



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 ELDER ABUSE IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 26 March 2025

Cherbourg

WEDNESDAY, 26 MARCH 2025

The committee met at 11.17 am.

CHAIR: I officially declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into elder abuse in Queensland. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land here at Cherbourg and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. On our committee today we have regular members as well as some substitute members. We have Ms Wendy Bourne; Mr Nick Dametto; Miss Ariana Doolan; Mr Nigel Dalton, who is joining us as a substitute for Mr Jon Krause, who is away; as well as the Hon. Leeanne Enoch, who is representing the member for Mansfield, Corrine McMillan, who is absent and offers their apologies for their absence. We would like to acknowledge Mayor Simpson and his council and community for welcoming us. Thank you for all of the efforts you have gone to, working in conjunction with the wonderful Peter from the Queensland parliament and our committee secretary, Lynda. I know that you have been working together for weeks and weeks to get this set up and we really appreciate that.

The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee with its inquiry into elder abuse in Queensland. We are here today in Cherbourg to hear your views, to hear your stories and to hear your wisdom. 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, as you can see from the myriad electrical equipment around us, are being recorded for the purposes of *Hansard* and will be reported and published on the parliament's website. If you have any concerns around this, please speak to our committee secretary. We can do both closed sessions and redacted sessions. We do not have to have individual details, but we do benefit by having the shared stories and shared wisdom that can help ensure we are getting a true picture of what is going on in Queensland. Media may be present today and are subject to the committee's rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on parliament's website or social media pages. I would ask that everyone, including our members, to please ensure your phones are switched off or to silent mode. I would like to invite anyone who wishes to speak to speak with the wonderful Lynda. She is going to make a little bit of a list for us and we will take them one at a time.

SIMPSON, Mr Bruce, Mayor, Cherbourg Aboriginal Community

CHAIR: After your opening address we may have some questions for you—but nothing hard.

Mr B Simpson: Can I please stand here for the community and then I will come over there; is that alright?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr B Simpson: Firstly, I thank the committee for coming to our community. Also, I would like to acknowledge the matriarchs of our community and elders, of course, and our uncles that lead the narrative of elder abuse for our community. Last year I met the Parliamentary Service around, 'Look, we need to get our voices into parliament, no matter how or when, but we need a vehicle.' I reached out to the Parliamentary Service team to say, 'Hey, how does that translate for Cherbourg?' and they mentioned that they could bring an inquiry to have a face to face, do Teams and get people in the room or have a closed session. I was really excited because our new council for Cherbourg, voted in by our people, has an open-door policy around anything. We say there is no wrong door. We have to create the doors, to make them come open.

A lot of the leadership that I do is around intentional relationships and this is the intentional relationships that our community would request of government, both state and federal. Then it also translates to intentional investment. I believe that this is the translation for our community of intentional investment. So thank you once again for reaching out to Cherbourg and to Peter and Lynda for making this happen. We need a voice and this is the vehicle, so I thank you so much and now I will stand over here.

CHAIR: Mayor Simpson, we might ask you just a few questions. Feel free to say that you are unable to provide the answer or that you would like to provide the answer later if it is something that you would like to make sure you get some background on. We will ultimately provide a report to

parliament on this so we want to make sure we are getting the good answer, the right answer, not just the first answer. We know that when you put someone on the spot it is quite often difficult. We want to make sure we are doing well by all Queenslanders.

I guess my first question to you is with regard to the community of Cherbourg. What we have understood from the committee's hearings to date is that each community has unique challenges. The Gold Coast spoke very strongly around financial challenges related to elder abuse. Yesterday in Hervey Bay and Maryborough we heard about services, related to service delivery. In your mind, what does elder abuse look like in the community of Cherbourg?

Mr B Simpson: From personal experiences, the pathway for our elders to receive the quality care and the quality communication to that care and the quality of service delivery to that care is very fragmented. On Cherbourg—and I am speaking for my late Dad and my mother, who is 82 years old—the effective service delivery sometimes does not translate in our homes. You will have a carer come in and they will just want to boil the kettle, sit around and yarn. I think Mum has only an hour for cleaning services. We had to change a few of those services to meet the needs of Mum. Then even with our late dad, Dad was more frail. There was no intentional services around his frailty—again, a fragmented pathway.

I think from entry level, capturing the support for an elder needs to happen earlier. A lot of early onset dementia is happening in Cherbourg as well. The further rural and remote you go, there is no early dementia education. If there is, it does not translate to Cherbourg or it is not visible. Our elders are from 50 years onwards. We have some elders who are walking around with early dementia and no supports. There are advocacy services here, but I am yet to see some early dementia testing or more communication and education sessions for what that looks like for the elder but also for the carer, who could be a young granny of that elder. There are still a lot of gaps in that early dementia and looking at how we take care of that.

Housing is another huge area for elders. This new council is talking to the state housing department to say, 'Hey, how do we co-design our houses for our elders? Why does it always have to be this design? Why can't it be the design that meets the needs of our elders and also our vulnerable people with disabilities and their carers?' We are looking at a healthy housing initiative through Queensland Health to try to bring some traction to finding the needs of each household—the health needs, the modification of homes, the assistive technology that could be required for mobility. There are a lot of gaps there, too, in just the housing for our vulnerable people. Already that is an abusive response to whatever the needs are of Cherbourg for housing. We are talking now about co-design around granny flats. The government have said, 'We never thought of granny flats.' It would be two duplexes—one this end for the carer, one this end for the elder and then a communal area. You have provided an independent living type arrangement but also support for the needs of the elder and the family in general.

Also medication on country is a huge issue. I think we need to provide the medication—what do you call it? For my mum we have a medication board. It is a whole month. I was teaching the nurses at the hospital, 'Look, we do this for our appointments. We do this for tablets.' I think more education needs to come from the health services as well to teach or to guide but to support as well. Some of our elders might be taking the wrong tablets or not showing up for their appointments. Then that leads to decline in their health, too.

Then there is one very important area I see, the psychosocial—the wellbeing of people's mental health. Yes, that is the abuse of the elder but also the strain on our carers and our families that look after them. There are no services available around how we triage our mental health, who we talk to. It is common knowledge who needs those supports, but there should be some type of cultural framework there too to provide for the psychological decline of not just our elders but also the support. I think the strain of our carers goes unnoticed. You are 24/7. You do not have a break. I think because we are remote and rural, the services for psychology support and so on for our elders is limited or not there at all.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Mayor. That was a very fulsome answer and I can hear the passion you have for your community. It is brilliant.

Ms BOURNE: Thanks so much, Mayor Simpson, and thanks for your presentation. What role do the community leaders and elders play in addressing elder abuse within the community?

Mr B Simpson: I just touched briefly on the opening of doors for inquiries like this, and we are blessed to have a Cherbourg Elders Advisory Group chaired by Uncle Eric Law. They are at the pulse of everything, including the elder abuse that is happening. We already had conversations around pockets of whether abuse is happening. I will say that our Ny-Ku Byun needs to be looked at in terms Cherbourg

of the quality of the care for our elders in that home. You hear from community that there are concerns around that as well. There is a lot of community knowledge of elders being abused but also financially. We have a term which we call booking up for food, so that is when they do not have the money in their pocket but they will go and say, 'Can I book up and pay you when I get pension?' Things like that happen as well. That is a financial strain on the whole of the family as well. Yes, elder abuse is very at the forefront of our conversations and I think this is a great vehicle to start finding some solutions.

Miss DOOLAN: Uncle, are there any cultural factors that influence trying to address elder abuse in the community?

Mr B Simpson: Yes, there is usually a spokesperson for each family or an elder of each family. Even around sorry business, we go to that person that has been nominated by their family to speak on behalf of the elder.

Mr DAMETTO: Mr Mayor, thank you very much for coming along today and giving us a full overview of what is happening here in Cherbourg and giving your evidence today. My question is trying to get a little bit amongst the weeds. We have heard in other communities and in other areas where we have had committee hearings about family members taking advantage of elders, and you brushed on that gently just there about booking things up and paying them back later. Is there anything more sinister or more, I guess, prominent going on that you know about or you have heard of—anecdotally, of course?

Mr B Simpson: I have heard that, yes, that happens—a lot of that psychological abuse and financial abuse, emotional abuse. Then it leads to financial emotional transactions and then that flow-on effect. I am sure that our community behind me today—and sorry for my back—may be able to speak more specifically because I do not want to speak on behalf of them.

Mr DAMETTO: Of course.

Mr B Simpson: Yes, but it does happen.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for your answer.

Ms ENOCH: Thank you so much, Mr Mayor, and thanks to everybody for having us here today. I think there will be more opportunity throughout this hearing to talk about one-on-one relationships around elder abuse. We all understand the concepts of humbugging and how that can go too far sometimes and we see some of our elders being in a situation where the humbugging has turned into an abusive cycle. However, I wanted to touch on what you raised as an abusive response when you were talking about government. I know that this community was a very strong supporter of the Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry and in fact ran your own truth-telling session where I heard elders' stories firsthand. They were very brave in telling those stories, but they were very important stories.

Mr B Simpson: Yes.

Ms ENOCH: In terms of your words about an abusive response, this hearing needs to be able to understand that it is not just a one-on-one thing. Sometimes when the government promises something and takes something away—when you are down a path of truth-telling, for instance, and then it is taken away—the follow-on effect of that is a form of abuse against the elders who are very much required to tell their stories right now because we are seeing a library that is disappearing before our eyes.

Mr B Simpson: Yes.

Ms ENOCH: I ask for your views on that.

Mr B Simpson: Yes, the response of abuse. There are 17 discrete communities around Queensland, and of course there are more around Australia. I think the government most of the time treats us as the same and that our priorities are the same when it comes to inquiries, when it comes to truth-telling. As a community our elders said, 'No, we still want to go ahead with the truth-telling regardless.' I think the power of our community's voice is that government does not dictate what we need for our community; we dictate what we need. The abusive response was that our community as deemed for that very short time was depleted and people were asking, 'Where do we go to now?' We had to reframe our enduring partnerships that you were mentioning, so we had to build more relationships with the state and federal government. It is setting us up to fail when the abusive responses happen on any government issue or government initiative.

I think the government must allow for healing when a response of abuse happens on any program, but there also needs to be a platform where we say how we feel as a community. We never even got that chance. It was just, 'Let's just get on with the next government and the next work to be

done.’ So you are always running and reacting instead of planning and being proactive in terms of the response to abuse on whatever level that is. We do become damaged as a community. We do become fearful again. We have to build up the trust, because the mistrust is happening over and over again when there is that response of abuse from government.

I think we also through history have always been responding to the needs of the government of the day. As the mayor and as the leaders of our community, we are saying, ‘No, you listen to what we need. You pay attention to our needs. You pay attention to our priorities.’ Sadly, we know that a lot of our elders and pioneers of Cherbourg in the many tribes that Uncle Eric speaks about have been laid to rest now not having an opportunity to be responsive and be at the table of the conversation of, ‘Why are we hurting again? Why are we feeling disappointed again? Why do we have to reshape our priorities to meet that need?’ There are a lot of layers of abuse in that responsive question, so thank you, and I hope I articulated it in a way.

Mr DALTON: Mayor, that is a really good segue into the next question: what better support could be given for your community here to protect against and maybe in some ways respond to the elder abuse? What would be your key ideas?

Mr B Simpson: This is a good start—more inquiries—but then action, because action speaks louder than words. Action speaks louder than a report. Action speaks louder than recommendations. We need to find an elders framework that looks at those services and an elders framework that looks at the elders’ rights of being on country but also simplifying the continuum of care pathway for our elders and translate that to each discrete community where you optimise the cultural connections and where you optimise the Cherbourg Elders Advisory Group as a segue to further put the words and the inquiry into action. I am sure the elders here today will probably give you some more information about how that framework will translate for Cherbourg.

Mr DALTON: Thank you. That is a really good answer.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mayor Simpson, for your contribution to our hearing today.

Mr B Simpson: Thank you.

LAW, Uncle Eric AM, Private capacity

CHAIR: Uncle Eric, thank you so much for taking the opportunity to speak to us today. We spoke earlier around the change in the nature of intergenerational respect and the role that that plays in terms of elder abuse. Would you like the opportunity to elaborate on that a little bit for the benefit of the committee?

Mr Law: Yes, Chair; thank you very much. I think sometimes when we talk about Aboriginal issues, like the mayor has already stated, we all get painted with the same brush yet we are very different. The thing that I would like to raise with this committee is that the reason it was good back in, say, the fifties and sixties was that we had respect in this community. I cannot go away from that. I think what is missing in all of what we are talking about is that our culture was very simple. It did not need to be complicated. I blame you guys for making it complicated—you politicians, governments and whatever—and I think that is where we have sort of missed out on it.

I heard the mayor talk about it. We used to have teams of local people going out and seeing our elders two or three times a week. That does not happen anymore. I think a lot of the agencies that we have here in Cherbourg would be far more effective if they were coordinated. They all seem to be going in their own little direction thinking that this is what is best for the community of Cherbourg. I think in our situation we need to really take a step back as our community and we need to say to ourselves, 'How do we value our elders?' Once our elders know about that, they then would be able to contribute their long understanding, their knowledge and whatever. I think a lot of elders here in Cherbourg are frightened to do that.

One of the real issues—and this is what this inquiry is about, looking at the issues of elder abuse—is that in a discrete community like this the question of addiction has to come up. That is the thing that is absolutely ruining this community. We keep talking to the police to try and stop it, but it just does not. I think if you find a lot of our young people and you talk to them and you ask, 'Why did you say that to this old person?' they would have a lot of remorse. They would say, 'No, I didn't mean to say that, but the stuff that I'm on—and it's the only stuff that's sort of keeping me going—is making me do that.' We could turn a blind eye to a lot of this stuff and say that everything is all right and we tick a box and then we move on to the next community, but I think our issues here show that we are at an interesting stage in our history because our young people here today are actually learning our language. How amazing is that? It is going to be our young generation—both black and white—who are going to change this country. Our young people, once they have that knowledge of their language, then start looking at things and ask, 'How does that relate to our culture? How do we make that strong?'

We have to understand in a very simple way that our people looked after this country for 60,000 years, so what they were doing must have been okay. I think somehow we tend to forget about that. We tend to this is a technological age and everything is done with robots walking around here in 10 years time doing this sort of stuff. For a community like ours, we are used to that personal touch, used to hearing. That is what our culture is all about. It is about listening—listening to our elders, listening to ourselves and finding out how we can be the best person we can. I think if we got back to the basics and really worked on that, especially with our young people coming through the schools or learning that language—even for me to say those two words today, that has meant a great deal to me. It means I am then connected to my community.

I will just share with you a personal story. Because I have been around in the education field and what have you, I hear all these flash terms like 'intergenerational trauma' and 'connection to country' and stuff like that. I will share with you a story about connection to country. I used to be the director of the TAFE college here next door. I came home one day for lunch. As I said, my mother was a woman who was taken from her community in New South Wales at the age of six and spent the rest of her time here in Cherbourg—not going back to her community, not allowed to go back to her community, not allowed to have contact with her mother. She spent three-quarters of her life here. I came this lunchtime and she was crying. Automatically, I thought somebody had died. I said, 'Mum, who passed away?' She said, 'Nobody.' I said, 'Why are you crying?' She said, 'I want to go home.' I was 50 years of age when that hit me, which said this is what connection to country is all about. No matter how long she lived here, her heart and soul was always going to be back with the Bigambul people of northern New South Wales.

It is about trying to understand that stuff. Let's not undervalue that generational trauma. It is something that is not always going to be mentioned but something that is always going to be in front of whatever we do. We have to try somehow to alleviate that. I always think that we start taking some of that trauma off our people, but it is how we do it, and that is a door I do not know how to open. I

wish I did, because if we could open that door and we could learn how to deal with generational trauma and deal with it in a way that does not affect people ever, then we are halfway down the road to success. We have to look after our elders. If we do not, then we are missing a most important part not just of our cultural history but of the future of this community.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Uncle Eric. We will take a few questions from the committee. My first question is around your experience as both a schoolteacher and a member of the Elders Advisory Committee for Cherbourg. I know that your committee spoke about the elder abuse inquiry coming to town. One of the things that has been raised with us in other hearings is around the language of elder abuse. With young people we talk about healthy relationships, not just between boyfriend and girlfriend but between families and community. With adults we talk about domestic violence. It is the same context but different language. With our seniors we are now using the language of elder abuse. Did your community understand elder abuse instinctively, or do you believe there is a better common language we could develop to make sure our community understands?

Mr Law: I think the mayor touched on this before. When we talk about elders in our community, we are talking about people 40 or 50 years of age. In the normal community they would not be classed as elders, but through all the trauma and whatever they have had to carry that has led them to becoming classed as elders in our community. I think on the language side of it, it is about how we communicate with one another. Regardless of whether we are, like you said, a younger people or whatever, it again comes to that word 'respect'. Let's take our yarning circle, for example. Our yarning circle has been part of our culture for thousands of years. Sometimes you polities might want to think about something like this. I know it is right up there in outer space, but the good thing I like about yarning circles is that everybody is equal. There is no Speaker of the House, there is no whatever, and the only requirement for a yarning circle is to be respectful. If you are not going to be respectful, you do not belong in that yarning circle.

As I said in my welcome, we need to get back to what my great-grandmother would have said to me—we need to go back to culture. Those wonderful old people, who thought about this culture thousands of years ago, must have known what was going to happen in the 21st century, and they must have known that the power of respect is immense. As long as you can harness that, you can hand it down to people and you practise it—stop talking about it; practise it. That is where I reckon that language comes in. There is too much language that is not able to be repeated here, and I think that is sometimes the cause of elder abuse, where people are not being respectful in the way they talk to one another.

I want to get back to that point of looking at our community and seeing how we can get those services out to our people. A lot of our elders cannot walk great distances to hospitals. We do not even have an ambulance here. We have an area, just over the side here, set aside for an ambulance, police station and fire station. It never happened. For some of our old people to get down to the hospital, it is a big deal. Sadly, someone can lose their life trying to do that little journey. It is about, I think, having common sense and looking at where you are, but it has to be something that everybody agrees on. Council and our elders group are not going to change this community; this community is going to change it, but the only way it is going to change is if everybody is on board. If we have a group that does not want to go on board because of what I call lateral violence, which is jealousy and all that sort of stuff, we are never going to get anywhere. We have to talk about those things. If we do not talk about them, they are put away to the side and then nothing happens. Unless we address those things, and unless we come up with a really workable idea, we are going to be like marking time in quicksand and we are not going to get anywhere.

Ms BOURNE: Uncle Eric, it is such a privilege to listen to your wise words and questions almost seem inconsequential. I think what I am finding from this inquiry is that a one size does not fit all and how different the communities are that we go into. I will not ask a question. I am more wanting to listen to today, if you do not mind.

Mr Law: No, that is good. I appreciate that.

Miss DOOLAN: Hi, Uncle. Thank you again for sharing. I could listen to you all day. In your community, what sort of demographic are you seeing who are experiencing elder abuse?

Mr Law: That is actually a good question because if you look at our demographics from, say, the fifties, probably 60 to 75 per cent of our community was over the age of 50. Fast-track it to today, 60 or 70 per cent of our community is under the age of 40. When you look at it, that is a very big gap. We have a gap in the middle who are—I say this publicly and I say it wherever we go and I absolutely feel sorry for them—what I call the loss mob because they are the mob that has not had any mentors, has not had any good mentors, and try to make this stuff up as they go along. Six or seven times out

of 10 they get it right, but it is the other three or four times that they do not get it so well. I think that demographic needs to be looked at. This is a young community. This is not an old community, yet all of our resources, all of the government policies, are around an aging community. This is not an aging community. If we want this community to be like the mayor has said, we need to be able to provide the right resources for the right age groups.

Mr DAMETTO: Uncle Eric, something we have noticed in other places where we have run these committee hearings is that it seems the younger people who decide to abuse elders, whether it is financially or emotionally, come from a place of dependency. Whether it is the cost-of-living crisis or whether it is a change in society in the way young people view their elders, it seems like people are becoming more dependent on their parents and therefore more dependent on their grandparents a lot more. Are you seeing that in your community here?

Mr Law: It happens here. What we have not done well as a community is look at that. We need to skill our young people into asking the right questions in the right environment. Again, I come back to this demon of addiction. It is a real problem. If we cannot do anything for that, that is all we are going to do—just talk about these things and they are going to go through to the keeper. Our young people, I think, get frustrated because they have been knocked back in so many areas. They are sort of saying, 'Well, I'm tired of getting knocked back. I'm tired of getting knocked down. I don't know how to get up and I don't know how to stand up and I don't know how to speak so I can get what is best for me and my family.' The only way we can do that is on an individual basis.

However, I make this point: I look at this community and I always see that there are some good little lighthouses. These little lighthouses are people and families who are really struggling but also really good at what they do. I think governments, both state and federal, tend to forget about those people. They tend to worry about the people who are right down and trying to get them up to a level that they are happy with, yet for the people who are already there I think governments say, 'They are okay. Let's leave them alone.' No. We need to make those little lighthouses strong so that there are more of those little lighthouses around this community. Like I said, it is common sense. Look at the demographics, because the demographics of this community is very different. I think you will find that in most of our communities.

Ms ENOCH: I want to talk a bit about kinship relationships and how that plays out with regard to potential opportunities for elder abuse. You keep talking about going back to culture. We have talked about this in the past: culture heals all things. Culturally, kinship structures are very important, and the elder has a particular role. Where I come from, Quandamooka, and also my grandmother's country, Kaanju, the grandparents raised the children. It is part of an actual structure. I wonder if you might be able to share with the committee how the kinship structure operates here and how that might open up, sadly, the opportunity for potential abuse. The second part to that question is: how do you think the delivery of services, be they government or NGO, might be contributing to that opportunity being opened up, as if there is a deterioration of kinship structure through the delivery of those services that might be actually creating these issues?

Mr Law: Let me answer that last bit first. I think the delivery of services into Cherbourg needs further investigation. Again, I think it is that old one-size-fits-all and, 'Whatever we do here we will do in every other community and we will not take into consideration kinships, we will not take into consideration cultural knowledge or whatever.' You have to understand that the protection act prevented culture from being taught here. That is the burden our elders, our grandparents and our great-grandparents have carried for years and years. How smart those old people were: they were able to hide that, but it got to them at a stage. It got to them at a stage where they could not then hand that on to the next generation. In this community we have to look at kinship, which is a most important deal. It will only flourish when there is respect being practised. I think our young people in particular get very frustrated with the fact that they want to be good First Nations people but they do not know how to be that. As I said, once we start teaching this language and they get that into their mind, I think that will change things.

As for the kinship part of it, those things about our grandparents looking after our children, in our situation here that comes a lot earlier than it should. I think there is that generation that we miss out on. When we miss out on that generation, a big heap is dumped on our grandparents and that is why we lose so many. We have lost so many smart people here, so many wonderful people here, and it is because they have taken on that extra role. That is a cultural thing for us as a community to address. I know that we need to be doing a lot better, but we need to have some resources and some help from government sometimes too. This is probably an area where sometimes fresh eyes are something of benefit, because they can look beyond the forest and see what we cannot because all we can see is what is here.

We need to very much strengthen our kinship. We need to take our time with how we address our people, how we talk to people and how we set targets and objectives and whatever, because if we put them up too far to reach we are just not going to get any action at all.

CHAIR: Very true. Thank you very much, Uncle Eric. Member for Mackay?

Mr DALTON: I will not ask any more questions. I have been thoroughly educated through your submission so far, so thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Uncle Eric, for speaking to us here today. Ladies and gentlemen, recognising that I am now going to be the person standing in the way of lunch at 12.30, I do not wish to hold anyone back from being able to have lunch, but I do want to make sure that the committee gets the benefit of hearing from more people. What we will do is invite anyone who would like to to share their story, share their information, but I may ask the committee to hold the questions and have a little bit of a chat over lunch to deal with some of those one-on-one, just because I do not want anyone who has made the time to come so far to be here to not have a chance to share. Do we have anyone who would like to speak today?

BOND, Aunty Grace, Private capacity

Ms Bond: Thank you. My name is Grace Bond. I am a Koa woman. My grandmother was taken from Winton and brought to this country, but I was born and raised here. I have had the chance to go back to country, but my mother and her siblings never did. I felt very strong going back to country. I would just like to say that I heard everything the mayor and Eric said and I support it. I live in the next town, Murgon. We have been undervalued, like Eric said. Living in town, I feel that we are undervalued, especially when you give your time into here. Sometimes it is very hurtful when that does happen because this is my home; this is where I was born and raised and this is where I am going to be laid to rest. I would just like to raise that about being undervalued because I have a lot to contribute and so has my family.

I am the chair of the Barambah Local Justice Group at the moment. Like Eric said, there are only a few of us that are still around to guide and mentor. From the justice perspective, we have younger ones who have stepped up and want to take the baton and take on that role because it is about our health as elders as well. We are one of the well-resourced communities in Queensland and should be very proud of it. That is all I would like to say.

As for the elder abuse, three years ago I asked whether World Elder Abuse Awareness Day—on 15 June—could be separated from Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month in May, to highlight that. We did that about three years ago, but we would like more support around it and more support, like Eric said, in our service to assist us, especially in that aged-care sector.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Aunty. I think you raise yet again some really important information for the committee to take on board around the role of people who not only live in community but whose heart will always be in community. I think that is really important for us to hear so thank you very much. Is there anyone else who would like the opportunity to speak today? The more voices we have of this community, the better the understanding the committee has, not just for the individual but for the collective.

Witness, Private capacity

Witness: Just a couple of thoughts came to my mind with regard to service provision. I have worked in service provision in the community for about 15 years in not-for-profit and in a statutory space with regard to My Aged Care packages and supports in the community. I reflect on a case where the elderly lady required some support but first asked her sister to call the local hospital to see who was on staff. Speaking about that trust and relationship, before even wanting to approach and get medical assistance, it was really based on the relationship and that trust in the community. There were a few aspects to that case. Elder abuse was one of them, and the need for some help in the home. The process occurred where we went through My Aged Care support and that particular lady ended up with a level 4 home care package, which is the highest home care package you can get. That indicates the level of need she had been managing in her own home before she received the highest care package.

For that particular person, as other people in the room supported, the topic around the abuse and the family abuse was very sensitive because of the desire to still love and care for her adult children. It was very challenging to introduce services into that space. I think we used a clothes line and looked at some practical needs. The local DFV service came in and helped with some practical needs to build that relationship. It was very sensitive because of the loss in the family. Yes, there are protection orders in place, but many times they have conflict in terms of calling police to get that breach because of the love and care for the child and because of the loss of other children. If you look at this community and you look at loss in terms of suicide, it is very difficult for someone to speak up if there is emotional abuse or other forms of abuse.

Before there is a home care package there is an assessment, which is a RAS assessment. They are the sorts of services you get in place before a home care package can come in. It is a couple of years since I have had direct patient work, but for some of those services there are three- to six-month waits. When someone is just starting to need support—they just want a little bit of help grocery shopping but the family is helping in the other areas—there are some long waits. If there is a home care package, usually they are grabbed quickly by services because there is more money involved in it. Providing some service supports just gets someone in the home, looking through a DV or an elder abuse lens as well. There are significant waitlists.

With regard to the increased cases of dementia and so on in the community, at the moment people have to go to Toowoomba to access a geriatrician. There are some specialist services from Brisbane—I think that is dependent on staffing—that do assessments based on Indigenous knowledge. If you look at assessments in a mainstream service, the little Mini-Mental is based on mainstream information so there is a gap in terms of how people get to a geriatrician and get to an assessment. The question of capacity often can go on for months here. The local nursing home a few years ago did not even have a fence around it. It is a mainstream service. It is not a specific service for people with dementia, although they are coping and doing the best they can. There is one aged-care centre in the South Burnett. There is a long waiting list for a dementia-specific place. There are some gaps in services both in the community and with long waitlists. Sometimes when those services come out the family can do the supports better than the service can, knowing that in the community and in the family caring is a part of their nature. The services that come in really have to be very sensitive and attuned to all of the needs. That takes time and trust. At the moment, there are big gaps.

Many years ago I worked in the youth space. There are a lot of grandparents and elders who are caring for their grandchildren and there is a significant demand on them. For example, if one of those grandchildren is excluded from school they have to be re-entered and they need to have a meeting at the school. Then another one might be required at the courts and the courts will not hear that case unless there is an elder present. The demand on the grandparents every day—from the principals of the schools to the health appointments, let alone their own ability to engage in health services and their own health—is something that I think is probably not known about in terms of mainstream services, the demand on one carer for multiple grannies. They are a couple of reflections I have with regard to how that can all intertwine when it comes to the vulnerabilities.

Overcrowding is significant. When you talk about protective factors or statutory agencies that step in and put protective notices in place, there is no place for family members to go if there are breaches. Again, that adds on the pressure, with overcrowding in the housing situation.

CHAIR: Thank you for offering those personal reflections. I think it is important to have a wealth of experience in the workforce and a few varying roles in community. Those personal reflections are noted so thank you very much. Is there anyone else who would like to take the opportunity to share today?

SIMPSON, Uncle Neil, Private capacity

CHAIR: Uncle Neil, the floor is yours.

Mr N Simpson: Good morning, everybody. It is good that you are here today to hear our concerns in our community. It has been a concern for a while, and it is probably overdue because of the generation gap that we have now. Technology could be part of it. Back when I was there, there were no mobile phones, no games, whatever. It takes them away from the respect that they should have. When I was in the home I was taught we had to respect elders, and it did not matter if they are black, white or where they come from; you call them aunty or you call them uncle. Today, we see that gap is getting wider. Honestly, we cannot close it but we can teach it and educate them again because they are not being taught. As I see, it is just going out the window because of technology.

Like I said, we cannot just blame technology. We cannot do anything about it. It is what it is. We need technology, but the effect it has on our families, on our relationships, no matter what age or gender you are, affects us all. I think education is a key aspect of this. I think from day care, at the grassroots levels, to the high schools and even to the universities—across the board there has to be an awareness for everything.

You can see the trauma in the elders—why they act like they act. They could pass it down to who they are looking after, so it is going both ways. It is just bouncing back and forth in families. I believe that education is an important thing here. We need to get that message across where we can work with both the elders and the young people in the house. As Aunty said before, we could have an elders centre where they can come together for mediation if any incidents arise. We can have workers there to mediate, or experts—whatever. This was my thought today, and I thank you for being here.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Uncle Neil.

Mr N Simpson: Just one more thing—I was told by Uncle Eric to come back. I am a youth worker with community services. I am a manager with Edwina. In the youth work, we cater for everybody. We do lawn services and everything. We have our services and we have some business as well. We charge people but, when it comes to elders, we just charge them \$70 and that is it. The price goes up for everyone else. That just gives an idea how we have to look after elders. We also have to look after the young people because they are doing the yards. It is a win-win for everyone. So we make it cheaper and the boys keep their job because of what they are doing—self-generated things. We are starting to try and do more programs around elders as much as possible and also the community, but I will leave that up to my manager to talk about.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Uncle.

Mr B Simpson: Can I add to that?

CHAIR: Of course you can, Mr Mayor.

Mr B Simpson: I think the Youth Advisory Group that Neil is speaking about could be that foundational intentional investment that we grow to bring that respect and that continuum of care to our elders out into Cherbourg. That is all. Thank you.

Mr Law: Could I say something?

CHAIR: Of course you can, Uncle.

Mr Law: The one issue that I want to share with the committee is our Murri Court. The Murri Court idea was set up to change the way we look at our offenders. They have all pleaded guilty to whatever crime they have committed and then we in the Murri Court work out a solution on how we try and help this person not go back into that system.

CHAIR: Break the cycle.

Mr Law: Yes. Again, this is where we need support from government. We need to get some strength behind that Murri Court. We need to make Murri Court a standalone court—that is, managed and controlled by us locally. If the person has already admitted their guilt, there should not be a need for a police officer to go and read through the crime and whatever. They are already guilty. Then it is up to the Murri Court to say, 'Okay, how can we keep this young person here? How can we try and make sure they do not go into prison?'

The government has been talking about boot camps and so on. We are talking about it being more like a cultural camp. We want to be able to send our young men to a place not far from here where they can sit down, think about what they have done and try and get their culture back inside of them, which will make them a better person. We just do not seem to be getting anywhere with it.

We have talked to Justice and Attorney-General—the director-general is our community champion. We have mentioned a couple of times that that is the need. At the moment, we cannot send them anywhere and when they reoffend they are straightaway back into the justice system. We want to stop that because they are our future leaders. If we cannot help them now and prepare them to take on that role, we will just go around in a circle. I know our culture is all about circles, but we need to make those circles very strong.

It would be good if there was any way through this group that we could push for a much better understanding of our Murri Court and for more support for it. Like Aunty Grace said, our justice group plays an important role in this community. We want to make sure that message has gotten across in this community. At the end of the day, those people who come before Murri Court know that they have a commitment to do something. Thank you very much for that. This will be the last time.

Ms Bond: Can I have one more go?

CHAIR: Of course you can, Aunty.

Ms Bond: One of the things I should have mentioned was that, as elders, when we look to take out domestic violence applications the police are not very helpful. You talked about training them in that area but I think they still need to be strengthened in regard to what is elder abuse in our communities.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Aunty Grace. Would you like to come forward? I believe that you have been 'volun-told'.

STEWART, Aunty Edwina, Community Services Manager, Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council

Ms Stewart: I am the community services manager for council. Thank you for coming to our community. I would just like to reflect on the other guest speakers—what the mayor, Eric and Aunty Grace said. We just want to acknowledge that the community-driven initiatives and programs work well in community. We have to address community voices. If we have true and proper engagement with community and they get what they want, it works.

I have worked for council for over 30 years. I have seen the different dynamics of leaders come through community. I believe that is important. We have people come into our office—our young people who have been in trouble with the law and the system and elders. We try and connect them together. I believe their stories are powerful and they make a difference because they identify with community people. It makes a difference to where we work.

On a personal level, I was fortunate enough to see some dear old people who were passionate about our community. I am not saying that our elders are not passionate now, but I do not think they have been valued the same. They have not been given that opportunity. The abuse is real not only in our community but all over—that drug and alcohol abuse. We have damaged children that our elders are looking after. In saying that, the children that we look after who are on the drugs and alcohol and stuff like that—our elders still love them. They are still family. It is important to care for those children too and put them first.

I think that is the situation. If community is not passionate about speaking about issues like suicide prevention and the dual diagnosis, where our kids have mental health issues through drug abuse, and things like that—if it is not taken seriously, we have no hope. Our families have no hope. I can see the difference if community has that voice and if we make it appropriate. It is appropriate. We are living it. We have to support that.

We could have programs where our elders are with our children, walking with them. The reason these children are here is that they have been through that hard life, and the elders know because they have come through the other side. We have to get agencies on board with that, to work with that. I believe what Eric just said: we need that coordination around service provision. It is important. Coordination is important. I would just like to reiterate that. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Aunty.

FISHER, Ms Angie, Private capacity

Ms Fisher: My name is Angie and I have been working in the community for 10 years but in the last five years in the DV sector. My role at the moment is immediate safety, working with all women who experience DV, whether they be our elders or our younger women. Prior to that, I was very lucky to be able to facilitate a grannies group. It was an emotional wellbeing group with some of our grannies who are here today. I cannot say enough about the value of the elders to the community, even in the DV sector. If we brought a young woman to the grannies group who was experiencing DV, the elders would give that person support.

I would like to quickly mention, because I know we only have a little bit of time, some of the impacts that maybe you guys can help with the DV. The No. 1 impact I see on households is housing. You might have three or four families in a house and there might be two people that are committing DV in that household. No matter what happens, our grannies love their kids and the kids love their grannies and they will do whatever they can do, even if it is to the detriment of their own health, emotional wellbeing or financial wellbeing.

Another thing is the Centrelink process. It is so hard for our elders because it has to be done online. Yes, we do have some Centrelink help in Cherbourg but we do not have a proper Centrelink office here anymore. If they need to get to Kingaroy, there is no transport. They might have three or four adult grandchildren in their household who are not on payments—sometimes there is the gap or they might not have registered the births so they have no ID. Granny's feeding them and looking after them on her wage, which is not very much. The cost of living has made that even more difficult. She cannot transport them to get them to Centrelink. Then there are some hold-ups in the processes: you have to apply to register the birth, you have to apply to get a birth certificate and then you can see what other ID you can get before the Centrelink process will start. I have seen clients just give up going through the Centrelink process.

We need enough housing for the people and Centrelink processes that are a little bit easier and more understandable. I was with a client and while we travelled from Cherbourg to Gympie we were on hold with Centrelink the whole time. It has to be easier for people and there has to be some more understanding when things have been difficult for people to get ID or go through the processes.

There are also our grandparents whose children are drug dependent and they want to look after their grandkids. They know that, if they actually get a payment for that child, the parent who is using drugs might come and get the child so they can then get the payment. Help for grandparents who are looking after children financially needs to be available. I think that is it. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Angie. Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank each of you for honouring us with your time, your wisdom as well as your stories. It has been incredibly important for us to hear those. Today we have heard a few things. We have heard that we need to look at the definition for elder to recognise the difference in the demographic and the age of people who are elders in communities. We have heard about the desire to walk together, underlying that respect and culture do not happen by accident but are intangibly taught in schools, in families and in homes over generations.

We have heard about the tyranny of distance and how it is affecting not only access to services but also service delivery in community and how that then plays a role in the vulnerability of our seniors. We have also heard about communication—communication for abuse victims, communication to advise of the services that are available and communication challenges just to even gain access to those services.

We will take each of those messages back to the Queensland parliament on your behalf and ensure that the documentation for our report is there. On behalf of the committee, once again, thank you very much. This now concludes this public hearing and I thank you all for participating today. Please join us for lunch.

The committee adjourned at 12.32 pm.