table that.

MR WALL: That would be great. In calculating that figure—and it may be part of what you took on notice just prior—do you take into account the impact on existing trading businesses in the CBD area?

Mr Manikis: I will take it on notice.

MR WALL: Still continuing with businesses in the CBD area, what consultation has there been between the multicultural office, the festival organisers and the businesses there? I note that a couple of businesses have raised the issue of city lights with me recently. Just so I do not get taken out of context, I am supportive of this, as these businesses are, but obviously as an employer their biggest concern is making sure that they are a viable business and they can meet their obligations to their staff.

Many of them have the Christmas lights being set up out the front of their businesses. That started about a week and a half ago. That is expected to continue until mid-January. Then they have a couple of weeks of clean air before the Multicultural Festival bumps in. That runs over the summer trading period, which is a peak time for many businesses in the strip section of the city. They are obviously substantially concerned about the fact that there are major obstructions to their shopfronts, which is what they pay premium rental for. How is the multicultural office managing that?

Mr Manikis: For 20 years now we have written to all the shop owners, retail, and invited them in to have a discussion. We get one or two people turn up. We are aware of three shop owners, particularly of late, who are particularly upset after the 2015 festival. I have gone down and personally visited them. I sat down with them and went through a sort of a mini planning session as to how we would configure it.

They are in the business of valentine and love and all the rest of it, a teddy bear shop, flower shop, chocolate shop, and it just happens that the festival falls on the valentine's weekend. We are very much aware of that. We sat down with the three of them individually and configured how the place would look during the festival and how we would leave laneways open for deliveries. They were very happy. In fact, they might even come on as quasi-sponsors as well. We have put that to them. They were very happy.

MR WALL: They would be given the benefits of sponsorship in kind?

Mr Manikis: Yes. We would promote their business on our website and all the rest of it, just as a gesture of goodwill. The festival site is limited, defined. It does not increase because the participation rate increases or more people or organisations are interested in participating. The reality is that we have got a defined footprint. We have got to make do and make sure we tread around the matters that you have just raised, Mr Wall, about making sure the retail sector is happy. There are more people encroaching on the footprint with their outdoor spaces. There are two or three new ones now, which take away more store space. We are on top of it and we are consulting. We try to address any concerns proactively, but we are always willing to listen as well.

MR WALL: I guess the big issue, and you just touched on it, Mr Manikis, is that of access, particularly during the set-up period of the festival and the Friday, which I think is the main one for businesses. It is still a trading day, generally. That access is going to be maintained and guaranteed during the festival?

Mr Manikis: Yes. When you have got around 400 stalls and eight stages, there is going to be a smidgen of disruption in the place. We try to confine the movement of trucks and what have you in spaces that do not have much of an impact.

MR WALL: I guess businesses expect some disruption but the difference is they are happy to tolerate some disruption. There is a big difference between disruption and the trucks getting through late or in an alternative arrangement compared to not getting through at all. I think there were some issues in previous years where that occurred.

Ms Berry: That is why Nic spent some time working with them on an alternative plan.

MR WALL: Just around the attendance numbers—again, that was part of the survey—I would imagine that is part of the formula that you are going to be presenting on the economic benefit, or is that done separately?

Mr Manikis: I can give you the formula that was used to calculate the \$7.8 million. As far as the numbers are concerned, it is an estimate; it is an approximate number. It

was done scientifically about four or five years ago by the police in taking grids, a matrix and all the rest of it and making some assumptions around people being there for two or three hours or so and counting how many people in a grid. We have built on that over the years. It is an estimate. It is not something where we can say, “Here is the formula.”

MR WALL: So the AFP or no other groups have done that same matrix works?

Mr Manikis: Some time ago. The festival is an outdoor, free event. It does not have a turnstile, so in that context we cannot guarantee that they are the numbers.

THE CHAIR: That would be why it says “approximately” in the annual report.

Mr Manikis: Yes.

Ms Berry: There is the feedback that we get from the stallholders on how successful their stalls have been compared to previous years—whether they have run out, which is often the case, and whether they have run out earlier than they did in previous years. All of that is taken into account in coming up with the figures as well.

MS FITZHARRIS: Minister, I was wondering if you could give us an update on the additional refugees that we are expecting, the Syrian refugees that we are expecting to take. Do you know where the commonwealth is up to with the overall program and how that affects the ACT?

Ms Berry: There have been pretty much weekly briefings on Australia accepting Syrian and Iraq refugees. I know that there was a family accepted into Australia just last week. I might get one of the officials to provide us with a bit of an update on where it is up to.

Mr Manikis: I meet with my counterparts each week in a teleconference arrangement chaired by the Department of Social Services. Immigration is on that teleconference as well. I cannot get into the details, but what I can say is that they do give us updates. You might have noticed in the media that Minister Dutton, the federal minister for immigration, was there—as the minister said—handing over a visa to a family.

It is pretty slow. The message from the federal government is that it is slower than was anticipated. They are trying conditions and all the rest of it, and remember they have to go through health and integrity checks and so on. They are not anticipating many before the end of January. There might be a trickle coming through during December and January, but the main lot will be starting around February. That is what we are hearing. It is pretty slow.

MS FITZHARRIS: Is that normal?

Mr Manikis: I am not sure you would say it is normal. We had a 13,750 number for the humanitarian program for 2015-16, with 150 to come to Canberra—under the normal program, 150, of whom 34 have arrived.

MS FITZHARRIS: For 2015-16?

Mr Manikis: Yes, for 2015-16. So 150 under the normal program, out of 13,750, and up until a few weeks ago only 34. MARSS tells me 34 have been welcomed to our city.

Ms Berry: It is a much more complex process than anybody thought to start with here.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you know where in particular they are from? Are they coming from existing refugee camps on the border or are they people that might have gone into Europe?

Mr Manikis: I understand it is camps.

MS FITZHARRIS: If our normal annual intake is 150 out 13,000, but we have taken 250 out of 12,000, that is—

Mr Manikis: In addition.

MS FITZHARRIS: In addition, so that sounds like more than normal. How did we get the 250 figure?

Ms Berry: We basically depend on the experts, and that is organisations that are part of the Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Humanitarian Coordination Committee. That committee has a bunch of organisations including MARSS, as well as Companion House, St John's Church at Kippax, St Vincent de Paul and the Red Cross. I have got the whole list, but rather than read it out I might just table it, if that is okay, because there are about 25 organisations or more represented on that committee. I will provide that for the committee rather than read it out.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Ms Berry: It was those organisations who have been settling refugees into our city for many years now, and we took their advice on how many we could successfully welcome into our community.

Mr Manikis: On top of that, there are two issues. One is employment and the other is housing affordability. On housing affordability, the minister met with the representative of the Real Estate Institute of the ACT, Ron Bell, as well as MARSS, who has an investors program on a philanthropic basis where there are investors out there who make their houses available for refugees which MARSS has got a list for. The chamber of commerce has done a survey of its members—and they responded very quickly—and got a couple of hundred responses back from businesses saying, “This is the outlook for the next 12 months of our hiring. We will have some casual, part-time and full-time positions in these areas.” When you put all that together, it looks like 250.

MS FITZHARRIS: Would the 250 be individuals or families?

Mr Manikis: It is 250 individuals.

MS FITZHARRIS: So it could be made up of—

Ms Berry: Different family groups? We do not know.

Mr Manikis: It is mostly women and children that the commonwealth is going to focus on, so about 150 households, maybe.

MS FITZHARRIS: Will they arrive with working visas so if there is a job available they can get going?

Mr Manikis: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: At the moment you are in the process of establishing those additional connections for the additional groups who might—

Ms Berry: I guess that has been the challenge with finding out about these people, what their needs are and what experiences they have. They are humans. We are trying to find out about different families and, once they come here—or before they come here—we will know exactly where they can be part of our community.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: In the interests of time, I will pass to Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Thank you. My question relates to page 76 around the additional funding in the domestic violence area.

THE CHAIR: We are still on multicultural affairs.

MRS JONES: My understanding was that you said we were dealing with women and multicultural affairs.

THE CHAIR: No; we are doing multicultural affairs. Then we are moving to women. Do you want to ask a question? If you want to ask a question about multicultural affairs, you can go now.

MRS JONES: I am happy to go to my multi questions; I thought I had to choose between them. In relation to staffing in the multicultural affairs areas, I am keen to understand better the detail of full-time equivalents that come across. My understanding is that the nominal funding for the multicultural affairs area within the department is one point something million. How is that broken down into staffing, and which programs does it cover the expenses of? How many full-time equivalents?

Mr Manikis: The Community Participation Group, which the Office of Multicultural Affairs sits within, has an FTE, full-time equivalent, of 23.

MRS JONES: Yes.

Mr Manikis: Within that are the Office for Women, Office of Multicultural Affairs and Youth Engagement Unit.

MRS JONES: Yes.

Mr Manikis: With the Office of Multicultural Affairs, it is about 3.8 million, not 1.2 million. It is 3.8 million. And I do not have the exact number, but it is about seven FTE out of 23.

MRS JONES: Are you able to take that on notice?

Mr Manikis: I can take that on notice, yes.

Ms Berry: Just to make some clarification around this, the Community Participation Group brings in a number of functions under the one umbrella.

MRS JONES: Yes.

Ms Berry: That includes community recovery, youth engagement, the Office for Ageing, the Office for Women and the Office of Multicultural Affairs. That is all in the same output class, which is 3.1, which is the same as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs and the community services development grant scheme, and previously community facilities, which is now over in the Property Group.

MRS JONES: Yes.

Ms Berry: It has changed over a number of years. And because of the way that office works, the community participation subunits are a bit notional, because each of the staff within that group works across different programs. It is difficult to compare over the years, because staff are working across different programs, which I think is the most effective way of an office working, so that everybody can be a specialist in all the areas that the office is working in.

MRS JONES: It is a lot of work for 23 people. Are they then working on different programs within multicultural separate from women and the other areas like the grants, awards and all that type of thing, or is it all mixed?

Mr Manikis: Whilst we have someone in the Community Participation Group that happens to be against the Office for Women, they might do the community infrastructure and support grants, for example, not just the multicultural grants; they may assist with the women's grants; or they may assist with the seniors grants out of the Office for Ageing. That person sits in the Office of Multicultural Affairs but they have developed that expertise.

MRS JONES: In grants?

Mr Manikis: Yes. And similarly with events management, which is the other major piece of work that we do throughout the year. It may very well be—

MRS JONES: People come across.

Mr Manikis: that for citizenship ceremonies the minister will see representation from all those subunits at the citizenship ceremony assisting with the set-up, ushering people around, working through the names and all the rest of it and welcoming people. It is CPG staff trying to get the most efficient use of the resources, those 23 that we have got, to do the work that we need to do.

MRS JONES: Do you have a document that you keep it all in where you spread out who is doing what?

Mr Manikis: We have a work plan, and we are developing one at the moment. We have a 2014-15 work plan.

MRS JONES: To understand that better, maybe you could get that to us on notice. If it is possible, that would be great.

Ms Berry: We can probably—

MRS JONES: Or summarise it.

Ms Berry: We have provided some information following estimates, it is my understanding.

MRS JONES: Yes.

Ms Berry: You should have that information. I can provide that again for the committee. Out of the select committee on estimates, there was the recommendation which we agreed to, and we provided that breakdown.

MRS JONES: Yes.

Ms Berry: Do you have that or do you want a copy of that?

MRS JONES: I would love a copy of that.

Ms Berry: Okay; we can provide that.

MRS JONES: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: We will move to women now. Minister, you have just launched the second implementation plan for the ACT prevention of violence against women and children strategy. What are the improvements in that second plan over the first plan?

Ms Berry: One of the important points made out of the meeting that considered the second implementation plan was how the government can monitor the implementation actions that come out of the plan. As a result, we have developed a more robust reporting structure, which is being implemented across all directorates, required to develop action plans and report annually against those plans. These reports then will be collated by the Office for Women and presented to the social inclusion and equity cabinet subcommittee for their information. I might ask one of my officials to provide

a bit more detail on where the second part of the plan is up to.

Ms Doyle: All the directorates have been really active in engaging with the Office for Women. This plan put forward some very concrete actions that could help people see what they could do, and I think there is also a sense that domestic violence is everybody's business. So there has been a very different engagement in getting ready for developing their action plans. Every directorate has met with the Office for Women to go through that, some of them more than once. The final of those plans will be presented at the end of this month to the social inclusion and equity subcommittee. Then they will report in 12 months, and do another report 12 months after that, which is the two years of this implementation plan.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms Berry: Can I provide a bit more detail on the second implementation plan. Some of the issues that were raised at the Domestic Violence Prevention Council extraordinary meeting in April 2015 also went into the development of the 2IP, the second implementation plan. Some of the key actions that have been included as a result of that meeting are the delivery of domestic violence training to all government front-line services; focusing on early intervention and primary prevention; promoting gender equality in schools, workplaces and the broader community; focusing on the diverse experiences of domestic violence; improving data collection to achieve a policy change across government; and undertaking a gap analysis of the service system that has been related to domestic violence. Ms Doyle has been the main person in charge of and responsible for bringing that gap analysis to the committee for social inclusion and equity.

Ms Doyle: That is right, yes.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps you could tell us a bit more about the data collection? How that has been improved and what outcomes of that we can look forward to.

Ms Doyle: There are a number of areas looking at data, but probably the main one is that some of the extra funding provided out of the confiscated assets has gone to the family violence intervention program and some of the work that they are doing on improving that data collection at that source. They will be the main driver of that. There are a number of groups looking at better integration that are looking at how we can do the data.

There is also another option. The commonwealth have a huge package out at the moment. One of the things that they are looking to fund in jurisdictions is the innovative use of technology. A number of people, in particular JACS and us, are looking at how you might use cloud-based technology to improve the way people can access each other or communicate with each other from their own data system. There are a number of bits of work going on to improve that.

Ms Sheehan: Could I add something. Because of the way in which the Community Services Directorate is responsible for the whole suite of human services supports, in the strengthening families services, in the west Belconnen trial and in the gateway, we are very much looking at focusing on collecting data around domestic violence but

then linking up services across all of those initiatives to make sure that women and children escaping violence are getting the supports that they need and extending some of our existing IT systems and data systems so that we are capturing the data across the whole suite of services that we are providing.

MS LAWDER: I have a supplementary on the implementation plan, about promoting gender equality in schools. Can you outline what you are planning to do, what program you are implementing and the time frame?

Ms Berry: It is probably more appropriate for the minister for education to provide some more information in that space.

THE CHAIR: Maybe you could tell us more about promoting gender equity in workplaces.

Ms Berry: Yes, we can do that.

Ms Doyle: In the work that we have been doing in meeting with the directorates about their action plans, one of the things is to look at becoming White Ribbon accredited. That is one way that an area, a directorate or a business can look at gender equity in their workplaces and give them innovative ideas on how to do that. All directorates are having a look at that at the moment. There is also the ability to use a triple bottom line assessment to look at how the things you are implementing impact on women. So it is about talking to directorates about that as well.

The Office for Women will put together as much useful information as we can to help people to be able to do that in their workplaces—to look at policy and have a look at the impact on women. We are looking to develop what will hopefully be useful data, so that people can come and get information and support to do that work. But they are all very keen to do it at the moment.

Ms Berry: One of the things that the ACT government provides as well in its enterprise agreement is domestic violence leave. We are the only state or territory in the country that provides domestic violence leave for its employees, although I understand a number of jurisdictions are pursuing that. We are pretty proud that people who are experiencing domestic violence, which is mostly women, are able to access leave when they need it to attend court, organise housing or get advice for any support services that they might need.

THE CHAIR: Of course that engages ACT government directorates, but what about private enterprises here in Canberra, and indeed small business?

Ms Doyle: We recently put out the women's safety grants. We had three categories in it. One of those was to really encourage projects that worked with businesses, to leverage business to do that. We are hoping we will get some innovation through that.

Ms Chapman: Chair, I would like to address Ms Lawder's question about the program in schools. I do not know exactly what the curriculum looks like, but my notes say that there has been \$615,000 worth of funding to enable ACT schools to provide social and emotional learning programs to build communities that model and

teach respectful relationships and to provide easy access to support. So it is a particular focus that they are providing in the schools.

Ms Berry: Again that does not prevent schools from accessing their own different types of programs. There is one at the moment that I was able to get along to last week which was done by Barnardos, with—

Ms Doyle: Mr Tongue.

Ms Berry: Thank you. What is his first name?

Ms Doyle: I do not know but I know he is a footballer.

Ms Berry: Are there any Raiders fans? Alan Tongue. He has been a real leader in this family violence and domestic violence space. He did some work out at Harrison School, with their high school students, with Barnardos. It is quite an incredible program which talks to young people about what domestic violence really is and encourages them to keep having that conversation outside the classroom and in the playground. From talking to some of the young people who had participated in that program, I think it really made a difference to them. It was quite confronting; they all said that they experienced some very real and conflicting emotions when they were learning about domestic and family violence. I would encourage schools and the community to also look at other programs that might be available that suit their needs.

Ms Doyle: Partners in prevention awards encourage people whose business it might not normally be to deal directly with domestic violence, but who are doing things about gender equity and domestic violence or violence against women. That can be community related but it is also about trying to encourage businesses to take this up.

THE CHAIR: Mr Wall?

MR WALL: In the interests of time I will pass over to Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: I know that there were some changes in the way that women's services have been delivered over the last couple of years. Are you able to give us an update on how that is working? I refer in particular to the women's information service. I note that the annual report says women continue to drop in to the Theo Notaras centre and to the three child and family centres, in Tuggeranong, Belconnen and Gungahlin. What are you observing about the sorts of services women are accessing?

Ms Berry: There has been a complete overhaul of how the model for service delivery is conducted across the ACT. As you pointed out, it is now available through the Theo Notaras centre as well as out in the suburbs, where we found that women are experiencing the most need. They are able to drop in to their local child and family centres at west Belconnen, Gungahlin and Tuggeranong.

It is one of those programs where we are learning about ways that we can provide better services and access to different services for women in our local communities rather than in a central service, as was previously the case here in the city. We are

finding that the number of requests for support that have been responded to by the women's information service has dropped, but the kinds of service that people are getting access to have changed. It is not just a phone service anymore; it is a personalised one-on-one service. We are able to take that service out into the family and child centres and provide women with better links to services that they need.

That has been particularly successful in west Belconnen, where we found the highest numbers of women accessing those services, both through the human services gateway and through the better services work that we are doing. I might get one of my officials to provide a bit more detail on that.

Ms Sheehan: When the committee was asking about community services generally, and looking at those initiatives—particularly strengthening families, but the minister also referred to the gateway in west Belconnen—Ms Saballa was going through the statistics on the number of disadvantaged families headed up by single women who were accessing services, particularly the strengthening families group and also families with a single head, and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women heading them as well. I think you can see from that that the types of services needed by disadvantaged women need to be local—the right service in the right place and for the right duration. They do not need to be just in one location, so that you have to come in to Theo Notaras to get an information service; you need to be able to access services out in the community where you really need them.

The other really important statistic is that over 50 per cent of public housing tenants are women. Of those women who are tenants, more than 50 per cent of those are mothers or they might be single parent families as well. In terms of access to services provided through the minister, you see services ranging from assets—which is of course a huge commitment for public housing tenants—right through to the support services that we get in the gateway in the child and family centres and in the strengthening families initiative.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are you seeing any difference between the four different locations regarding the types of services and information that people are looking for?

Ms Sheehan: In the different child and family centres?

MS FITZHARRIS: Between Theo Notaras and the child and family centres.

Ms Sheehan: The thing about Theo Notaras is that it is not providing direct service delivery. If you go to a child and family centre, you could be seen by a maternal and child health nurse, a social worker or someone from one of the community services that is providing that direct support. It could be a counselling service; it could be parenting skills and so on, whereas at Theo Notaras it is an information service.

Ms Berry: On your question, Ms Fitzharris, I want to go through the different ways that we have been recording the kind of contacts that we are having, with respect to the new way that these services for women are working. Prior to this new women's information model, records outlining issues for women were totalled and provided as contacts. So if a woman required a number of services then each of those services was counted. Whilst it might have been one person, if that person had been inquiring about

or accessing four different services, that would have been counted as five different contacts, whereas now they are only counted once.

I will give an example of how that works in the child and family centres. Ms Lawder and I were at Tuggeranong the other week and I was having a chat to Jo about the services that they were providing for women. While we were there, a woman was getting her MACH nurse support. While she was there they identified that she needed some other support services, and they were able to take her into the next room and she could access that service. That is counted as one contact now, not two.

MS FITZHARRIS: Will you lose some richness in the information?

Ms Berry: I do not think so. It will tell us really intimately about the kinds of services that people need within the different communities.

MS FITZHARRIS: How do you get feedback—in what form? There are so many different government programs that we see. This has been a common theme also for Access Canberra, for example. The government does the hard work behind the scenes about counting, but for the client it is straightforward. Is measuring the success of each individual program challenged a little bit by that, even though you know that it is having a benefit?

Ms Berry: Some of the work that the Office for Women is doing is working out better ways to collect that data, so that it tells us the full story and captures all of the activities that are performed under this model. We are talking more about a person's experiences, rather than just collecting a contact. With that data collection, it will be a bit more of a challenge to work it out. But we are working on doing that, so that we can get a better story.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you have any early indication of the age groups of the women, and of the age groups of the children as well? Do you tend to have more women with younger children, or more women who might come to you with teenagers—

Ms Berry: The information that we are gathering is not so much on that, but maybe through the work done by better services and strengthening families we are able to get a full picture of all of the families that we are providing services to and who are accessing community services. That is the kind of model that we would be looking at, but we will keep working on how we can properly collect that information.

Ms Chapman: I cannot answer the specifics in terms of those demographics, but we do know, because of the way we are currently keeping information, what the requests for support are, broken down into categories. So we have queries about general information, because they do not know where else to go. They do not know they should go to Access Canberra, which might be able to provide them with more contact or whatever. We have queries about financial matters, return-to-work grants, education and training opportunities. Women have contacted us about the fact that they are unemployed and they are trying to work out how to re-engage with employment. Whether that tells you what the age cohort might be is not clear, but we certainly know the kinds of things that they are raising with us.

Ms Sheehan: As part of the better services reforms we are actually doing work right now on establishing a minimum dataset to collect exactly the same information across our different initiatives, so that we are comparing like with like.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: On the domestic violence side of things, we have heard quite a bit this year about a spike in demand for domestic violence crisis services, partly due to more awareness. Do you have a feel for what the actual spike in demand is in numbers and rates? Or is that in the individual organisations?

Ms Berry: We do not have actual numbers. It is the feedback that we have been getting from the individual organisations but also through the work that the domestic violence prevention council have been doing. They bring services together. At the extraordinary meeting that they had earlier this year that was something that was identified by the Domestic Violence Prevention Council. But it is not just something that is unique here in the ACT, it has happened all over the country. Ministers for women or domestic violence across the country have been meeting and talking about the need for ensuring that whilst an education campaign about domestic and family violence and assault is very important, so is providing funding for services so that women and families who are experiencing domestic and family violence have somewhere to go when they are seeking support.

But one of the things that have come out of the announcements by the federal government is the \$100 million nation wide to community legal centres which have been re-funded. This is not new funding. This is funding that was previously cut and has been re-funded by the federal government. In the ACT part of that funding will go to the Women's Legal Centre.

But the point that all ministers for women across the country have been making in our numerous telephone conferences and meet-ups has been that there absolutely must be more funding for refuges and support services as part of this education campaign.

MS LAWDER: Earlier we spoke about the second implementation plan and improving data collection. You do not currently have access to that sort of data, but is that the kind of thing you will be hoping to get better visibility of?

Ms Doyle: There is a lot of data collection but we are not necessarily talking to each other. For instance, in asking that question about the increase, that figure may be different for DVCS as a service than it might be for the Canberra Men's Centre, which is why it is hard to work out what that actually looks like in any jurisdiction. But as the minister said, across the country everyone has seen a spike in services, and that is due to the publicity over the past 12 months.

MS LAWDER: We also heard about additional funding earlier this year for the DVCS, the Canberra Men's Centre and the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre. How were those groups chosen? Was it an open tender process? Or how did that occur?

Ms Berry: This year in Canberra three people have lost their lives as a result of

domestic and family violence. The ACT community reacted to that. In particular when Tara Costigan was a victim of domestic violence the community responded in that walk in which over 6,000 people participated. The government needed to respond to that in a similar way to what the community did.

When I spoke to the organisations who provide support services across the ACT for women and families, they said to me, “You can’t fix it. Don’t react. We don’t want a knee-jerk reaction. When you respond to this make sure that it is an educated response.” That funding was identified as about 10 per cent that they were short for providing services. So we have provided that additional 10 per cent to deal with the increase in service responses that they were having to provide in particular as a result of our community’s experiences recently with the three people who have passed away.

We will continue to talk with the Domestic Violence Prevention Council who have made a number of recommendations that the ACT government is working through and will continue to work through. But part of that has to be a response from the federal government as well in ensuring funding for those services as well. And it needs to be an educated response. We cannot just throw money at this problem. It is not something that is going to go away quickly. We need to make sure that it is an informed and educated response, and that is what we will keep talking with the sector about.

MS LAWDER: The question was about how those three were chosen. Was it the prevention council that recommended those three?

Ms Berry: Just a moment.

Ms Sheehan: In terms of the core funding for domestic violence services, quite apart from the legal response to domestic violence services, they are funded under the national affordable housing agreement and the national partnership on homelessness and some core funding for the Canberra Men’s Centre. In terms of all of the issues that the minister was talking about, it was simply going to the major funding sources for domestic violence, responding to their need for additional resources and just going straight there. So it was not a question of a hard choice. They are the main services and that was where we went.

MRS JONES: Earlier this week in another committee the Victims of Crime Commissioner appeared and one of the questions I asked him was: what would make the biggest difference to the processes that women have to go through after experiencing domestic violence? He said there were three things: for people to only have to tell their story once, if that is their choice; to have sharing information across directorates, if the woman has given permission; and to have one single advocate. Is there any work being done in order to achieve those outcomes for those who are actually experiencing this on the ground?

Ms Doyle: We are currently undertaking a gap analysis. Gap analysis looks at some of the gaps in service provision but its primary intent is to look at where you are and where you would like to be and what are the gaps between those two systems. John Hinchey included as part of his work, and the DVPC have said, that we need to have a more integrated model. It is also a key priority in both the national plan and the

ACT strategy for the prevention of violence against women and children.

We have done a literature review as part of that gap analysis which shows very clearly that there are some things for a good, integrated service that you need to look at—common risk assessment, improved information sharing and case management, which are exactly those things that John said.

We looked at national and international research, also against what we know about research that has been conducted in the ACT, just to make sure it is local as well as informed by national work. And we are currently doing consultation with a huge range of people in the sector and we have got a survey out. We are getting all of those consultation findings back. At this stage they are supporting those key elements that we need to look at and work towards to develop that more integrated service system.

The Coordinator-General for Domestic Violence that has been implemented in the ACT has set up a working group to start looking at common risk assessment. As I said a bit earlier, we are working with JACS at the moment about improved information sharing. Those things are pretty consistently coming through in that project as well and we will make sure that all of the sectors feed into what the recommendations and findings of that project are.

MRS JONES: And when is the gap analysis expected to be completed?

Ms Doyle: By the end of December. However there is some really significant research that is being currently conducted in the ACT that got delayed, and we really need that to inform the project. When the preliminary pieces of work are out we then need to review those against the piece of research that itself is not due out until December. It was due out a bit earlier, but we really need that. It is a really critical piece of information locally.

MRS JONES: And with that gap analysis, as well as the data collection we were talking about earlier, is there an intention to bring it all together and to work out exactly what is missing on the whole continuum?

Ms Chapman: Yes. Can I say that the work that we are doing in the DV space, in terms of joining up the service system and making sure we share information and collect data appropriately, actually sits as part of the human services blueprint architecture. It is the same principle, yes.

MRS JONES: It is similar but making it more client-centric, is it?

Ms Chapman: It is and we are actually mapping client journeys. As we have done in the human services blueprint, we are now doing client journeys from a perspective of domestic violence and the impacts of those client journeys. The methodology is exactly the same but we are now really focused on this particular aspect of that service system.

MRS JONES: The only other thing, just to add on to that question from before, is this: is there a similar summary of staffing for this area under the group, as there is for multicultural, and can I have that as well?

Ms Chapman: I believe that that was the document that was done for the—

MRS JONES: It is for both?

Ms Chapman: It is for the entire community participation group.

Ms Berry: In adding to that, there are lots of reports and research that is happening across the count. The ACT government provides funding to Anne Rose who also released a report—I cannot remember the name of the report; it was a very long name; we will get the name to you—and the information in that report is also going to contribute to the work that Ms Doyle has been doing on the gap analysis, as well as what the Victims of Crime Commissioner talked about, about having to tell that story once. That is the important work that we have been doing through the better services network as well and the human services gateway so that people only have to tell their story once.

THE CHAIR: We will move on to housing. It is a change of officials. Minister, perhaps you could elaborate on the measures that have been used to ensure that the people moved into the public housing renewal program are maintaining their links to the community and their friends and family.

Ms Berry: This has been a really fantastic, collaborative piece of work through the support from community service organisations as well as the ACT government working together through the linked group, which is made up of a number of organisations including government departments, who have been working together to work out the best way to support our public housing tenants through this renewal program. As you know, we are building 1,288 replacement dwellings over the next four years, which will be higher quality and will better suit the needs of our public housing tenants.

Some of the supports that have been provided for our tenants during this process, at the start, have been provided by our partner in this, Northside Community Service. They have been conducting regular conversations and meet-ups and barbecues to find out what kinds of support services our public housing tenants need.

I think for the first time in the ACT we have been finding out more and more about our tenants, not just as far as their service needs are concerned but about people who are part of our community and giving them, I guess for the first time, some choice about whereabouts in the ACT community they want to live: whether it is closer to their schools, closer to their families, closer to a shopping centre, or somewhere that they socialise regularly with their friends. The first part of it is making sure that they have support services by a local support organisation like Northside Community Service.

During the actual move as tenants move into their new homes there are also a number of other support services that are provided by the ACT government. Some of those are making sure that they are provided with information. The removal process is funded by the ACT government. I might get Mr Matthews to take us through some of the other support services that are provided by us during this relocation process and also

the communities that they are going into.

Mr Matthews: The public housing renewal program, in terms of the impact on tenants, is just starting to gear up now. We have been working with our tenants and our community partners, as the minister said, for a number of months—in fact the past year. But we are getting to the point now where more tenants are being relocated and the schedule of relocation will accelerate over the next three years. That time that we have taken so far has really been about making sure that we have got a very good set of networks with our community partners around the range of services that they offer throughout the ACT community.

Obviously today a number of those conversations have been taking place about Northbourne Avenue but of course there are south side locations with Red Hill flats and the Stuart flats that will also be included in the renewal program. So we have been liaising extensively with one community service as well about how they will be connecting with tenants who are going to be relocated on the south side.

We are also looking forward to the opportunity of public housing going into new suburbs in the ACT. That has really been our tradition over many decades. And what that will allow us to do is have public housing in at the beginning of suburbs in some of the releases in Gungahlin and also in Molonglo. What we will be able to do through that process is obviously get good quality, well-located accommodation but also help build the community through community development activities. That will involve very strong relationships with the community providers but also local schools and other local infrastructure. I make a general comment that those connections can be stronger in newer communities and we are looking forward to being a part of those new communities and helping build the social fabric of those communities.

THE CHAIR: Are there any learnings from the EDD mingle program that was rolled out in places like Crace that could be used?

Mr Matthews: There are always lessons that we can learn from the establishment of new suburbs in the ACT. Crace is a very interesting suburb. It is a suburb I have taken an academic interest in, watching it grow and develop and the mixture of accommodation and residential. The public realm in Crace makes it a very good location for people to live. Obviously the LDA has got broad responsibility about the land release program and essentially housing will be one of the elements of that. But we are very interested in making sure that good communities are formed, that good public realm is formed and that we have good services and facilities. I think the LDA are very experienced in that and they certainly have been considering those issues as well throughout their involvement with the renewal program to date.

MR WALL: I just had a brief skim through to reassure myself but there seem to be a few omissions in the annual report around housing. It makes no mention of the current rate of homelessness in the territory. Is there a reason why these issues are not being discussed?

Mr Matthews: Homelessness is measured in a consistent way across the country through the census. That is the methodology that is used. The last census took place in 2011. That is what you would describe as the most objective independent assessment

of homelessness, which is done in a consistent way across the country. Other than that, we have surface data that is reported through the report on government services which is collected from our social housing and homelessness programs. That data relates to the activities of those services rather than the rate of homelessness more generally in the community. It really talks about services that are offered, how effective they are, the range and mix of those services and the outcomes that they are achieving for service users.

So there is a plethora of data around homelessness delivery which is available and reported publicly through mechanisms like the ROGS. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare publish periodic reports on homelessness data as well. In the ACT we also have first point, which is a unique part of our service delivery system. First point is a central access point for homelessness services; it is a number that anybody can ring if they need support, whether it is accommodation or other forms of personal support. It is collocated as part of our human services gateway, which the committee has heard quite a bit about today. It keeps data as well; that data is shared with the sector, and shared quite widely, as a way of making sure that we have an understanding of what is happening in our community and what the current demand and service pressures are.

MR WALL: What is the current demand?

Mr Matthews: The latest data that has been published from first point was published in October 2015. It reports on the number of households waiting for accommodation at the end of each month, the number of new requests that are made in that month period and the number of placements into actual homelessness services as well as the number of placements into case management support. The way that first point collect their data is that they divide the people seeking assistance into four categories to get a sense of the relative needs of the different people seeking assistance, from priority A category through to priority D. Priority A applicants are ones that have both high accommodation needs and high support needs. That represents, as I said, an end-of-month stocktake of the number of people seeking assistance at that particular time. That information is provided to the homelessness sector, and it is something that we use as a system to look at how we are performing, where there might be emerging gaps and where the pressure points might be.

MR WALL: As I asked before, Mr Matthews, what are the current numbers?

Mr Matthews: How would you like me to break those down, Mr Wall?

MR WALL: You said they are broken down into four categories.

Mr Matthews: I can tell you that in the October 2015 figures, there were 371 individuals, families and couples, that is, units waiting for accommodation on the last day of the month.

MR WALL: How does that compare to the trend? These figures are done monthly?

Mr Matthews: Yes. How it compares to the trend monthly is that it was slightly higher than it was in October 2014. The figure was 359 in October 2014 and the

2014-15 average was about 357.

MR WALL: So there has been a spike in recent times?

Mr Matthews: I would not call that a spike, Mr Wall. It was obviously higher in October but it was lower than that in August of this same year, so the numbers do fluctuate a bit. Demand for homelessness services is affected by lots of different things, including seasonal factors. There are a whole lot of reasons why people are presenting for assistance. There are other cyclical aspects to the ACT housing market—for example, with the increase of graduates and students coming to the ACT at the beginning of a year. There are a whole range of factors that affect both the housing market and why people might be seeking support.

MR WALL: I guess the most important thing for those 371 families as at the end of last month is how long they are going to be waiting.

Mr Matthews: Waiting times vary as well, of course. The waiting times for those placed into accommodation was 27 days for priority A families and individuals at October 2015 and 52 days for the families in category B. Thirty-nine per cent are placed within seven days. It really depends on a range of factors. The availability of a bed is one factor, but there are the individual person's needs as well.

I would also take the opportunity to say to the committee that there is a range of other shorter term strategies also used by first point and other services, such as providing brokerage accommodation for motels, caravan parks et cetera, which are not included in that data. We talked about Domestic Violence Crisis Service as well; they have got a brokerage program and relationships with hotels and motels as well, to be able to make additional placements where that is required.

MR WALL: Does housing follow the same four categories as the first point survey—A, B, C and D?

Mr Matthews: No. Our categories are different from that. They are longstanding since about 2007. They are the three categories of priority, high needs and the standard waiting list.

MR WALL: So, high needs, standard—and the third is?

Mr Matthews: Priority is the top category, high needs housing is the middle category, and standard housing is the general category.

MR WALL: What is the waiting time for the standard?

Mr Matthews: The median waiting time for standard is 606 days in October 2015 for current applications.

MR WALL: So two years or close to it.

Mr Matthews: Two years for standard. The ACT has the highest targeted system of public housing in the country: 97 per cent of allocations are actually made to the top

two categories, and that reflects the very tightly targeted nature of our public housing system in the ACT. The focus is on housing those in most need. In order to achieve that, we have a system which is very rigorous and involves an assessment of every individual's case involving experts, including our community sector partners. We rely a lot on advice that we receive about people's relative claims for public housing. At the end of the day, we have to make sure that we can identify, from the available housing we have got, who will receive offers of housing. That is done through the multidisciplinary panel process. It has been operating, as I said, for several years now, and it has proven to be an effective way of identifying those in most need.

Ms Berry: Just on that housing register, the length of time on the register has increased, I think, and that is because of the government's policy of providing priority housing to people who often have many complex needs going on in their lives. Housing ACT's challenge is to match those people and their needs with housing that is appropriate to their needs. However, when you are looking at the data, the important thing is making sure that we are looking at the individuals and their stories that contribute to that data. That is the work that first point and Housing ACT do to match appropriately each individual family to housing or supports that they might need. Some individuals are on the housing list for a lot longer because of different needs or different priorities that they have in their lives, and some will be there for a short time. That means that the averages will appear bigger than they actually are because of some people having much more complex needs.

Regardless, first point are in regular contact to ensure that anybody who has made an application to Housing ACT for housing or support services—they make sure that first point directs them to community services or other ACT government support services to make sure that they are getting support anyway. They are always constantly in contact with first point, making sure that they are being supported through the whole process.

MS FITZHARRIS: Could I have a supplementary?

THE CHAIR: Yes, of course.

MS FITZHARRIS: Does that mean, for example, that if there are people on the waiting list who require a four-bedroom home because of the number of children they have, or if there is an older couple, with the houses that are available at any given time, you would not seek to move people for a couple of months into a home because it was available; you would prefer to wait until you can move them into a more appropriate home so they can establish themselves there for the long term?

Mr Matthews: That is right, Ms Fitzharris. The way it works is that, depending on household compositions, people have an entitlement to a particular bedroom size. "Entitlement" is just a word that we use to describe how we determine whether somebody is eligible for a two, three or four-bedroom home. Obviously those individual families might have a geographic preference, so we offer them the opportunity to nominate the whole of the ACT or one of the four subregions—Tuggeranong, Woden, the inner north and Belconnen-Gungahlin.

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes.

Mr Matthews: Then we only offer them housing that they are eligible for in their areas of preference. So if you were seeking a four-bedroom home in Tuggeranong, for example, you would be considered alongside other applicants that are looking for similar accommodation.

In addition to that, we very much take into account people's individual personal circumstances. That often includes things like where kids are going to school and where family support networks are available. Obviously people are often very reliant on grandparents or their extended family to offer support to children.

A number of people also have specific requirements for disability accessible property. We have got a number of people with quite significant disabilities or mobility issues on the public housing waiting list, and we will offer only housing that is suitable to them to meet their individual circumstances.

As the minister says, that means some of those people might wait longer in order to get the most suitable accommodation for them. We will always, though, be in touch with people, and if people want to change their preferences or if their circumstances change, we would take that into account. It is a very active process.

MS LAWDER: Supplementary?

THE CHAIR: Yes, Ms Lawder.

MS FITZHARRIS: I have got a follow-on. Is that all right?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thanks. Do you keep data on people on the waiting list who might turn down properties?

Mr Matthews: We do. The general rule for public housing is that individuals get two offers of accommodation, two valid offers of accommodation, and then their application would be cancelled. When I talk about a valid offer, it is in the area of preference and suitable to their individual needs. People can choose to appeal those offers or the decision to cancel people's applications. What we find in practice is that a number of people reject their first offer in the hope that they will get a better offer second time around. We spend a lot of time educating people through the process to say that that is not necessarily the case; you might wait some time to get a second offer depending on your individual circumstances. We strongly encourage people to take those first offers.

MS FITZHARRIS: Is it my substantive?

THE CHAIR: No, Ms Lawder has a supplementary.

MS LAWDER: Thanks. We were talking about first point earlier. When does the contract with Connections ACT expire?

Mr Matthews: On 30 June 2016, along with all of the homelessness services.

MS LAWDER: Has there been any evaluation during the contract so far? I know some things have changed—the opening hours, those types of things.

Mr Matthews: Ms Lawder, you will be aware that we have done an evaluation of our homelessness system, which was independently done early this year by ARTD Consultants, who are experts in this area and have done work for a number of different state and territory governments. That was really trying to look at the way the system operates as a whole and how effective it is, and particularly the journey that we have been on since about 2007-08.

I think it is fair to say that the role of first point, which was a major reform during that period of time, was subject to quite a lot of analysis during that particular evaluation. It certainly raised some issues and recognised that first point was effective in identifying those who most needed accommodation. In terms of the efficiency of their operations and making sure that they fully understood the business of the homelessness providers, and that the referral arrangements were working effectively, there were a number of good pointers which will certainly be taken into account in the consideration of any future contracting arrangements.

MS LAWDER: Is the evaluation report publicly available?

Mr Matthews: I believe it is. We certainly provided it to our providers. Since we released that report to them we have been actively engaged with them around some work on the future state of our homelessness service delivery in the ACT. In the past couple of months we have held a couple of long workshops with them about looking at how the system is operating and how people think it should operate in the future.

With homelessness in particular one of the key issues is the variety of the different cohorts. We have got young people, we have got women escaping domestic violence—which the committee has already spoken about—we have got older women falling out of other forms of housing and so on. The homelessness system itself has to be very flexible and responsive to meet the needs of those different cohorts. That is one of the focuses of those discussions. That will inform government decision making around future contracting arrangements.

I would certainly describe the dialogue and the discussions to date as being very positive and very constructive between the government and the community sector. Notwithstanding some challenges over the years I think we have a very strong and healthy relationship with our funding providers.

MS LAWDER: Just finally: in the summary in the annual report about that evaluation and reforms in the homelessness service system it shows that there has been a 13 per cent increase in service users since 2011 and an estimated 65 per cent increase since 2008-09. How do you balance those figures with your comment earlier to Mr Wall that there had not been a spike in demand?

Mr Matthews: The data, as I said, is somewhat of a characterisation of what service was provided. I think that since that period of the evaluation we have introduced new

services, so we are recording contact with more clients. We have also changed the mix of those services. What you have seen over the same period of time—

MS LAWDER: So it is service uses, not service users?

Mr Matthews: Service users, yes. We have also increased the amount of non-accommodation support; so outreach-based support, family-based support, one-off types of supports and earlier intervention strategies. Overall that has increased the number of people receiving support from the homelessness system.

MS LAWDER: So it is instances of support, not individuals?

Mr Matthews: There is an increase in individuals. The way that the social housing and homelessness data system works is that it talks about individuals as well as support periods. There have been more overall clients and a greater number of support periods provided over that period of time.

MS LAWDER: All right. So there has been an increase in the number of clients?

Mr Matthews: Yes, and I would say that is a positive because it shows that the sector is actually supporting more people, particularly through earlier intervention approaches that are aiming to stop people from becoming homeless.

Ms Berry: I think that goes to a couple of other things that are happening in the community. We keep talking about strengthening families, but that is an important part of this: not increasing or decreasing services, but making sure that services actually meet people's needs. One of those could be, for the families being supported, maintaining their tenancy, as well as the work that Woden Community Service is doing in assisting people in maintaining their tenancies both in Housing ACT and private rentals.

THE CHAIR: A substantive question, Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: I just wanted to go back to the earlier discussion about data. It comes up quite consistently around increasingly complex problems people face. By definition, it requires a whole-of-government, whole-of-agency approach. What are some of the challenges for you in measuring the data on the latest homelessness and housing services? I think you mentioned earlier that, in relation to people on the waiting list, the data does not capture, for example, where women's refugees might come into play. They might have arrangements for hotels so people are able to access housing, even if it is only temporary. Can you just talk us through some of the challenges you have and, in addition, whether some of those come from the commonwealth and the census collection as well?

Mr Matthews: Of course homelessness is a challenging area because it is a consequence of other disadvantage that people experience. Again, with the tighter targeting of public housing, the only people that are being housed, as a general rule, are people who experience some significant challenges in their lives. So they do not need just housing; they need a mixture of housing and appropriate support. That is, in fact, the case with the homelessness system as well. People need a mixture, depending

on their circumstances, of either accommodation or support. Very much in line with the discussion so far today about the human services blueprint, we need to be able to tailor that support.

There have been examples over the years that I could raise: for instance, a mum that might have teenage sons as well as teenage daughters. In the past that might have prevented that mother from getting into a women's refuge because of the requirement of the safety of other residents, for example. Over the past few years we have, again, made much more flexible use of our housing stock. Rather than having shelter environments where there are a lot of congruent families living together, which would have been the norm 10 years ago, most of our housing at the moment is cluster housing.

People are basically living in a normal residential environment where they have got safety and security and where they can take their whole family. They can take their pets even, if that was appropriate in the circumstances, and be supported in that location. I think that highlights the point that people that have been through the homelessness cycle have experienced a lot of difficulty and we need to ease that difficulty and give them the best possible transition out of that environment.

With public housing, clearly we need to work very strongly across government—and we do with our colleagues in ACT Health around the mental health service and the drug and alcohol program, and our colleagues within the directorate around the child protection services and youth justice. We have very strong relationships across the board with those service providers. We aim to make sure that we have coordinated case-management approaches.

The objective that we have set ourselves is to sustain people's tenancies, to keep them in housing so that they do not have that cycle of homelessness. I think we have been very good at doing that. We have stopped the number of people that are falling out of their tenancy, but it is really hard work. If I can, I would just like to pay tribute to the staff who do that every day. They work very hard, very diligently and very long hours to try to provide these services to the community.

MS FITZHARRIS: In some ways the defining data from this sector appears to be the waiting list data. It just strikes me that it does not tell the full story in any way. You mention, for example, fewer people dropping out of tenancies. Do you have data on that?

Mr Matthews: We do. Housing has got a business system called Homenet which is the tool that we use to manage our tenancies and properties and collect our rent. Through that business tool we are able to, at times, pull out whatever data we need to support our operations. We are obviously very much focused on things such as people paying their rent, the number of complaints and processing people's rental rebates. But we also, obviously, are very keen on looking for any signs of people whose tenancy might be at risk.

In our statement of performance I think we have got the housing indicators down really solidly in terms of what it means to provide a good housing service. We need to keep pushing into the area of looking at outcomes for people and making sure that

across our service delivery system we are not only measuring the services that we provide but also the difference that they are making in their lives.

We do have some evidence of that. Our satisfaction survey this year, for example, talked about the number of people who felt that public housing made them a part of the community. That increased from 71 to 79 per cent, from memory. Again, it is showing that linking people into communities, making them feel included and allowing them to get on with their lives are benefits that public housing provides, as well as making sure that we provide an efficient and effective service.

Ms Berry: I think that is one of the things in that story behind the data which we are learning and getting even better at. The Housing ACT managers, who have a professional and, to a degree, personal relationship with all of our public housing tenants, know people more as individuals. We are not just landlords; we are actually there to make sure that people are linked up to their communities and the proper support services. We are also able to get the story behind the data from programs like strengthening families and the tenant relocation program. We are getting to know those tenants—that is, 10 per cent of our public housing tenants—a whole lot better and in much more detail about their wants and needs and the sorts of choices they want for their future and their lives. We are able to do that because of our size, in some ways, but also because of the work that our Housing ACT managers do every day. It is a challenge for them and they do an excellent job.

MS FITZHARRIS: I think I heard you talk, perhaps in an earlier hearing, minister, about the fact that the tenant relocation program has given you a much deeper understanding of what tenants want. Are some of those things you found almost counter-intuitive, or are they exactly what you had expected, for example, where people want to live?

Ms Berry: I think there were a lot of assumptions made at the start of the relocation program. Following that with the conversations that we have had with people, we have found that they are just like the rest of us. That has been really valuable for us. It shows, I guess, that the ACT government has great respect for people who are our public housing tenants. They are an important part of our social fabric and our community and, just like the rest of us, they want to get on with their lives.

MS LAWDER: A quick supplementary before a substantive question. We started off with a question about data. Are the vacancies at Havelock House included in public housing availability figures?

Mr Matthews: We do record the social housing register as a whole, which includes all housing which is provided from government-owned stock. We also monitor the data of our community housing providers as part of our contractual arrangements with them. The issue with Havelock House is that it is a shared living arrangement. It is a different situation from that of people who are looking to live independently or with their families. Shared accommodation itself is something that people need to opt into and decide that that is an appropriate thing for them.

MS LAWDER: So was that a yes or a no?

Mr Matthews: Yes. It is included in the overall waiting list data.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. On the substantive question, I wanted to ask about student accommodation. On page 111 of the annual report it talks about utilising accommodation in Northbourne flats and some other things. When the Northbourne flats are decommissioned, what will happen to those students? Will they go on to the public waiting list or will they have to make their own arrangements?

Mr Matthews: The general principle with the use of public housing for student accommodation is that we utilise our stock for that purpose only if there is an area of stock which is in very low demand or it is about to be redeveloped. We have, of course, used the Currong apartments previously for that purpose. We make it very clear to the students that we offer housing to that it is outside the public housing program and it is done on an academic year basis which, of course, is the thing that most matters to students. They want to know that they have got some security of accommodation on an academic year basis. People are offered accommodation for only 12 months at a time, and that is the case currently with the students who are living in Northbourne.

MS LAWDER: Also on student accommodation, there was what I think is called Arscott House up in Belconnen. Did the ACT government give that property to the University of Canberra or was it sold? What was the arrangement there?

Mr Matthews: I am not familiar with that program. I do not think it is one of our responsibilities. Are you referring to the Cameron Offices in Belconnen?

Ms Berry: They are the ones next to the school, are they?

MS LAWDER: No, the lake. It was used for student accommodation.

Mr Matthews: I would have to find out more information about it.

MS LAWDER: Who would be responsible?

Mr Matthews: I would imagine that would be the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, but we can certainly take that on notice and get information back to you.

MS LAWDER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, what measures has Housing ACT been taking to provide specialised tenancy services for older people, and in particular for older women?

Ms Berry: Particularly with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, we have worked with the elected body on developing accommodation for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Kambah. That has been a great joint effort. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body has worked with the architects to design housing that meets the needs of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. More broadly, with respect to older women across the ACT, I will ask Mr Matthews to provide some more detail.

Mr Matthews: We are certainly aware of the feedback from advocates and also some growing research about the fact that older women are falling out of their form of tenure. They are not able to sustain private rental accommodation as they cease working. So we are aware that that is a future need that Housing ACT is going to have to meet to the best of our abilities.

As a general approach we are increasing the amount of older persons housing that we are building, recognising that the demographics of our own tenant population are ageing and that people over the age of 65—about 20 per cent of our current tenants are over the age of 65—will probably need our housing services for the remainder of their lives or until they move into nursing accommodation. That is why our capital program over the past four or five years has been very heavily focused on building accessible and adaptable accommodation and older persons units. During the nation building and jobs package, the stimulus program, we significantly expanded the amount of older persons accommodation that we built. Of course, even under the current public housing renewal program there will be elements of additional older persons accommodation.

The facts would say that a large proportion of those people are women because they tend to live longer than men. So the demographics in our older persons accommodation tend to be quite skewed to being female. There are no specific programs that we offer within the public housing system, although there are others outside it, such as Betty Searle House, which is provided by the YWCA Canberra. YWCA Canberra generally has also focused on the need to provide accommodation support to older women. So there is a range of different efforts that different partners are bringing to the table. From a Housing ACT perspective, it is about making sure that we have the right amount of older persons accommodation that is acceptable, adaptable, safe and appropriate for women to live in.

THE CHAIR: There is nothing in the pipeline for models like Lady Heydon House in Spence?

Mr Matthews: There is nothing specific, although, again, we are always open to making sure that the services that we offer are suitable. If there were a requirement to replicate that model or other similar models then we would certainly be open to any feedback on that basis.

THE CHAIR: What about ideas like community land trusts or community housing for older women? I am going to focus on this particular area for a while.

Mr Matthews: Those are somewhat outside the responsibility of the Commissioner for Social Housing in that our brief is to provide rental accommodation through the public housing system. But we are very interested in those issues and we have regular discussions with our colleagues in the economic development directorate who have the broader policy responsibility. I attended the national housing conference in Perth a couple of weeks ago and there was quite an amount of discussion around different forms of models of shared equity and ways of giving people a stake or ownership in housing. The conference also looked at how you can preserve the benefit of government investment in social housing. Models such as community land trusts were

certainly spoken about at the conference as well. Within the housing academic community there has been, as you say, some consideration of those issues over the years. In terms of the housing portfolio, they are not specific models that we are progressing at the moment.

Ms Berry: It is good to have all of these conversations and different ideas talked about—about how we tackle homelessness and housing services across the country, including here in the ACT. I think it was Mr Matthews who said that at one point in time you could come up with a solution that works for that moment in time but then human behaviour will change and you will need to change again, to make sure that you meet people's needs. That is what we are seeing with the increase in the number of people ageing in our community, particularly women. We are also seeing more single parent families rather than individuals. The need is always changing, and Housing ACT always has to look at different ways and to be innovative about the kinds of homes that are being provided.

Through this renewal program, and with regard to the types of housing that we are building, we are making sure that one particular dwelling can be adapted if mobility issues become a problem later in life, so that people can age in place. That is the plan for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing in Kambah. There are simple things like building on one level, wider access ways into bathrooms and small yards. All of those sorts of things are being taken into account when developing newer and more appropriate dwellings. Housing ACT is forever changing the way it does things because humans change the way they behave and their needs change as we move and grow as a community.

THE CHAIR: How is that accommodation in Kambah coming along for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Mr Matthews: We have lodged a development application for the development at Jenke Circuit in Kambah. We have done a lot of consultation work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. We did some particular work around the architectural design of that older persons unit. I think they are very happy with the outcome.

In terms of where it is up to in the planning process, there have been some comments made on our development application by the neighbouring Sri Lankan Buddhist association. They want to know how they can be good neighbours with them. They are particularly worried about the noise of their festivals and celebrations and how that might affect the residents of our proposed development. We have met with them and are in discussions with them about being good neighbours and reaching agreement with them around the things that we can reasonably do.

Once we get the approval through the development process then we expect to start to establish the site either late this year or early next year and do the construction through to September-October next year with the current program, all things being equal. So we are really keen. Once we are actually on site and once we have planning approval then the actual construction is not overly complicated. We will be working very hard to deliver it as quickly as possible.

The minister was just asking me about the public information on the plan. The *Canberra Times* recently reported on the issue. There is a fly-by video that is available of the Jenke Circuit development proposal. We would direct anybody who has an interest in that to our website. Everybody is very pleased with the architectural outcome, and we are looking forward to turning that into bricks and mortar and homes for people.

THE CHAIR: Can you elaborate on the architectural outcomes and how they may incorporate some Indigenous design features?

Mr Matthews: Yes, I am happy to, Dr Bourke. In addition to providing, as we have been discussing, older persons appropriate accommodation—flat levels, wider circulation spaces, as the minister mentioned—it is two bedroom accommodation, as the people living there might have caring responsibilities. They might have grandchildren that they are responsible for at times, or they might require carers at times to come in and live with them. Those are all features of the individual units.

We have also built into the overall design some very positive communal spaces that will be designed around a fire pit, with an outside pergola area. That will allow the individual residents to have some extended family engagements, as well as sharing time with each other, to have barbecues, picnics or to celebrate events in people's lives. It will also be set within, as much as possible, a natural bush setting. We are looking at how we can maintain the eucalypt trees, and how we can put in other grasses and more Ngunnawal-based plants and shrubs, to give the best possible effect to the site.

Ms Berry: I was recently at a housing ministers meeting. I was talking to the Northern Territory Minister for Housing, Bess Price, about the design that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body had contributed to here in the ACT. She has asked us to provide her with our design, in order to look at different ways that they can provide housing that is most suitable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Northern Territory. That is pretty cool.

MR WALL: Minister, I would like to ask a couple of questions about some of the tenders that Housing put out last year. In volume 2 of the annual report, page 274 lists contract No 2013-05, which was Durham Place in Chisholm, at a value of \$1.94 million. What works were completed there?

Mr Matthews: This is a development, which I know Ms Lawder is familiar with, in Chisholm. I will have to get the exact number of dwellings. From memory, Mr Wall, I believe it is a five-unit complex in Chisholm. I will check the record and get back to you on the exact configuration.

MR WALL: Can you also provide how many tender submissions were requested for that one? The other question is why, when there is an approved panel for construction of projects up to \$400 million, the panel was not used for that project.

Mr Matthews: I will take that on notice too.

MR WALL: Okay. There are similar questions about Wattle Street in Lyneham,

contract No 2012-02.

Mr Matthews: Just to confirm, Mr Wall, it is about the number of tenderers and the use of the actual panel arrangement?

MR WALL: Yes, and what works were completed. They are the two main ones that I had a question mark over.

Mr Matthews: I can say that I visited the Wattle unit development on Friday. I did a drive-by, and it is complete and ready to go. It is very nice accommodation, very well located for local schools in Lyneham.

MR WALL: While we are on this topic of panels, I notice there are a number of them: architects, builders, project managers and the like. Can you, for the committee's benefit, provide a list of all the panels that Housing manages, and when they are next up for review or to add a new one?

Mr Matthews: Happy to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Ms Fitzharris?

MS FITZHARRIS: I want to ask about Common Ground and how that is going, in particular, the feedback from the local community and also the corporate sponsorship, which I know was very strong, at the outset of that and continuing on.

Ms Berry: I understand your personal interest in Common Ground; it is located in Gungahlin, and it has been a very successful collaborative work between the community, government and businesses. This idea came out of the Common Ground group, led by Ms Dawson, who constantly lobbied the government at every opportunity she could get to provide some funding for a Common Ground facility in the ACT. It is our first Common Ground facility, but not the first in the country. It is a 40-unit development of one-bedroom units. I know you had a chance to visit it during the open day before the tenants moved in. Twenty of those units are for social housing and 20 are for community housing.

The thing about Common Ground is that it has the services embedded in the actual building. Northside community services and Argyle housing both reside within Common Ground and provide those services. And there was support during the development of Common Ground from a number of community organisations. The Quilters group of the ACT provided quilts for residents. The Uniting Church or Anglicare—one of the churches nearby; I cannot remember—provided welcome packs. As far as business support is concerned, IKEA provided furniture and electrics, whitegoods, for some of the dwellings. There was also support from the Snow Foundation. And there is some more recent support; I might get Mr Matthews to provide some more detail.

Mr Matthews: Without showing off, I was there on Friday as well, and—

THE CHAIR: You get around.

Mr Matthews: We had a meeting with the steering committee of Common Ground, which I chair, which involves all of these different stakeholders. They reported that things are going extremely well out there. It is fully occupied, and out of the 40 tenants there are five Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander tenancies out there. Also, of the social housing tenants, 17 out of 20 are actively engaged in case management at the moment, and are starting to address their futures and what might happen now that they have stable accommodation. There was also some really positive work reported about relationships with ACT Health around dental services, which I know Dr Bourke will be interested in. The ACT Health dental program people are going to be visiting on site to do assessments of individuals and build relationships with the aim of addressing any dental requirements that people have.

All of the Common Ground partners are very much now focused on employment opportunities and what they can do to see jobs in the local community. Discussions are ongoing with IKEA around employment opportunities. Also, as the minister said, there is ongoing philanthropy. I was advised that Bunnings in Gungahlin are helping with establishment of an indigenous garden at Common Ground, using Ngunnawal plants and shrubbery as part of the grounds out at Common Ground. And the CWA of Gungahlin has reiterated their commitment to continuing to provide ongoing support to the residents of Gungahlin.

One of the things that the Common Ground Canberra group are very aware of is that they have attracted a lot of goodwill from the community. They are now thinking about how they might extend some of that benefit to the broader Gungahlin community. They have foreshadowed future discussions with other service providers and, indeed, public housing tenants in Gungahlin, to see what extra support and community goodwill we can bring as a result of the momentum that has been created by Common Ground.

On the whole, people are very happy with the way that it is going and very confident that the results that have been achieved today will continue to be sustained into the future.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you. Do you happen to know when Bunnings is scheduled to open in December? They say that they will have 200 jobs available in the town centre. Do you happen to know whether they will be a partner in the employment? I know that they are doing their community program with Common Ground, but do you know about the employment opportunities at Bunnings?

Mr Matthews: I am not sure if anything has been finalised yet along those lines. The advice I got was that the parties—that is particularly Argyle, Northside and the Common Ground Canberra group—are coming up with an employment plan, an employment strategy, which will involve contacting all local businesses and leveraging off philanthropic relationships. I do not know if anything has been finalised yet, but I think you can be assured that they will be chasing every rabbit down every hole to get good outcomes for those residents.

THE CHAIR: Do you have a quick final question, Ms Lawder? We are just about to finish.

MS LAWDER: Maybe a supplementary.

THE CHAIR: All right.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are all the tenants men?

Mr Matthews: No, they are not.

MS FITZHARRIS: And are they singles or are there some couples?

Ms Berry: Some couples.

Mr Matthews: Some couples. There are 22 females and 24 males, of which six are couples. That was the original advice. That is a very good gender mix.

MS FITZHARRIS: Just one final question. With the dental services that you mentioned, I know there are a lot of dental services provided at the community health centre, which is a five-minute walk away.

Mr Matthews: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: In addition to the mobile dental services, are tenants also accessing services at the health centre?

Mr Matthews: I think the objective was to link people with those services, just acknowledging that some of the residents there have not been active at getting those needs met in the past. It is relationship building. They are holding weekly breakfasts, and that is an opportunity for service providers to come and meet residents. I am also advised that one of the board members of Common Ground makes dinner every week. So it really is very ongoing in terms of the level of support that people are offering.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder, a quick one?

MS LAWDER: Is there a formal evaluation plan at Common Ground?

Mr Matthews: As part of the development of Common Ground, there was an evaluation plan developed. A subgroup of the steering committee focused on that. We spoke about that on Friday, too. What we have talked about is that we will do a formative evaluation, a post-implementation review, to both identify early lessons learned and early successes and also make sure that we have got, for example, the data systems and evidence base in place in order to do periodic evaluations down the track. We will initiate that work on the formative evaluation before the end of the year, and it will be completed either by then or sometime in the first half of 2016.

MS LAWDER: So that would be external?

Mr Matthews: Independent, yes. Yes, it will be.

MS LAWDER: So the committee is creating terms of reference?

Mr Matthews: Yes. The committee have approved the evaluation plan, and they will develop the scope of works for this formative evaluation. We will act on their behalf to commission it, but they will be the group that oversees it.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, we have to stop there.

Ms Berry: Chair, before you close, I table two bits of information for the committee: information on the elected body elections in 2014, with the polling booths and the numbers, the results on each booth, and information about all of the different individuals and bodies that were consulted as part of the elected body backed review.

THE CHAIR: Before I adjourn, I remind the committee that supplementary questions are to be lodged with the committee secretary within four business days of receipt of the proof transcript from this hearing. The committee asks the minister to respond within 10 working days of the receipt of those supplementary questions. Answers to questions taken on notice today are to be provided five business days after this hearing, with day one being the first business day after the question was taken.

The committee adjourned at 1.04 pm.