



EDUCATION, ARTS AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr NG Hutton MP—Chair
Ms W Bourne MP
Mr NJ Dalton MP
Mr N Dametto MP
Miss AS Doolan MP
Hon. LM Enoch MP

Staff present:

Ms L Pretty—Committee Secretary
Mr P Yagmoor—First Peoples Liaison Officer

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO INTO ELDER ABUSE IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Tuesday, 25 March 2025

Pialba

TUESDAY, 25 MARCH 2025

The committee met at 10.11 am.

CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into elder abuse in Queensland. I would like to start by respectfully acknowledging the Butchulla people, the traditional custodians of the lands at and around Hervey Bay, and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. My name is Nigel Hutton. I am the member for Keppel and chair of the committee for this morning's proceedings. With me today are: Wendy Bourne, the member for Ipswich West; Nick Dametto, the member for Hinchinbrook; Ariana Doolan, the member for Pumicestone; Nigel Dalton, the member for Mackay, who is substituting in today for John Krause, the member for Scenic Rim; and LEEanne Enoch, the member for Algester, who is substituting in today for Corrine McMillan, the member for Mansfield and deputy chair, who is unfortunately unable to be with us.

I would also like to acknowledge David Lee, the member for Hervey Bay, who has joined us here today. The purpose of our hearing is to assist the committee with its inquiry into elder abuse in Queensland. We are here today in Hervey Bay to hear your views. Please take this opportunity to share your experiences with us. The committee is a committee of the Queensland parliament and its hearings are subject to the rules of parliament. These proceedings are being recorded by our wonderful Hansard reporter and will be published on the parliament's website. If you have any concerns around this at all, please talk to our committee secretary, Lynda.

Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I would ask everyone to ensure that their phones are turned off or switched to silent mode. I will invite to the table anyone who has indicated they wish to speak to give us a brief opening statement, after which our committee members would appreciate the opportunity to ask some questions.

LEE, Mr David, Member for Hervey Bay, Parliament of Queensland

CHAIR: I welcome Mr David Lee MP, member for Hervey Bay, and offer him the chance to speak to the committee.

Mr Lee: Thanks, Chair. Welcome to Hervey Bay. We welcome the inquiry into elder abuse. It is certainly a very real issue. I just thought I would give a bit of context about our population and then talk a little bit about my personal engagements with both victims and perpetrators of elder abuse.

Hervey Bay is part of the Fraser Coast and 32 per cent of our population is aged over 65. We have the highest rates of chronic disease as a total percentage of the Fraser Coast population in Australia. That figure is across the 10 types of chronic disease, and that information is publicly available through the Australian census data for 2021. We also have very high rates of disability. We do have a vulnerable population that is subject to exploitation.

Elder abuse is certainly a real issue and, as I said, I welcome the inquiry. Over the years, I have been exposed to elder abuse as a lawyer. In fact, I volunteered here for a number of years at what was the Taylor Street legal centre, so I had some exposure to cases of elder abuse. More substantially, over the years I have had a lot of exposure to elder abuse as a healthcare administrator. It usually occurs within the context of an established relationship, so it can be an employment relationship or a client-carer relationship. I have been engaged in situations where people have been exploited through theft, which is particularly unconscionable conduct when it is directed at someone who might be cognitively impaired and who is generally not believed when they raise their concerns about the thefts because of their cognitive impairment. That is the context of what I have found with employment relationships. In other situations, it has been family members committing the abuse—for example, a family member has exploited the relationship outside the terms of the power of attorney agreement. Unconscionable conduct within that context is very real.

I have had a bit of time over the years to reflect on the red flags for elder abuse victims. Usually they are very silent and heavily embarrassed, particularly when it comes to family relationships, and they are reluctant to disclose that abuse for the potentially deleterious impact that that might have on

the long-standing relationships in the family. We do not often look at the red flags with respect to the perpetrators. There is generally, I feel, a pattern of conduct with the perpetrators. Generally, the red flags that I have seen over the years include some form of addiction—whether it be substance abuse, a gambling habit or a problem with alcohol—or financial difficulty. It usually starts off incrementally over time, but as the situation escalates the desperation becomes more and more a problem.

I am aware of a number of instances in Hervey Bay involving vulnerable people living in caravan parks. From listening to those vulnerable people, it would appear that there has been unconscionable conduct under the caravan parks and rooming accommodation legislation. It might be worth exploring the relationships that have been exploited under the caravan parks and rooming accommodation legislation. Recently we have had changes to the manufactured homes legislation, which is welcomed. That is an observation that I will be further exploring with constituents in my community. I am happy to take any questions from the committee, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Lee. I really appreciate your taking the opportunity not only to give us some background but also to highlight some of the things that I know the member for Ipswich West will agree we have heard previously—that is, the vulnerability and a lack of desire to share experiences. We have found in this committee process that submissions are few and far between. Organisations provide submissions but very few individuals do. Are you able to share just one example of a case of elder abuse in your community—without naming names, obviously—to give the committee some context for what are the experiences of elder abuse victims? Can you share with us one case study?

Mr Lee: One case study that I am currently exploring at the moment involves someone who lives in a park situation and the manager appears to be exploiting that relationship around increasing rents, making it difficult to get services delivered and regulating visitors to the site. In some cases, there has been talk about the possibility of regulating emergency services support to the site. It has been mainly around regulating visitors to the site. I have visited that site actually and engaged with the resident and then been quizzed about why I was there. In the agreement itself, they are quite entitled to have visitors. That is their home environment and they are quite entitled to receive legal advice and whatever support they need.

I would describe that kind of person as using a power play on that relationship. They are exercising what I have described as unconscionable conduct, which is exploiting the vulnerability of people who are living in a situation where they cannot rightly defend themselves either because they do not have the financial resources to take the matter further legally or because they are simply too afraid because, if they escalate the situation, the alleged offending behaviour might worsen. That is one aspect to it.

In a situation where financial resources are limited, and perhaps family support is limited as well, it is not as simple as just packing up and moving away. Some of these caravans have been on the site for 20 years. It is more or less a fixture of the land. If you were to move some of these caravans to another location, they would literally fall apart because they have been there that long. I am generalising but that is the information that I have heard.

Also, I have heard of a level of encroachment in terms of the resale value of the premises. I have not had the time to research the legality of it—it is not my role as a state member to provide legal advice; it is simply to point people in the right direction. Basically there is the possibility of exploiting the resale value of their premises by saying it cannot be handed over to an independent agent to get the best price for them because it has to be directed, or funnelled, through the management.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, member for Hervey Bay. I am conscious that the member for Hervey Bay has to leave us shortly. Do you have a moment or two if we have further questions?

Mr Lee: Yes, sure.

Ms BOURNE: Thanks so much for coming along today, David. With your experience in the community with all of the people you meet, do you think there are enough resources out there? Are people aware of this issue or is it sort of an underbelly thing—it is hidden from the community and people are not talking about it?

Mr Lee: I think there is a lot of the latter. People are afraid to talk about it, particularly if they have been exploited, because they are embarrassed or, as I said, they are concerned about fracturing existing family relationships. They are in a really difficult position to vocalise that. In my experience in another state—and I think the principles apply whatever state you live in—it is up to the management to identify that there is a problem and then step in as an advocate on that person's behalf and deal with the situation and collate the necessary evidence to prosecute.

Ms BOURNE: Do you think there is enough on-the-ground information for people in terms of pamphlets and knowing the abuse hotline?

Mr Lee: I think we can always do much more with it. The people we are trying to target are not necessarily computer literate. A lot of this is put up on Facebook and websites. As I said, 32 per cent of our population is over the age of 65. Not everyone is on Facebook and websites. We need to find another avenue to get that message through so that people can hear the message and it can resonate. A really good communication strategy would be to follow up and make sure that people are engaged and aware of that.

Miss DOOLAN: David, we are having similar issues in my electorate of Pumicestone in terms of the caravan parks. My question to you is: do you know if any social groups are running any programs or presentations in the community at the moment regarding elder abuse?

Mr Lee: I might leave that to the Neighbourhood Centre. I might leave that to Mary and Jules. Hello, Tanya. Tanya is the CEO of the Neighbourhood Centre. Welcome, Tanya. I might leave it to others to answer that question.

Mr DAMETTO: David, thank you for coming along this morning. We really appreciate your perspective on what is going on here in Hervey Bay with regard to elder abuse. My question is around legislation and regulation. Do you think some legislative or regulatory changes could actually work as a deterrent for those perhaps engaging in elder abuse?

Mr Lee: I have had a fair amount of engagement with home owner groups discussing the manufactured homes legislation and I think there is an opportunity to rebalance the relationship between the management and the client. In the caravan parks, it seems to be too skewed in favour of the management and the residents have very few rights. They have the basic committee structure and the like but the legislation needs more teeth in order to ensure the management of caravan parks are taking their responsibility seriously.

It is no secret that we have an issue with homelessness, but we need to make sure that they are adequately dealing with and taking responsibility for the client in terms of rental rises and managing the parks. It is about a balance. Obviously, we want to encourage people to stay in the industry and provide the service but, at the same time, they have to do the right thing. Maybe penalties should be looked at in terms of enforceable contractual agreements. There need to be penalties for breaching those agreements to make sure that management are doing the right thing by their clients.

Mr DALTON: David, thank you again for that overview of Hervey Bay. My question is more on the criminal side of things. Obviously assault, fraud and abuse could be manufactured by anybody, and quite often within the family, in an elder abuse situation. Do you think there needs to be an overall flagging with the police that an offence is actually an elder abuse offence? Would that help with reporting and collating how many instances of elder abuse are actually happening within the community?

Mr Lee: That is a hard one to answer, Nigel. I know of one incident in a caravan park where a resident alleged that she was pushed over by the manager but refused to make a report to the police because there would be repercussions. She was quite clear that she was physically pushed and then tripped over kerbing but, when she engaged with me, she was reluctant to make a complaint to the police because of the potential repercussions. Again, that is about that relationship.

Mr DALTON: So that was never reported?

Mr Lee: No, not to my knowledge.

Ms ENOCH: Before I start, I also acknowledge the Butchulla people of this country on which we are having this hearing today. Thank you, David, for the wonderful way that you have described your own community—I really appreciate that—and for the personal way in which you are engaging with individuals and sharing that today. It is lovely.

Mr Lee: Thank you.

Ms ENOCH: Also, you have reflected on those two overlapping pieces of legislation—the residential tenancies and rooming accommodation legislation and the manufactured homes and residential parks legislation. They are separate legislation but there are overlapping aspects. As you know, the manufactured homes and residential parks legislation was very heavily consulted on for many years. I think it was last year that the legislation actually got through. There are a lot of competing interests, as you would know, and as the member for Pumicestone would understand, so I appreciate your comments on that. There is still some work to do, I imagine.

My question is to the digital technology space. I am exceptionally concerned that older people who are not digitally literate are put in a position of greater vulnerability. Do you know of any activities or programs that are being launched or undertaken across the community around that issue? How do you raise the digital literacy of aged people?

Mr Lee: That is a really tough question. My mother is 86 and she cannot operate a mobile phone or computer.

Ms ENOCH: There are many who cannot even operate an ATM.

Mr Lee: It is a really tough one. I think it gets to a point—and I can only use the example of my mother—where it is just all too hard and then they have to rely on sons and daughters to be their voice to do that. I do not know whether we are going to get that digital uptake in that age bracket. Some people are exceptions and they are outliers. I am generalising. It is really hard for people in that age group to make that change, and they get to a point where it is too energy sapping and too difficult that they just do not engage in that respect.

It is about targeting that population, making that assumption with the right targeted communication strategy. I think that will be largely paper based and ongoing education through the various community groups that people engage with, whether it is the local bowls club or sporting organisations or cultural organisations—a whole range of organisations. It is that multiagency approach. You can have a uniform message going through multiple different agencies to make those connections. We encourage people to be engaged with groups because socially and mentally that is really good. My mother will go to the RSL, the 60 and Better group and tai chi. It is trying to identify some of those different groups to have that level of engagement to make them aware.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, member for Hervey Bay. We will relieve you from your place at the table. Enjoy the rest of your day. Thank you for letting us join you in a beautiful part of Queensland.

Mr Lee: My pleasure. Thanks, everyone.

STEVENSON, Ms Tanya, Chief Executive Officer, Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre

CHAIR: Tanya, on behalf of the committee, thank you for taking this opportunity to speak to us today. As you would be aware, the committee has been travelling across the state hearing from communities of not only their unique challenges but also their suggestions for solutions in dealing with the plague which is elder abuse. We thank you greatly for the time you are giving up today and freely welcome any offerings that you have. Afterwards, the committee may have a few questions for you just seeking to expand upon the things that you say.

Ms Stevenson: Thank you for coming to Hervey Bay. It is lovely to have all of you here. Elder abuse is on the rise for us in our region, as David said. We are very lucky that we are funded to deliver the Hervey Bay Seniors Legal and Support Service, which is a great program. I think it has been with the neighbourhood centre for well over a decade. I do believe there are only about 11 or 12 in the state. If there is room to expand that service to other areas, I think it is a great program with a good mix of legal and social workers working together to be able to support seniors to address elder abuse. That would be a nice easy win if that program were expanded. It is very well funded. I do not think that it is in any way not being funded appropriately for the area that we currently deliver. I will let Mary—she is one of our lawyers in that program—give you some more information about the specific rise in incidences.

The other issue we have around elder abuse is cost of living. We have recently released the *State of seniors report* for our region. Last year we were able to do some surveys with our local seniors and really drill down to some of the most pressing issues that were impacting them. Obviously cost of living was one of those issues. The flow-on effect of that that we have seen is family members relying on their parents for financial support and knowingly or unknowingly taking advantage of their parents, whether it is that they move in with them and then are not contributing or they are taking money from them. That is pretty much a lot of the work that our service does.

Scamming, which Leeanne mentioned, is huge. It is horrible to see some of our seniors not understanding the impact and how quickly they can lose a lot of money and the emotional distress that it causes. Educating them is a little bit difficult because you need to really go out to the places where they already are. They do not tend to want to come in just to learn about scamming. We try to deliver some of that education to aged-care homes and retirement villages during their happy hour. It is always the best time when they are all out and about and they do not mind having a 15- to 20-minute conversation just to get the conversation going. We have found that when we have gone out and just opened with that question 'Have you been scammed?' 90 per cent put their hand up to say they have. It is quite significant—whether it was the \$60 'We've got your computer virus. Can you turn your computer on and give us your password?' to quite significant bank fraud and those kinds of things. They are very clever. It is not just seniors who get scammed. There are plenty of younger people getting caught up in that as well. I think we need more education being delivered practically about what the scams actually look like.

The other issue for our seniors is youth crime. It is causing a lot of fear in our elderly people. There is a lovely term—the youth have called it 'stealththing'. I do not know if you have heard of that. They will wait at the shopping centre and pick an elderly person and wait until they get to their car either to take their groceries or to follow them home to steal their vehicles. That happened to one of our staff as well. It was middle-aged men who followed her home. As soon as she drove into her driveway and into the garage, they jumped out, grabbed the keys, stole her BMW and then drove it out to the bush and basically tipped petrol in it but did not get a chance to light it up. She did actually get it back but it was not really in a useable condition.

That is also another issue with cost of living. We are seeing desperate people, trying to grab anything they can to access funds to support habits or support whatever they need money for. That came out really clear in our *State of seniors report*—that they are not feeling safe. We need to educate them to be aware that someone is tailing them home or when they walk out to their vehicle they should make sure that there are other people around as much as possible. I will leave it there. If there are any questions that you have, I am happy to try to answer them.

CHAIR: Tanya, thank you very much for your contribution. Could I firstly ask for a copy of the *State of seniors report* to be tabled as part of our proceedings here today?

Ms Stevenson: Yes. I will get that printed for you.

CHAIR: That would be brilliant for us to have included as part of the record as well as for the benefit of committee members. You have been very specific in some detail and thank you very much for that. Can you give us an idea of the footprint that the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre itself serves, just because it is a unique beast in that it is not owned or operated by council?

Ms Stevenson: No.

CHAIR: I think it is a model that is worth exploring, even just briefly.

Ms Stevenson: Neighbourhood centres are usually independent. We are an independent, run by a local board. They are based here in Hervey Bay. Our footprint covers Wide Bay-Burnett. At the moment, we have about 72 staff and just over 600 volunteers registered but 400 volunteers who are very active.

We deliver services from legal and professional—we have tenancy advice, the community legal services and the SLASS. We also deliver the community transport and CHSP transport program. The recent flood hit that a bit hard. We lost 20 cars in that flood. We are really struggling at the moment to deliver our transport services especially for the elderly. The council have been really great. I was talking to George, our mayor, this morning, trying to figure out how we are going to quickly find 20 cars to try to fill that void for us. We also deliver multicultural services. We have a lot of veterans here. They do have a lot of overseas wives that they bring in. We run a lot of English classes and some domestic violence education services. They are fairly good.

We then have child youth and family programs. We have a youth centre just across the road. The Neighbourhood Hive looks after our employment services. The Reconnect Youth Centre looks after youth homelessness services. Then we have our wellness centre, which we just built a few years ago thankfully. That houses our Social Prescription Program, which we are piloting at the moment for the Queensland government. We have some of our social isolation programs there.

In each of our centres we co-locate with lots of other services to fill the void because we are not everything. We do not want to be everything. We try to be very specific to what we are delivering and then bring in the organisations to fill the gaps, so we end up with one-stop shops for our clients. Over at the youth centre, the bail services live with us. At the Urangan wellness centre, we have child psychologists and those kinds of things. That is the lovely quiet centre. Then we have our noisy centre at the youth centre. This is a mix with some emergency relief. We obviously have Skilling Queenslanders for Work with our social enterprise cafe. We are very lucky to have such a broad range of services that keep us in touch with a lot of the issues that are going on.

CHAIR: To be honest, it seems like it is not luck at all. It is actually a tailored response to your community which is exactly what a neighbourhood centre should be. Well done to you and all the efforts of your board. That is not an accident; that is an investment. Member for Ipswich West, do you have any questions for Tanya?

Ms BOURNE: Thank you so much, Tanya, for coming today. I really appreciate you giving up your time. If elder abuse is occurring in the community, do you think people and those organisations know what to do?

Ms Stevenson: Yes and no. This is good timing. Tomorrow we are hosting an elder abuse conference. That has been six months worth of work with our local ALAF, the regional legal services. We have partnered with Legal Aid and a few of the other services that come into that group. I think we have 60 people coming tomorrow to learn more about elder abuse and how to work with elder abuse. We have engaged the VPU in police and some key speakers. That is the continuing education that we are doing.

Because of the rise people have not really understood what the line is between your parents and elder abuse. One of the major issues we came across about two years ago was dementia. Families were wanting to do the right thing but they were overstepping the line on how far they then were directing their family members who had dementia. We run an internal *Shark Tank* here. It is a pitch night where our staff come up with ideas. One of our staff came up with the idea to develop a dementia handbook which was practical and friendly for the general community. I think we are on like our eighth batch of printing at the moment because we have sent them to North Burnett and across the region. They are just given out by all of the services to help people understand how to support their family member the right way when dealing with dementia.

Ms BOURNE: So there is an elder abuse component in that. That is fantastic.

Ms Stevenson: Yes, but there is plenty more work to be done to help people understand how to support your parents but without abusing—

Ms BOURNE: Overstepping the boundary.

Ms Stevenson: Yes, that is it. It can be a fine line.

CHAIR: May we also ask that a copy of that is tabled for the committee's purposes?

Ms Stevenson: Yes, absolutely.

CHAIR: When we are travelling across the state it is important that we do collect these amazing samples of how community responds to need.

Miss DOOLAN: Do you find that some of your clients are reluctant to report the abuse?

Ms Stevenson: Absolutely, especially family members. Mary will correct me, but I think 90 per cent are family members. They do not want to go through the police to charge their family members, and a lot of the time I think the family members are trying to do the right thing. They become frustrated or they become fatigued with the ongoing support that they require and so they have overstepped.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for having us here today. I will coin a new phrase here—digitally reliant. I think that is what a lot of our elderly are these days which makes them digitally vulnerable. You are speaking about them being the subject of everything from scams right through to perhaps even their children, who may have their own problems, who have quite a lot of access to their online and digital platforms. Everything from their banking right through to their emails can be accessed. I do not know the demographic or the layout of Hervey Bay so well, but I know in our smaller towns in North Queensland, we are seeing a lot of the face-to-face services that especially elderly people enjoy, from banking all the way through to being able to see a Telstra agent in town, go. Are those sort of things being pulled out of Hervey Bay as well, and do you see some value in making sure we still have face-to-face services?

Ms Stevenson: Yes, I agree. It is becoming a bigger issue. They do not have those face-to-face services as much, and you need double authentication on all of these things to access them now and they do not understand. The council runs some great programs at their library to help with that, and we run some digital literacy programs as well which are funded by the federal government under the Community Access Program. We are looking at how we can try to support them. It is not even our elderly; our average age is 51 here. There are a lot of digital literacy issues where even our young people cannot use a computer because they only use phones. Trying to understand how to use Word to write a resume is even an issue for our elderly people trying to go back to work.

We did have some funding for a program called WISE which was an older women's homelessness program because they were our fastest rising homelessness cohort. It lasted 18 months and then the pilot did not go ahead. We had a lot of women in that program who had been married for so long and then were divorced. They had relied so heavily on their partner—he did the banking, he dealt with all the money—and all of a sudden they were 60 and did not know how to function in the world without their husband. In that program, we did a lot of education around computing and digital skills. That was what they asked for because when they were applying for jobs, because they all of a sudden had to go back to work, they had never even turned a computer on. They were then ending up in jobs such as a cleaner. They were well and truly intelligent enough to be doing a lot more, but did not have the practical skills to be able to join the workforce with the digital requirements needed.

Ms ENOCH: Tanya, it is lovely to see you again and congratulations on the incredible work you have been doing here in this neighbourhood centre. I was going to ask more or less the same question about the digital savvy space, but I will turn to the social isolation and loneliness inquiry and the outcomes of that, given that you talk to the social prescribing piece that you have been doing here. For the benefit of the committee, Tanya is the CEO of a neighbourhood centre that is one of 128 across the state. As Tanya knows, I am a very strong supporter of neighbourhood centres, and I think that the place-based approach that neighbourhood centres bring to these issues of social isolation and loneliness are fundamental to addressing those issues. To that piece then, what further support would be required for a neighbourhood centre to take on the work around elder abuse through that place-based approach?

Ms Stevenson: If I had the magic wand, there are the Community Connect workers. We do not have one, but they have been piloted across the state and have been very successful. It would be ideal if that type of worker could evolve into a position where they actually focused significantly on the elder population. We already work very closely with our council. They have Jules who works specifically with seniors. I think to have that type of program and position. If I could just get the WISE program back, that would be nice. It was not a lot of money—it was about \$100,000 a year—and they were able to use a deal of support through the place-based approach. The women would come in and volunteer and start their own groups and then they would learn together. You do not need to fund 15 different programs. They are very active, they want to be involved, so it is much easier to engage that population. We do a lunch with friends down at the Urangan centre where they come in, learn a skill, socialise at the same time and then get a nutritious meal.

We run the falls prevention program as well with the PHN and Queensland Health. We had a lot of first falls being fatal in our region. It is a 12-week program we developed with those partners where we provide the centre and the excitement, so the drawcard of, 'We are going to come because we know it is entertaining and there is good food,' but then the doctor and the physio are brought in to run the education sessions. It has reduced the number of fatal first falls significantly across the area. They have expanded that program now to Bundaberg. Hopefully, fingers crossed, it will go across the state, because that was quite horrific, during COVID, finding people who had died in their home and it had been three or four days before people found them.

That would be an ultimate support for neighbourhood centres to have that provided. They have the space and the centres are usually fairly well-equipped, but they just need the people there to organise it, oversee it and provide some of that structured learning around the key skills that they need to have.

We did a survey with the women that we were working with about what type of skills they wanted to learn, and digital literacy was No. 1, and computer skills. They just have not had the chance to sit with someone and do it. It can be quite frustrating when you are learning something new like that. It never does what you want it to do.

Mr DALTON: I have a question, but I will give an observation initially. There is a program run by the AFP called Be Connected which is a program which Neighbourhood Watch has taken on board. It is very straightforward, right down to turning a computer on and using a mouse. There are little, short sections to run. Maybe it is something you can look at in the future. I have run it in Mackay myself with Neighbourhood Watch groups, and it has been accepted really well. It is a session which is very interactive.

Leaving that to one side, witnesses of elder abuse are sometimes the key to being able to present a case to a court. Do any of your sessions target the people who visit older people in their homes for health care, for visits—Meals on Wheels et cetera—who may be able to witness what is going on in that private place from their visits on a regular basis?

Ms Stevenson: We do have SLASS program home visits, but we also run the ACVVS program which is the visitors' scheme for lonely elderly people. SLASS use that quite regularly just to get eyes on a client. If we can get a volunteer going into the home just for visits, we can make sure that they are getting friendship support, but it is also the best way for us to have eyes on that client to check in and know if anything is not being looked after or there is something going on. They have someone they can talk to who they feel safe to disclose anything to.

CHAIR: I apologise to interrupt, member for Mackay. Tanya, can you just repeat the name of the program you just referenced?

Ms Stevenson: Yes. It is ACVVS. They changed the name and I am like, 'Ahh!' It was the Community Visitor Scheme, CVS, but it is now the Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. I apologise for interrupting.

Mr DALTON: So if they identify something, what is their next step?

Ms Stevenson: Usually the volunteer will then report it to our service manager who will then engage with another service, depending on what the need is. If it is an elder abuse issue, SLASS will step in, but if they just need someone to transport them, we can do that, but there are plenty of other services out there that we work with as well to fulfil the need, whatever has arisen.

Mr DALTON: That is statistically recorded that you are actually being worthwhile in that area?

Ms Stevenson: Yes, that is it.

Mr DALTON: That is brilliant; good.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ms Stevenson, for your time this morning and for sharing with us your experiences. If we could get the *State of seniors report* as well as the dementia booklet so we can table them as part of the correspondence for today's session, that would be brilliant.

BOITTIER, Ms Mary, Solicitor, Seniors Legal and Support Service

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mary, for being willing to speak today to the committee and to share your experience as a solicitor for the Seniors Legal and Support Service here on the Fraser Coast. I know that Tanya left a few gaps which she said you would fill in. We will again provide the opportunity for you to provide a statement and then members may have some questions just to delve a little bit deeper.

Ms Boittier: Thank you. First of all, I would like to thank the committee very much for coming up here. I think our regional experience is very different to the cities and even to some of the larger regions or the rural and remote. We have our own issues. I endorse everything that David and Tanya said.

I am the solicitor in our Seniors Legal and Support Service. There are a number of them across Queensland. I think they were started by Caxton Legal Centre who you have probably spoken to or know. The benefit of our service, I believe, is that we are an holistic service. There is myself and two case workers. We are government funded, but we are managed by the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre. The really terrific thing about our service is that we go into people's homes, or we go to aged-care facilities or hospitals to see our clients. That really helps us to get eyes on exactly what is happening. Quite often if we get a referral, it might actually be the referrer who turns out to be the abuser. You just do not know until you have made some investigations, which can be even tricky to do that.

Our referrals come from family quite often who are worried and quite often family who live, say, in another state. I think in this region, a lot of people might have retired up here, but they have no actual close family around them, and sometimes they are not connected with their family. We get a lot of family referrals. We also get referrals from the social workers in the hospitals. I would just like to say one thing: it would be great if you could arrange to expand the health justice partnership arrangements. I assume the committee is aware of those. It is where a solicitor and social workers will work together. We are quite stretched, but quite often we will get a referral from a social worker in a hospital and we will go and make our inquiries. If there was another SLASS-type service there, like a health justice partnership, that would be really useful to take some of the strain off.

We also get referrals from the aged-care services themselves if they are concerned. Quite often this will happen—and I can give you case studies—if the fee is not paid, all of a sudden someone's fees go way into arrears. That is a big red light for their facility and they will call us and we will start the investigation process and see what we can do. Sometimes you have friends who make referrals. There is a huge range of ways we get our referrals.

Our numbers are all in the *State of seniors report*, which Tanya is going to provide a copy of. We are pretty busy. Today my two case workers, who unfortunately are not here, are in Maryborough visiting clients. We are finding we are getting almost 50-50 in Maryborough and Hervey Bay. We only operate in the Fraser Coast regional area, which means that we do find gaps where people try to make referrals to us, but they are unsuccessful because our funding only covers this state council area. We think there really are gaps and uneven levels of service. Is that sufficient for an opening?

CHAIR: That is wonderful.

Ms Boittier: I have plenty of case studies if anyone wants to hear anything.

CHAIR: Undoubtedly, we would love to hear a few of them. Recognising the scale of your service, at any one time what is your case load like? How many clients is your service seeing on the Fraser Coast including Maryborough and Hervey Bay?

Ms Boittier: We did a submission to the national plan. On that date, which was the end of February, we had 37 active clients and a waitlist of 17 referrals. Apart from those, we get a lot of what we call info referrals, which are people ringing up. It might be a really quick inquiry about how to access My Aged Care, which is not really elder abuse, or it might be a conflict of interest. One of our pressure points is because there are so few services that provide this legal advice or even social advice, we often find that our community legal service has seen the person who is doing domestic violence as a client. Then we cannot help them in another matter because we have a conflict of interest. It would be really good if there was an expansion of services to take that pressure off.

Ms BOURNE: Thanks for coming along today and thanks for all the work you do in the community. I am really interested in enduring powers of attorney. At the shopping centre where my office is located there is the community JP service just outside. We photocopy a lot of documents for

people coming into the office and then they go back to the JP and they are doing that enduring power of attorney. We had a presentation I think at the Gold Coast where a solicitor was quite worried that this was being done by a JP and perhaps should be getting done by a solicitor. Obviously you do not want to increase the costs for people, but what are your thoughts on that?

Ms Boittier: I think it is either in our rules or a strong advisory that solicitors cannot witness an enduring power of attorney; that is the role of the JP. There are a lot of facts about enduring powers of attorney that I think could be improved. Quite often if someone is appointed as an enduring power of attorney, financial can start immediately or it can start when someone loses capacity. Then the health and personal start when the person loses capacity, so there is a whole range.

The form is very complicated and the explanatory form, the form 19, is really long and really complicated. I think it would be helpful if attorneys knew in very simple steps exactly what their responsibilities are. They have big responsibilities under the law and it is not clear that all attorneys understand what they are doing—and that is the good ones, let alone the bad ones.

Having powers of attorney is a preventative measure for elderly people, except when they are abused and then it becomes a risk. I think that risk could be alleviated if there was a test for someone to be a financial attorney, which is similar to what is in the guardianship act where the person who is putting their hand up to be a guardian through QCAT has to do a statutory declaration that they have not been bankrupt and this, that and the other. It would be even better if they had some type of training, but that is probably making it a bit too complicated.

I would also like to see—and I think it was a recommendation of the Public Advocate for enduring powers of attorney—that you cannot have had a criminal conviction but also you cannot have been a person against whom a domestic violence order has been made. You might be surprised, but we have a case at the moment where the attorney we are complaining about was made the subject of a domestic violence order by his parents and down the track he got his mum to appoint him. There are little things, but that probably does not answer your question.

Ms BOURNE: No, it does. You absolutely have. That is a lot clearer for me. Thanks so much.

CHAIR: We really appreciate that it is a space where, for most people, if they have to act as a power of attorney, it may only be once in their life. So the idea that everyone is equipped instinctively and prepared for that let alone understanding their responsibilities, financial or otherwise, is varying. I think the idea around the testing of that and the role of the guardian—

Ms Boittier: I do have a follow-up point to yours, Wendy, which is sometimes the person who is actually the principal who appoints the attorney does not really understand what they are doing either. I think the form could be fixed so that it is made much clearer. Someone will have capacity if they understand those particular points, and they are set out in the legislation. Usually for older people, they are required to get some type of letter of capacity from a GP. Quite often we find they are done by a nurse who might—surprise, surprise—turn out to be a family friend. We are really concerned with some of the powers of attorney that we see that, in fact, the person has had very marginal capacity but has been able to show they have a doctor's certificate saying they have capacity. I do not know how you fix that, but it is certainly something we do notice.

Miss DOOLAN: Thank you again for all the work you do in our communities. My question relates to the demographic of your clients. Do you find that it is mostly older women or older men, and what form of abuse is more prevalent?

Ms Boittier: That is a great question. It is just slightly more older women than older men but not by a lot. In fact, we seem to be seeing a lot more older men now than we did even some months ago or last year. They seem to be vulnerable, and David's story about the caravan park is just an example. That was where a bloke is living in a caravan in the caravan park and the friendly guy over the road or in the next caravan becomes his attorney and abuses him. We have situations like that. We are finding there are men who are just so lonely and vulnerable. That is what we seem to be seeing quite a lot of.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for coming in today and presenting to the committee. It is an important inquiry and I know you are quite passionate about helping the elderly not only in Hervey Bay but also wherever you can, by the sound of things. My question is in regards to legislative changes that could apply to everything about elder abuse and perhaps making it a specific crime or even creating a scenario—I know at this point in time in Queensland we have aggravating parts to an assault, for example, of an elder. Do you think adding an aggravating component to an offence could act as a deterrent?

Ms Boittier: Sorry, that is a really complex, difficult area. First of all, I think there would not be harm in trialling that. One of the issues we have, which I know David and Tanya have mentioned, is that with the older people who are being abused, often they will not report it. It is getting them to the next step.

Mr DAMETTO: Or that first step.

Ms Boittier: There seems to be quite a lot of information about what is elder abuse at this stage. We have clients who say they have elder abuse and they say, 'Can't you get that person charged?', but they do not really understanding what you can do about elder abuse. Then there is that bigger step, 'Do you really want your child to be charged with fraud or violence?' I have not really answered your question. I think it is a really difficult one.

Mr DAMETTO: It really is. Do you think some people may even be living in denial that they are in an elder abuse scenario?

Ms Boittier: I am not a psychologist so I cannot really answer that. Some people seem to put up with a lot so maybe they are. We have one client who had been abused by her son and then finally she just snapped. We find that sometimes happens: people just go along and then one day they cannot put up with it anymore and do take some action. There are some great things. I think for tenancies, domestic violence protections is a really good step.

Mr DALTON: I am very keen to hear a case study that you may be able to de-identify. Could you give us an idea of one of those that you have dealt with, obviously without naming clients?

Ms Boittier: I had three in mind. One involves real property, one involves what we call the proud house maker and one involves the hoarder. Which would you like?

Mr DALTON: Let's start at the top and maybe someone else will ask for another.

Ms Boittier: The real property one?

Mr DALTON: Yes.

Ms Boittier: I think that is a really sad situation where, for various reasons, an elder person might go into some type of property venture with their children—there is a whole lot of combinations and permutations—but they end up all living together and things do not work out well. Then to break up that family house, because of the housing costs and cost of living none of them will end up being able to buy their own home. We have had that situation where someone does not want to do anything because none of them will end up in a nicer home. That is that one. There is a lot of those real property ones. You have probably heard about that in more affluent areas. We have many more rental/homeless/caravan and aged-care people.

The proud house maker is one that I am personally really concerned about—and this is a stereotype, but one that we have found. You go to someone's house and they are immaculately dressed. You could eat your dinner off the floor and it is just lovely. Any sort of conversation with them for more than about five minutes discloses that they do have cognitive issues, but they might still be driving. They may or may not have their medical certificate that you need over 75 to keep driving. They say they do not need to see a GP because they are too fit, they do exercises and they walk a lot.

We have one case study where the person has actually been preyed upon by an opportunistic friend who has now got power of attorney and is trying to put this person into a home somewhere. We have a lot of trouble getting any traction there because the person has not actually been deemed as not having capacity and you cannot persuade them to go to a doctor. You cannot persuade them. I think what Tanya was saying about the community visitor scheme, someone to get eyes on them, is one thing I am concerned about. The other one is the Public Advocate's reports about adult safeguarding. I think there is this category of vulnerable people who live in a little shell but until they actually fail, they fall over and break their leg, they do not really get eyes on them to get the help they need.

Then the last one was a sad one. This is a bloke in a caravan park and the mate became his power of attorney and also helped him with his banking because he did not have any digital literacy. This mate also got his login and helped him do internet banking. It was not discovered until the client went into an aged-care facility and the facility realised he was not able to pay his fees, which is pretty difficult when 85 per cent of your pension should go to the fees. This friend had, in fact, milked his whole account. Not only that, he had also been to Centrelink and had advances on his pension. The bloke is still now in the red and Centrelink cannot help because he gave him his logins and passwords. We see situations that just perplex us. I am sorry, I do not know what the answer is.

Mr DALTON: That was the question I was going to add: what is the answer to that?

Ms Boittier: There is a whole lot: there is the whole community; there is trying to get eyes on people; there is adult safeguarding; there is the digital literacy piece; there are banks being more aware about when there are red flags; there are banks even being around, because we have difficulty in there being no banks except online.

Mr DALTON: I have one more question. What is to stop that particular perpetrator from picking up the next person in the caravan park—

Ms Boittier: Nothing and in fact we are aware of serial—

Mr DALTON:—because the police do not know about him?

Ms Boittier: This has been reported to the police but we are not aware that anything has actually come of the police report.

CHAIR: Thank you for being so willing to share some firsthand experiences. I think it is really important for each of our committee members to see that elder abuse does look very different. We quite often have said, 'Oh well, if only we could fix this or put a check in place here,' but what you have exposed us to in your three examples is that there are multiple entry points and exit points and they are not all the same. I really appreciate you taking that time. Member for Algeester, do you have a final question?

Ms ENOCH: That goes to my question, actually. Often we could recategorise elder abuse as coercive control and you do not even know you are in the situation because you have been so manipulated over a period. We know, and not just in this area, that women in particular are quite vulnerable to that kind of coercive control. I think the red flag piece that you have been talking about the whole time is, how do you get more people's eyes on the situation because if you are in a situation of coercive control then it is very difficult for you to even identify that you are in that position. You talked about the health-justice partnership. From your experience, are there other services, government services in particular but other government funded services, where we could see those partnerships put in place to be able to support eyes on people?

Ms Boittier: That is the only one I know of, but it has occurred to us with the proud house maker lady I told you about that she had actually had two admissions to hospital because she hallucinated about peopling coming in so the ambulance took her—that is QAS. She went to emergency but she discharged herself. I know there is the GEDI scheme, the geriatric nurses. When someone is admitted in that type of situation, there could be a referral immediately to a GEDI nurse just to talk to them. Really, she should not have gone home on those two occasions.

I think the other one is the motor transport and the need to get the certificate when you are 75. A lot of people talk about the traffic and it is pretty scary. I am not aware of how the medical check goes, but it is about those cognitive type issues. I think the RACQ has looked at this. I think those cognitive issues are quite important. I think the QPS do a fantastic job. We red flag people with the QPS when we can, but I am not sure how that might be made more across the board.

CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I take the opportunity to really thank you, Mary. You have brought life not only obviously to the work that Tanya expanded on for the service but also really the individuals who are being affected in very real terms. On behalf of the entire community, I thank you for that and thank you so much for your time this morning.

De WAARD, Ms Julie, Seniors Liaison Officer, Fraser Coast Regional Council

RAYNER, Ms Robin, Private capacity

CHAIR: With the leave of the committee, we will table a copy of the *State of seniors report* as well as the dementia booklet. Thank you very much; we are very grateful. Ladies, thank you very much for providing some testimony here today for the committee and for sharing your personal experiences as well as experiences on behalf of your community. We will go one after the other, with questions in between. I will remind committee members that we are getting close to the end of the hearing so we will try to make sure that we are succinct. Julie, would you like to start?

Ms de Waard: Once again, welcome to the beautiful Fraser Coast, despite our recent weather situation. I am Julie de Waard and I am the Seniors Liaison Officer with the Fraser Coast Regional Council. My position is funded by the state government, with the main focus being reducing social isolation for people over the age of 50 years. My role includes facilitating a small community centre, which is nothing like the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre. We have one staff member and a dozen volunteers. I am also involved with most of the large community events that we do for seniors in Hervey Bay. I also do one-on-one assistance and support for individuals who may need some kind of contact with their community.

In my role from an elder abuse point of view, I am one of the Seniors Legal and Support Service's major referrals because I get to talk to people who identify others who are in need of some kind of support. I see my role as an important part of educating. A lot of the people I talk to do not necessarily recognise elder abuse for themselves or for their other friends. We talk about it so that they can recognise it and they know what pathways they can take. Usually, that means they come and knock on my door and say, 'What do I do about this situation?' The more we talk about it, the more people know about it.

Unfortunately, on the Fraser Coast we have lost our regular written newspapers. When you are talking about socially isolated people in the age brackets that we are talking about, they are not accessing the internet, Facebook and all the digital forces, and they are not receiving the weekly three newspapers so it is hard to get the word out to them as much as we could previously. As service providers, we have to find ways of getting into those homes. If you are isolated, you are not at the groups that we have also mentioned here today, which makes it really hard. We have events like our Over 50's Lifestyle Expo where we encourage people to come out. We have lots of exhibitors from service providers, businesses and community organisations. It helps to get that word out. Even the social activities that we organise throughout Seniors Month, once again, is a way to promote not just elder abuse but also other services that people can take advantage of.

From a council point of view, we produce the Seniors Information Directory, which is just a list of all the services that are available across the Fraser Coast. That is a hard copy. It is in large print. We probably print and distribute at least 4,000 copies of that annually, if not twice a year. That is continually updated as well.

I am also involved in the Fraser Coast Dementia Alliance and Tanya talked before about how big an issue dementia is on the Fraser Coast, Australia-wide and worldwide. We are noticing, too, that they are probably even more vulnerable than your normal run-of-the-mill individual so they have less capacity to identify that they are being taken advantage of and it provides greater opportunity for people to take advantage.

The other thing that I want to mention to you is that you talked about organisations like the caravan parks and retirement villages taking advantage and using our elders. We also have other institutions that are doing that, like nursing homes. It might be one individual staff member who takes a dislike to someone or it is the bureaucratic system that we have. We need to make sure that does not happen and we have pathways so that family members can actually report it without feeling like there is going to be retaliation on their loved one for doing that. Our government does it. When you ring My Aged Care to register—and if you would like to get on our website and just check things out—most of the people ringing My Aged Care cannot even hear the conversation on the phone let alone get on a computer to check out what their program is all about. There is a whole range of different ways people are being abused.

CHAIR: I might pull you up there, Julie, to get a couple of questions in before we move on to hearing from Robin. My first question is based on some of the previous conversations we have had. Your position is unique, coming from a small community centre. I actually started as a business admin trainee at all of 18, in a neighbourhood centre of one staff member and 12 volunteers so I can relate. In the committee hearings to date we have learnt something around language. We talk with young

people about healthy relationships and that is the language we use. We get to middle age and call it domestic violence. Once you reach a certain point, we call it elder abuse. Do you think that the lack of commonality of language is leading to that lack of self-identification? 'Coercive control' could be an overriding term that could relate to any of those relationship statuses.

Ms de Waard: When the term 'elder abuse' comes to someone's mind they are automatically thinking physical or sexual. They are not thinking about the control, the coerciveness, the financial abuse that occurs within our community, which are probably the bigger areas of abuse that happen. When I talk to my people, we talk about healthy relationships. You talked before about scams. That comes into the healthy relationships. We do not just talk about partners. We talk about family relationships, your neighbours and your friends.

You also spoke about EPAs. The one thing I say to my people when we talk about EPAs—and thankfully for us we utilise the skills of SLASS to come and talk about the legal components of all of those pieces of important paperwork—is that whoever you have as your EPA it has to be someone you trust with your life. That is not the cleaner who comes in once a fortnight. It is not the neighbour down the road who has been doing the garden for you. It is someone you want to make a decision about your life and what is going to happen with it.

Ms BOURNE: Julie, thanks so much for the work that you do and thanks for taking the time to come today when you are probably so stretched. I wondered whether you have any opportunities or ideas to improve the service towards elder abuse.

Ms de Waard: I think the service that we have in the Fraser Coast, the Seniors Legal and Support Service, is fantastic. I was here prior to the inception of that service and we had nowhere to go. I think it can be expanded and even more funding could go into it because, as the girls indicated today, they only work in the Fraser Coast Regional Council area. However, we also have Hervey Bay Central and we have Maryborough Central, but, geographically, when you look at the outlying areas, who is getting to them? Who are they getting information from? How do we get that out to those rural areas? That is important. When you have limited staff members for one service, it makes it really difficult to get out to those people.

Ms BOURNE: I have a supplementary question: I am really interested in the people who deliver Meals on Wheels. This is more a statement rather than a question. They are actually going into elderly people's homes and they would see a change in them. I think there is a great opportunity for some questions to be asked there. That is just really a comment more than anything, thanks, Chair.

Ms de Waard: I think it also associates with all the care services that go into individuals' homes. Are we training those staff members enough to recognise the changes—whether it is elder abuse, dementia changes et cetera? Should we be doing more with those individuals?

Miss DOOLAN: Julie, you are obviously very passionate about fixing this issue. I was wondering with any of your clients whether there has been a case study that has really stuck out to you.

Ms de Waard: Yes, I have a few. I was going to say also not all people who are abusers are intentionally doing it. The case study I will tell you about is a hoarder who moved in with a lifelong friend and started hoarding. They were in a mobile home village. He then became abused and neglected because of her hoarding—not because she was deliberately doing it, but because she had this passion to buy things and keep things and did not know what to do to meet his needs. The other issue that was raised with that and that came to my notice is that who do we, as a community member and not a specific agency, go to to get someone to come into their premises and investigate what is going on. If you look at the hospital system, they will not come out unless the person has been in the hospital. The community health program will not go in and check on someone under certain circumstances. If it was not for the Seniors Legal and Support Service we would have no service that would be able to come in and investigate if there was an issue.

Miss DOOLAN: Would it be that individual who would probably have to seek counselling for both of them to mitigate those issues?

Ms de Waard: Then if you are looking at hoarding, on the Fraser Coast there are minimal service providers who can assist with it.

Miss DOOLAN: People who know how to deal with that sort of situation, yes.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for coming in and giving us your overview. My question is with regard to service delivery obligations. We have corporate service delivery obligations, we have telecommunication obligations, but do you think there is an ability for government to lead in this space? You mentioned earlier about ringing My Aged Care and the first thing they direct you to is the

internet. I had a similar situation play out the other day when I rang Policelink. It said that the quickest way for me to actually make this inquiry was via the website. I thought to myself, 'No, that's why I am on the phone right now. This is the quickest way for me while I'm driving—on bluetooth.' If you had any comments around that, I would most appreciate it.

Ms de Waard: All our government departments are going technical. Yes, as we come through the ages the younger people and the younger seniors are going to cope with that, but the people we have at the moment are not. If you want a pension, if you want to go to Centrelink, if you want to go to health services, it is all technical. I know about Be Connected and all the other training programs that we do in the local community. It is not enough. Even with phones, there are so many different choices of phone. You would have to have a brilliant mind to be able to train each individual in the community on how to use their phone. I do not know how to use my phone and I use it every day. The government department has to think about how they get their message across to the people they are targeting, as well as being able to move with technology. You have to have more than one option.

CHAIR: It has been a very strong flavour for today—the digital divide.

Ms ENOCH: I will go straight to the question, Julie. In your experience, how has cultural diversity been taken into account, and are there any unique impacts that you have seen?

Ms de Waard: I cannot speak greatly on cultural diversity, but from my knowledge of coming from a very cultural area, different cultures see different behaviours in different ways and do not necessarily acknowledge it as abuse or control. From our point of view as service providers, we have to be aware of those different cultures and work with the cultural background as well as the individuals in order to make them more aware. You are not going to get into specific communities if you are not working with the people who are a part of that culture.

Ms ENOCH: I raise that because of the comment earlier about older men and servicemen who have wives from other parts of the world who are here accessing services at the neighbourhood centre.

Mr DALTON: I do not think I will ask any further questions. I think what you were saying was very interesting. Thank you.

CHAIR: Robin, would you like an opportunity to provide a statement and then if we have any questions we can follow up? Is there anything left to share? I know that we have stolen your thunder a few times here already. I have seen you nodding along.

Ms Rayner: Everybody has raised very pertinent issues. I just came as an observer. I am not providing a service as such, but more observations if you need examples of older people I am trying to support. My background is I am a member of the Fraser Coast Domestic and Family Violence Alliance, a member of Zonta International, but I also have an education background and work with one of the local churches and a few others. I get a bit of contact with the elderly. I am getting there myself, I think.

One of the things that is interesting to note is the terminology of abuse. I think there is neglect and then there are safety aspects as well. To me there are those three areas that impact our elderly. In no particular order, these are my observations. Aged care is an issue when it comes to the mistreatment of our elderly people. I think they are so stretched in terms of resources. I have had family members go into the aged-care homes here. The number of people who miss meals, who are not being turned and who do not speak the language is an issue, especially if they do not have someone who is advocating for them. I think there is a lot more happening than we probably are aware of. The flow-on from that is the number of people I talk to who are terrified of being put in a nursing home because they just see that as the end of their life and death. They are quite frightened so they stay in an unsafe situation because they are scared of what that means—'They will put me in there.'

The issue of families I think is a major one. I have a number of examples where family members are definitely taking massive advantage of elderly people, but the elderly are too scared and too afraid to say, 'No, go away.' For one of the people that I have a connection with there is a feeling of duty: 'I should be looking after them. I should let them do this for me. This is my duty. I am the matriarch of the family. I should be letting them walk in and do whatever they like in my house.' Families walk in and say, 'Gran had a slip. Let's whack her in a nursing home'. They slip over every day too, but they use that as an excuse to take over the house or whatever.

I think transport in our area is a major issue for elderly people. You have St Johns and Ubers and things, but there is a cost to that. Having to use transport means for many elderly people going out at night is almost a non-existent occurrence; they cannot do it. I think the services we have been

talking about and having that personal contact rather than digital contact is so important. I think for community members like myself, and many other people that I know, knowing people and them knowing you personally is important. I can bring people to somewhere fantastic like the neighbourhood centre and say, 'Come here. Talk to these people. They can point you in the right direction.' They need that personal introduction because they do not know anyone.

On the issue of advocates, whether it is in nursing homes or elsewhere, someone who speaks up on their behalf, someone who stands beside them is huge. In terms of what we were talking about with the EPAs, I have one lady in a nursing home and her power of attorney passed away. The pressure she felt when she was told, 'You have to have somebody. You must have somebody or we are going to appoint someone,' was huge. She is grieving the loss of this family member. In the end, out of the blue she said, 'I'll ring Robin.' It was never a question: who would you trust with your life? It was: 'This is a legal imperative, you must.' I think that is abusive. I find for a lot of people here, particularly women because I do a lot with women's services, the husband dies and the women are quite isolated. They may never have driven, done their finances and things like that. I think there is a lot of isolation around that. Volunteering is wonderful for women in our community, provided they can get there. There is volunteering they can do that actually gives them a social connection. I think that supported volunteering is really helpful.

Then there are the legal processes and documents. I have just had the funeral for a friend last week, and I was quite amazed. This guy has been palliative for 18 months. The day before he died his wife is ringing me asking me what to do because he did not have a will, let alone anything else. I am in the middle of a meeting somewhere else. We got a will done, but did he actually know what he was signing? I have no idea. I was thinking, 'He has been palliative for that amount of time, why has nobody followed up on this with that family and made sure those documents were there?' There was no end-of-life document—nothing. It is very complex.

I have had a number of community people ask me whether the church or another organisation could run little workshops in their own organisations to outline what the documents are and how you do them. The neighbourhood centre has a great service, if people know about it and come and do it or somebody takes them. MyHR, My Aged Care—what a nightmare for anybody even if you have got an education degree. I struggle with that. I have learnt a few things and tend to go to Centrelink with people and help them.

Mental health is a major issue—not just dementia, but depression or anxiety—particularly for those on their own or fearing being on their own. I have had a recent experience with a lass. Her mother was contacting me. She had been in a mental health facility and was released into her mother's care. There was absolutely no follow-up whatsoever. The mother was actually in danger—and she is quite elderly—and she had to leave the daughter, putting the children in danger. The follow-up was not there around that. There was no support for her at all except that she got to know me and rang me up.

Medical follow-up is difficult if you do not have an advocate, whether it is basic dressings or whatever. If you do not have transport to get there it is difficult. I have certainly experienced massive elder abuse of an old lady who was deaf in our local hospital. She could not hear. She was in great stress and in massive pain and the abuse she got from the head nurse was not right. I put a complaint in and the response at the hospital was fantastic. They responded immediately. She should not have had to go through that in the first place. Another older lady I work with was very stressed about the Mental Health Tribunal so I said, 'Would you like me to come to the next one?' What a horrible process for an elderly person. Decisions are made while not listening to her, not listening to me, not listening to anybody. You are perfectly capable of managing your own finances, but you cannot decide what you want to do with your own health. It made no sense to her and nobody has taken the time to help. I think the Mental Health Tribunal could be much more personable and supportive.

In terms of online scams, the Commonwealth Bank does a nice little session in person, but how many people know that they can go. I am absolutely blown away when I talk to some older people and say, 'Have you got security?' 'Yep, yep.' 'Show me what it is.' They have got a screen door—not a security door—and they have got a sensor light. That is their security. I think we could do a lot more around that. Zonta has run some sessions in the past on that. Older men have come to my attention lately. I was driving back through Maryborough and these guys were ringing me up saying, 'We can't get him.' He could have been dead for two or three days if somebody had not thought they had not seen him. There is no following up. It was quite a drama, so I will not go through the whole story. The older men here I think can become a bit isolated. Women tend to talk to one another a bit more.

There is another one that I had that I thought was quite appalling. You know how you come and do your assessment for your aged care support systems. They turned up. It took a while but they turned up. They talked to him on the veranda. They said, 'Do you need any help with your housework?' 'No.' 'Are you right to cook for yourself?' 'Yes.' If they had walked into the kitchen they would have seen the green fur on the meals from Meals on Wheels. They would have seen the grease that thick on the stove. They would have seen that the floor had not been mopped or swept for weeks, but they did not. They stood on the veranda and asked him. I think about that when you are saying that visiting the home is the care that is needed.

The other thing that I think is a challenge for very independent people is when support is offered for them to actually accept it. So often it is, 'No, I can do that. I can drive myself. I can do my own housework. I can paint my own ceilings'—or whatever it might be. The other thing that I find is that there are a number of services in Hervey Bay because we have an aged population, but navigating all of those and the coordination between them is something we could probably work on as a community.

Just going to your question before, there are people who have come to Australia from another country. They were in a relationship but the partner has passed on and they may not have citizenship. They do not even have to be old for that to happen. They are legally left very high and dry, and their children. Particularly if they have a language problem, to go to Centrelink and try to explain something is almost impossible if they are not fluent in English.

Those are just observations that I have made. I am working with a few people, one of whom is a hoarder. Who looks after a hoarder? Who actually does it when they say, 'I'm okay, I don't want any help.' I will stop there.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Robin. Once again, what you have provided for us is lived experience but also from the perspective of a community member as opposed to an agency. I think you have identified a few things for us, firstly, that your community does have some really wonderful facilities and services but making that referral connection can sometimes be difficult if you do not know that service exists. You also spoke to us about the tyranny of distance, which adds to the tyranny of the digital divide that we spoke about earlier. Tyranny of distance is obviously something that needs to be considered in regional communities like yours and mine in Yeppoon.

We live in a world where we do have wonderful service providers and we have lots of agencies. In the last 12 months we have seen a growth in the number of gentlemen who are now starting to identify that they could be a victim of elder abuse. Is it because now, as our communities become more educated around domestic violence and healthy relationships, that we are seeing elder men start to see it for themselves? Is it because we have got better at identifying it? What is driving elder men to join? I think for a very long time they were a very reluctant group to participate or to recognise it.

Ms Rayner: My impression from the older fellows I have had to deal with is there has been a female friend or a female family member who has walked with them on that journey: 'It is not shameful. This is wrong. We are here for you, dad'—or grandpa, next-door neighbour or whoever. I find sometimes it is a mate, but often it is a female connection who seems to be saying, 'Here's the legislation. It is okay to do this.' It is just that feeling of being supported by someone who seems to know what they are talking about, whether they do or not.

CHAIR: Member for Ipswich, recognising that we are getting very low on time.

Ms BOURNE: I do not have another question but I wanted to thank you both because what you have just explained is really confronting. It is so good to hear that from you and for us to take that away and look at all of the issues that you have raised. It just seems massive, listening to that. Thanks very much.

Ms Rayner: Thank you for coming and listening.

CHAIR: Member for Pumicestone, do you have a question?

Miss DOOLAN: I do not have any questions either but, again, thank you so much for the work that you do in our communities to help so many people.

CHAIR: Member for Hinchinbrook, do you have a question?

Mr DAMETTO: Once again, I want to thank you, on behalf of the committee, for coming along, Robin. I appreciated hearing your perspective today, but also thank you for what you do in this community not only helping those suffering from elder abuse but also supporting those who could be the most vulnerable.

CHAIR: Member for Algester, do you have a question?

Ms ENOCH: I do have a question, Robin, about respectful relationships. I know that you are a long-term educator. We do a lot of work with our young people about understanding their role in the broader society and the important role of elders in our community. From your experience, do you think there is an opportunity in that respectful relationships piece to work with younger people around the issues of elder abuse?

Ms Rayner: I was actually on the consultation committee developing that curriculum in the schools. The thing that really struck me was that it was very focused on women and domestic violence and the broader issues in relationships were sitting on the fringe. Because of the media attention on domestic violence, that seemed to be the major aim.

In terms of young people, the thing that concerns me is around parenting. In my generation, you respected your parents. For many years now, I have seen little tots abusing their parents and being allowed to do it. They grow up to be teenagers who also abuse their parents, grandparents and so on. I think of the role of the parent, the rights of children, parent responsibility and support to be parents. I had one mum tell me once, 'My job is to support and back my son no matter what he does. He can murder someone but my job as a parent is to support him and lie for him and whatever else.' Maybe there could be something in the respectful relationships about connecting with parents as well?

CHAIR: Member for Mackay, do you have a question?

Mr DALTON: On the digital divide and there being no reading material because there are no newspapers, in Hervey Bay have you seen flyers in any commonly used places where older people might visit—hairdressers, coffee shops, dentists, doctors—that may get into people's hands as a readable document?

Ms Rayner: Very rarely. I have seen it in some other places but around here very rarely. It is something that I am taking back to some of my groups. I have just been down south and I was looking at the book boxes that Rotary puts around. I saw somewhere that had the little community booklets and I thought, 'We should have them in every Rotary box', or multiples of, because people are picking them up.

Mr DALTON: I do know that the police have a very simple brochure, a DL flyer, which could be distributed to those types of places and that may help with that communication.

Ms Rayner: They have gone digital here too, have they not? All of our little books and things are digital.

Ms de Waard: Except for the Seniors Information Directory.

Mr DALTON: I know that people like to read things.

Ms de Waard: I do know that, over the years, campaigns have been held. On your beer coaster or your drink coaster, things have been printed—where people are gathering for social events and so forth—and on the backs of toilet doors. Things have happened, but it is not constant.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, ladies. The time allocated for our session is due to expire. This concludes the public hearing. Thank you to everyone who has participated today, especially those who were unexpectedly asked to step up but who shared such important information with us. Thank you to our committee secretariat, our Indigenous liaison officer as well as our Hansard reporter. The transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I now declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 11.53 am.