



LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr PS Russo MP—Chair
Mrs LJ Gerber MP
Ms SL Bolton MP (virtual)
Ms JM Bush MP
Mr JM Krause MP
Mr BL O'Rourke MP

Staff present:

Mrs K O'Sullivan—Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE SUPPORT PROVIDED FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Friday, 28 April 2023

Rockhampton

FRIDAY, 28 APRIL 2023

The committee met at 9.21 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into support provided for victims of crime. My name is Peter Russo, member for Toohey and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose lands, winds and waters we all share. With me here today are Laura Gerber, member for Currumbin and deputy chair; Jonty Bush, member for Cooper; Jon Krause, member for Scenic Rim; Barry O'Rourke, member for Rockhampton; and Sandy Bolton, member for Noosa, via videoconference.

The hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. These proceedings are being recorded. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and my directions. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I ask people to turn their mobile phones off or to silent mode, please.

WATSON, Mr Glenn, Private capacity

WATSON, Mrs Linda, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome. I will ask you some questions and then you can tell the committee your concerns. Do not be worried. Glenn, you briefly told me about your concerns when I met you earlier this morning. Do you want to tell us your story each in turn? It is important that only one person speaks at a time so that Hansard gets an accurate recording of what is being said. The committee then will ask you some questions. Answer the questions if you are able to. It is not a test. If there is something that you cannot answer because you do not know, just say, 'Sorry, I cannot answer that.' Glenn, you were outlining some of the issues that you had.

Mr Watson: Our concern is that when the court case finally came up, we were of the understanding that he was sentenced to 30 years in a maximum-security jail. We put in a request to be notified of what was happening with him when he was sentenced. For years we got nothing. Somewhere along the line, what we put in must have got mislaid or we mailed it wrong. A friend suggested that we put in a request to find out, which was approximately three years ago. We found out that he was still in Etna Creek prison in low-security, not in maximum-security. That is what we cannot understand. It is very upsetting to find out that he has not even served half his sentence, yet he is in low-security. We cannot understand why that is. That is our concern. Why? Once we were notified, they were pretty good with the information, but we have not heard anything else now for the last three years of what is going on up there.

CHAIR: Glenn, did you actually have contact with Corrective Services or another organisation?

Mr Watson: The wife knows more about that because she was the one they rang and she was speaking to them.

CHAIR: Linda, can you expand on that, please?

Mrs Watson: To go over what Glenn said, I sent the register form off at the time. We heard nothing back for years. Then a friend of mine told me to register again, and that is when we found out that he was in low-security, serving his time. I was then put onto the parole number, and they were very helpful. That is who told us that he was in low-security and told us that he was up for parole in 15. They were very informative, once we were actually told. There was a breakdown in communicating with the victims that, 'You have to do this' or 'Keep a check on whether you are registered.' There were a number of years that we did not even know that we were not on the register. Maybe that is one thing that needs to be looked at there.

Mrs GERBER: Can you give us a bit more detail? You obviously have already met with the chair and given your story to the chair, but the committee has not heard your story. I am uncertain as to what you are talking about in terms of being victims of crime and what you have gone through and the detail that you need. Are you able to expand on what you are talking about?

Mr Watson: It was a domestic violence situation. He brutally murdered our daughter. It was four years before the court case came up for sentencing. Then when it did, the sentencing that he got was 30 years in maximum-security, but—

Mrs Watson: Can I say something? He got 25 years for my daughter and five years for attempted murder of his daughter—he tried to take her life—and it was four years before he went to trial so that was taken off that time, of course, and it is just—

Mrs GERBER: I am sorry. If it is too difficult for you to talk, just let the committee know. Throughout that process, were you kept informed of what was happening in the court?

Mrs Watson: No.

Mrs GERBER: Did you have a victim liaison officer? Was any assistance provided to you? How long ago are we talking about?

Mrs Watson: It is 15 years this year. I cannot fault the lead-up to it. The police and everyone were great; they were really good. They kept us informed. At the time when he first was sentenced, he was trying to go through the mental health tribunal. I had constant phone calls from Mental Health, which really upset me because to me there was no mental health there. That was really upsetting, the amount of calls I got about that. I was given more information about him going to the mental health court side of it than anything else at that specific time. After that, we had no communication at all until I found out where he was three years ago.

Mrs GERBER: In relation to this inquiry, part of what this committee is looking at is around the processes, which is what you have just talked about, but it is also around the financial assistance that might be provided to victims of crime.

Mrs Watson: We did get a payout from them which was wonderful, which helped me put Makayla through—we got custody of Makayla; she was only two at the time.

Mrs GERBER: Your grandchild?

Mrs Watson: It helped us financially with a few things and also to put her through day care—that was a massive help—and other things, if we needed counselling et cetera. We did have that support at that time. I cannot fault them there.

Mrs GERBER: How long ago was that?

Mrs Watson: That was 15 years ago when it went through, yes.

Mrs GERBER: Thank you very much for coming today.

Ms BUSH: Glenn and Linda, I am really sorry for the loss of your daughter. Thank you so much for coming here today. I understand the process you are talking about. You are talking about the victims register that sits in Queensland Corrective Services, and that is the register that is obligated to inform you of the offender's status and where they might be moving in the prison system, including parole. How did you find out about that victims register? Who told you that you could make an application?

Mrs Watson: That was at the time of the hearing. The lady who helped us through the court system—Christine, I think her name was—was the one who helped us through that at that particular time.

Ms BUSH: She would have been a victim liaison officer in the DPP?

Mrs Watson: Yes. She was wonderful.

Ms BUSH: Did she help you make the application and submit it? Did you find that process okay? Was it a hard process?

Mrs Watson: No, she told us to go and register. I did not know. You know, as you are, you are just all over the place. I was lucky that our lawyer helped me fill it out. I did not know. It was so complicated with all the questions on there. I noticed that with the new one, when I registered, it was not as hard to put all the information down. It was more straightforward on the new form compared to the old one that I filled out.

Ms BUSH: Yes. I think they do try to keep improving.

Mrs Watson: Definitely.

Ms BUSH: It sounds like one of the issues was that you sent it off and it went somewhere and no-one ever confirmed you were on the register.

Mrs Watson: It was years and years and years. I just assumed I was on the register.

Ms BUSH: That is certainly an issue. You then re-initiated contact and rang them and got the information, and that sounds like that was quite helpful.

Mrs Watson: Yes.

Ms BUSH: It sounds like something that might be helpful is someone who can sit and explain to you why he might be in low-security—what that means and the reasons for that—to give you a sense of why these things happen and what you could do about that.

Mrs Watson: Yes.

Ms BUSH: One of the other interesting things you have mentioned which has come up is that a victim's journey is sometimes incomplete. It happens not just at the time or at court but also down the track. When they make a parole application, it can be retraumatising for people, and the need for support to be there at that time is important. What would you say about that? Would you agree with that comment?

Mr Watson: Yes, I agree with that, because since I have found out I have been on monthly visits to psychologists trying to deal with it. Now it is getting closer to this time, it is getting worse.

Ms BUSH: Yes, I understand. Are you connected to support? We have the Homicide Victims' Support Group in Queensland. Have you connected with them at all?

Mrs Watson: Yes.

Mr Watson: Yes, Brett Thompson is going to help us with our impact statements and everything for the parole hearing. I cannot fault the victims-of-crime support group; they have been really good. They have been supportive. The police have been supportive with us the whole way through. A lot of that helps, but—

Ms BUSH: It sounds like you have had some really good people along the way.

Mrs Watson: Yes, we have.

Mr Watson: We have.

Mrs Watson: The victims support group has rung me many times, just to check in. Especially around the anniversary I get a check-in. I had one lady in the beginning which made it so much easier, because I did not have to explain over and over. I found it very important to have the same person when they give you that call.

Ms BUSH: That has come up a bit.

Mrs Watson: She was on the board a long time, and then she left and we got another one. To have that contact where you did not have to explain yourself over and over again made it so much more special. They have been good, yes.

Ms BUSH: Thank you so much for coming today. That was really useful for us.

Mrs GERBER: In relation to the Parole Board and the parole process, have you had some support through that process? I am not sure about the circumstances of his case and whether he is eligible for parole or when it might come up, but, if that does approach and if that does eventuate, are you in touch with services to support you through that?

Mr Watson: We have been given a date, which is December this year, but we have been asked to sit down and speak with a person on the Parole Board. That is probably in the near future. The wife has had a contact from them. Yes, we would—

Mrs GERBER: Is there anything about that process that you want to see improved, or is there anything about that process that is difficult for victims that you think the committee should hear about?

Mr Watson: I need to get a better understanding, because the thing that is upsetting me more than anything is: for the severity of how he murdered our daughter, why he has been—to me—pampered in a low-security jail and not doing at least 15 years in maximum-security and then been lowered as it gets on? I cannot understand why, after so many years, which is very little, he has been pampered, to me, in a low-security jail and not a maximum-security jail. That is my big issue and that is my—

Mrs GERBER: No-one has communicated?

Mr Watson: No. We have not been given an explanation as to why that has happened. It is very distressing to know that.

Mrs GERBER: How have you tried to find that information? Have you asked the question of police? Where have you gone to find out?

Mr Watson: I think the only time was when Linda relayed back to me after she spoke to the people from the Parole Board when we found out where he actually was. We have not had any other correspondence from them since then.

CHAIR: Our time in relation to this has expired. Thank you for coming along and for the information you have given. I want you to understand that you may have to reach out to the secretariat for some follow-up in relation to where this information ends up ultimately so that you can get the assistance you need.

Mrs Watson: We appreciate that.

Mr Watson: Thank you very much.

HOGAN, Mr Brian, Private capacity

LAUGA, Ms Brittany, Member for Keppel, Parliament of Queensland

CHAIR: I now welcome Brian Hogan. I understand Brittany Lauga MP is his support person. Brian, would you relate your story as you were relating it to me earlier? Then the committee will have some questions for you.

Mr Hogan: At about this time last year—it was 24 April, the day before Anzac Day—I was spending some time in the garden at home. On dusk, if not just a bit before, I locked my car, which was out in the driveway. I closed the tilt-a-door and I put my keys under the house. I was watching the NRL game between, I think it was, the Raiders and someone else. There was a bad refereeing decision, so I flew upstairs and I said to my wife, Anne, ‘Did you see that?’ She said, ‘Yes, but that sounds like your car starting up.’ I said, ‘No. Well, I just locked it.’ She said, ‘But where are the keys?’ I said, ‘They are on the table under the house. I closed the tilt-a-door, but it wasn’t locked.’

Anyway, I flew downstairs and there were three young First Australians there. One of them had taken the keys off the table under the house and had started my almost brand new Hilux. He was sitting in the car in the driver’s seat and the other two were rummaging through my tools. I used to be a builder and I only retired a couple of years ago. They got the shock of their lives, because I had rushed down the stairs and started screaming at them. Then they assaulted me and then they made a dive for my car. One of them got in the front and the other person got in the back. I flew outside and stood in front of my car and I said, ‘Hop out of my car. You are stealing my car’ or, ‘You think you are going to steal my car?’ The vehicle just moved straight towards me, very slowly at first, and then they sped up a bit and I sort of moved back a little bit, and then it started to accelerate. It was a four-wheel drive with a bull bar on the front, with a side rail and a sidestep. I lost my balance out the front because the car actually pushed me a little bit. I jumped to one side to save getting knocked over, and this hand got caught between the side rail and the mudguard. They dragged me down the rest of the driveway and 50 metres up the bitumen road.

I had managed to drag my hand out. I only had a pair of footy shorts on and a T-shirt—no shoes, because I was trying to have a beer under the house to go upstairs. The action of dragging me down the road—I sustained all of these injuries. It turned out to be massive internal injuries with fractured ribs here, fractured ribs there and a fractured sternum. I played a lot of football years ago, but I never had rib cartilage displacement, but that also happened apparently.

Of course, by that time, another person came along. I was still lying on the road and my wife was out there screaming to this person, ‘Stop! Stop! Stop!’ Otherwise I would have got run over, because it was almost dark by that time. I broke my glasses and my watch and all that sort of stuff, but I could not get off the road because I was so injured. This person stopped their car and got me up and back under the house to where I had been sitting in a chair at the edge of the driveway. In between that time, this person’s daughter had rung triple-O and the police were there promptly. I would say within probably five minutes they were there, along with a handful of detectives as well. I was in complete shock and so was my wife. I was absolutely covered in blood. There was no skin left on my insteps and my toenails were all ripped off. The ambulance turned up at the same time, and they managed to wipe all the blood off me. I did not think I was too bad until I got to the hospital. My face was out here. I went through a series of X-rays, MRIs and all that sort of stuff at the base hospital. The injuries that I had were pretty—

CHAIR: Brian, I do not mean to interrupt. You also told me about the process whereby you were expecting the offenders to be sentenced in May but you found out that they were dealt with yesterday.

Mr Hogan: They were, yes.

CHAIR: Could you explain that to the committee?

Mr Hogan: I was just talking to Brittany at her Yeppoon office yesterday about something else. I was over at the north side police station a couple of months ago and I just happened to mention it to the lovely girl behind the counter there. She said, ‘I can find out for you, if you like.’ She went to the computer and said, ‘Those people who survived are at Etna Creek now. One of them is going to be sentenced on 1 May and the next one is going to be sentenced on 29 May.’ I did not think any more about that. I said, ‘Thanks for that.’ When I was talking to Brittany yesterday about something else, I was telling her about the situation with my stolen car and I told her the dates that the police had told me that these people were going to be sentenced. I picked the paper up this morning and they had been to court yesterday or the day before—I cannot remember the exact date—and they were sentenced then.

CHAIR: Brian, I will hand over to the deputy chair, who will ask you some questions.

Ms Lauga: Chair, before that, can I add something to give some context to Brian's story? It is about Brian's property. His car, the property that was inside the car and his phone were not returned to him for over six months after this event. He really needed his phone for the SIM card, to have the number replaced and to try to obtain all of the data, photographs and family memories that were on the phone, but it took over six months. There is an element of impact as a victim with respect to his own property as well.

Mrs GERBER: Brian, thank you for sharing your story and I am really sorry for what you have been through. It sounds extremely traumatic and should not happen to anyone. Can you tell us about your experience as a victim throughout the court process? It is a two-part question. First, can you tell the committee whether you received any assistance and whether you were supported emotionally, financially or psychologically? Second, throughout the court process, did you feel like you were kept informed, and how do you think the system might be able to be improved?

Mr Hogan: I think it was three days after I got back from hospital there was a knock on our front door and there were two people who actually looked like police but they were apparently police volunteers. I invited them in and we had a cup of coffee and they wanted to know how I was feeling about the whole affair—whether I was stressed and so on. At that stage, I think I was still in a bit of shock and so was my wife, but they were nice and they sat and talked to us for about an hour and a half. They asked me whether I needed some ongoing assistance and I said at that stage of the game probably not, because I was not feeling too bad. It was only because I was not in my own vehicle when it rolled and this person got killed up at Ogmoo so I had managed to separate the emotional side of things away from me. Yes, it was my car but it had nothing to do with me, but you cannot help the reality that my car was stolen by these people who were drugged out and drove up the Bruce Highway and rolled my car six times and one of them got killed.

Apart from the other persons who came two or three days after, the police were really good to start with and then I had to keep going on them. On the night that it happened, on 24 April last year, my wife and my son went to the police station and the detective told my son that they had my phone and my phone case with all my cards in it—my licence, my Medicare card and so on. The police actually showed my wife and my son the phone and the cards and they said, 'You can have the cards and the phone case but we are keeping the phone.' My son asked, 'Why is that?' The answer was, 'There's been a fatality at the scene so this has to be forensically investigated.' My son asked, 'How long will this take?' The answer was, 'It will not take long.' Like Brittany said, almost five or six months later I still did not have my phone.

Mrs GERBER: Did you get help from Victim Assist? Did you make an application for financial assistance?

Mr Hogan: No, I did not.

Mrs GERBER: Did anyone tell you that that was available to you?

Mr Hogan: No, they did not.

Mrs GERBER: How long ago are we talking about?

Mr Hogan: It was 24 April last year. I spoke to Telstra on numerous occasions about my phone. They had unscrewed the knob off the stick of my four-wheel drive and the threaded piece was up about that far on the middle console. My phone was locked with a PIN number on it and it was in the car at the time, and they had managed to smash the back of the phone on the exposed four-wheel drive stick 58 times I think and the front 38 times, or something like that. It was a complete mess. My wife and my son actually saw the phone on that first night.

I kept going back into the police station after I got out of the hospital and I was feeling a bit better. I told them who I was and that I wanted my gear back. The police told my son and they told me the first time I arrived there that all my equipment that was in the car—which was some of my tools, my four-wheel-drive equipment, the recovery ropes and that sort of thing, because we used to do a fair bit of fishing, beach driving and those sorts of things—was supposed to be in store in the south side police station. I asked, 'Can I have that back?' 'No, you can't.' 'Well, how about my phone?' 'I just told you about your phone. It's got to be forensically examined.' I said, 'But my phone's already been locked,' and there is no way in the wide world these people would have been able to make a telephone call from my phone without the PIN number. The detectives told me, 'No, you're not getting it back because it has to be forensically examined.' Then he said, 'If you have a PIN number, can we have it?' I said, 'No, you can't,' and he got a bit angry at that. This other detective rang me a couple of weeks after that and said, 'Here's the story. Can we have your PIN number?' I said, 'You can have it. That's fine.'

Mrs GERBER: I realise you probably cannot quantify the emotional and physical damage that has been done to you, but are you able to give the committee an indication of the financial loss that you may have incurred as a result of the crime that has been perpetrated against you? You lost your car, your phone.

Mr Hogan: The vehicle was insured. That is the first thing.

Mrs GERBER: I know there was insurance, but you were without it for six months. Is that about right?

Mr Hogan: Not quite. The vehicle was taken by Fitzroy Towing out to their holding yard at Kawana, and because there was a fatality at the scene no-one was allowed to photograph it or anything like that. My insurance company kept ringing me because my son had the pressure on them to get a payout so I could get another vehicle. The police kept saying, 'No, you can't go anywhere near the vehicle. It's got to be forensically examined.' Yes, I can understand that.

I kept going back to the police station and asking for my phone. Telstra had said to me to get the SIM card out of it and they could have the phone because it was cooked. They said, 'Just get the SIM card out of it and we can transfer all the data onto a brand new phone of yours. Because you own the number, we can transfer the number now. We can't guarantee we can transfer the data out of your phone that is elsewhere. It's got to come over here to get done.' I was back to the police again and I told them the story, but it was, 'No, you can't have it.'

Mrs GERBER: Is there a figure that you can put on that? Can you quantify what kinds of losses you suffered financially?

Mr Hogan: It was all the travelling backwards and forwards, but that is neither here nor there.

Mrs GERBER: So the insurance compensated you for your car?

Mr Hogan: Yes, they did.

Mrs GERBER: And you got your phone back.

Mr Hogan: I got paid out for my vehicle. However, for the contents of the vehicle, the insurance was only worth I think \$750. We did a summary of what was in the vehicle that was supposed to be held at the south side police station. It was about \$7,000 worth of equipment that I had in the car, and the insurance payout was \$750.

Mrs GERBER: That is a significant loss.

Mr Hogan: I kept asking the police, firstly, for my phone and, secondly, 'Can I please have all my equipment that is supposed to be stored here?' I was told, 'I'll check.'

CHAIR: Brian, did you ever get the equipment back that was stored at the storage yard?

Mr Hogan: Yes, some. I will go briefly to that. I think it was about five months later or something, this young detective called Jake rang me up and said, 'Mr Hogan, my name is Jake from the south side station. I believe that we have your phone.' I said, 'Yes, fancy that. You do have my phone.' He goes, 'Well, do you want to come over and pick it up, because you have to sign for it, or will I deliver it to you?' I said, 'You can deliver it to me if you like. That will be fine.' He said, 'Okay. Will you be home now?' I said, 'Yes, I'm home now.' He said, 'Right, I'll be over there in half an hour.' He came over. I shook his hand. He said, 'You don't remember me but I was here the night that your car was stolen.' I said, 'Mate, I was just in'—

CHAIR: Brian, just to go back: the policeman delivered your phone, but I was interested in the other property that you were referring to that was at the storage facility or at the holding yard. Did you ever get any of that back, such as your towropes and tools?

Mr Hogan: Yes, I did. At the same time as this detective was at my place, he said to me, 'I believe that you are after your gear out of the car.' I said, 'Yes, please. It's supposed to be stored over at the south side station.' 'No, it's not. It's still in your car.'

CHAIR: Did you get it?

Mr Hogan: I got some of it, yes. He said, 'What are you doing now?' I said, 'I am standing here talking to you.' He said, 'I can take you out to Fitzroy Towing now and see if we can recover some of the gear out of your car because it is not stored at the south side station.' I said, 'That's what I was told.' I said, 'That's a load of rubbish to start with.' Anyway, he took me out there. We signed in, the both of us. He said, 'Which is your vehicle?' I said, 'That's my vehicle there.' It was just unrecognisable.

CHAIR: Brian, I do not mean to interrupt but I need to allow the member for Noosa to ask you a question.

Ms Lauga: I am sorry, Sandy, but can I help explain that a little better or elaborate a bit more? Mr Hogan's car was rolled seven times. It was unrecognisable, pretty much. All the gear was inside the car and had been sitting in the car for six months.

CHAIR: Sandy, do you have a question before we finish this part of the hearing?

Ms BOLTON: Thank you, Chair. Brian, out of everything you have outlined and what you have gone through, is there anything additional that you believe the committee can consider for how victims such as yourself could be better assisted in the process, in addition to what you have mentioned?

Mr Hogan: What they could have done better was to keep me informed about what was happening with the whole process, but that did not happen. I kept going back in to the police station, and at one stage I was accused of being a serial pest because I was there every second day. I just laughed and walked out. I said to this detective, 'What do you do over there, Jake?' He said, 'I'm the go-to man, Brian. I'm the Mr Fix-it for south side station and I cannot apologise enough for this big delay.' In between that, some IT expert apparently had a go at my phone and lost all the data. When I did get my phone back, I took it straight over to Telstra and they said, 'No, this has been interfered with. All your data has gone from the cloud and you will never get it back.'

CHAIR: Brian, thank you for coming along and giving your evidence today. It has been very helpful to the committee in its deliberations.

STEEDMAN, Ms Peta, Executive Officer and Program Manager, Healing and Recovery, Helem Yumba Central Queensland Healing Service

CHAIR: Good morning. Thank you for being here and thank you for your patience.

Ms Steedman: No problems at all.

CHAIR: The way that the committee hears evidence is that we ask people to make a statement of up to five minutes. We are not absolutely strict about the five minutes if you have more to say. However, we are conscious that the longer your statement goes the less time there is for questions from the committee. Would you like to start, Peta?

Ms Steedman: Briefly, Helem Yumba is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisation. The service was started by a community movement in 2003. Our primary work is with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people impacted by domestic and family violence. We also work in partnership locally with CatholicCare under mainstream funding to provide support around domestic and family violence for both aggrieved and perpetrators. We also have a small amount of mental health, alcohol and other drug support funding.

In terms of keeping things simple, there are probably just a couple of main points organisationally that we would highlight as major issues for us. In working with victims, one of our primary concerns is notification to victims around the location of the perpetrator. It is a constant theme that we just do not know where they are.

I have a regular service user I have been working with who has an extensive history of domestic and family violence. She has separated from the perpetrator. He has been jailed six times. There has been strangulation, stalking, coercive control. She will know his court dates. He is breaching still regularly. They have been separated for five years but there are still constant breaches. She will know his court dates but she will not be notified as to the outcome so there will be phone calls back and forth between us. She is stressing. She is hypervigilant. She is worried about the kids. He has presented at day care and things like that. Then we go through the formal process where I complete a form and send it to the police asking for the whereabouts and quoting the legislation for the information-sharing allowance. It is just a really time-consuming process and for her it is the retraumatisation, the worry and the stress. She has to change her habits. She changes her kids' habits and pickup locations at school.

That happens for quite a few of our service users. Another woman we are currently working with is in our coordinated high-risk response team. She received a phone call to notify her that the perpetrator had been to court and had been released. She said, in her words, 'No xxx, Sherlock. He's at my front door.' He was already there. The lack of planning and notification puts some of our victims under so much additional pressure, worry and stress that is really just not necessary because it is a communication issue. That is one of our primary issues.

We support our service users to access Victim Assist, but a lot of them do not understand that process. It is even things like getting evidence together and seeing doctors. Being able to get GP appointments quickly is nearly impossible here. The follow-up and follow-through can be really difficult to navigate, but we do support individuals to do that.

Often a problem for our women particularly is misidentification as a perpetrator. We work with a lot of women who have cross-orders where you have reactive violence or self-defence. A lot of our victims are being identified also as perpetrators. Sometimes there is a lack of understanding by police responding to the dynamics of relationships and what happens there, so a lot of our women are criminalised and demonised in that process.

We also have probably some more complex issues that have come up for us lately. We have been working with young people as a special project. We have noticed significant increases in the numbers of young people being subjected to or participating in domestic and family violence. We have some specific examples at the moment where we have young women who are, on the surface of it, actively involved in some of the youth crime and the vehicle crime that is happening in Rockhampton. We are aware of some young women we are working with who are subjected to violence and coercive control in order to engage them in those processes: 'I'm going. You're not allowed to stay home on your own. You're coming with me.' These young women are not only subjected to violence and coercive control. I know they have free will and the rest, but they are then dragged into that criminal activity so they are being criminalised. Then there is their treatment within the justice system. It impacts on how they are treated as a victim of domestic violence because they are a perpetrator of other crimes. Often they do not receive the compassion and understanding that a victim normally would. I am not sure if I am explaining that well.

CHAIR: You are making sense, Peta. I understand the complexities of the situation.

Ms Steedman: It is a theme for our women that, because of racism, intergenerational trauma, colonialisation, there are often co-occurring mental health issues, and drug and alcohol issues. Our women will often be viewed as perpetrators of crime more broadly than domestic and family violence, which again interferes with their treatment and the response that they get as a victim of domestic and family violence.

Mrs GERBER: Peta, you may have said it, but I could not quite catch everything that you said right at the start. Does your organisation just support women or do you support anyone who is referred to you?

Ms Steedman: We support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men. We work with perpetrators and victims. As an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation, we have a big focus on family reunification or supporting families.

Mrs GERBER: How do you get the referrals? Do the police refer clients to you?

Ms Steedman: The majority of our referrals are through police, through the RMCS system. They are referrals that are made by the first responding officers. Those referrals happen in the heat of the moment, while the police are responding to an issue. We also get referrals from a range of different community service organisations, from Queensland Health, a lot from Corrections, probation and parole. We work really closely with the Murri Court, with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. We also work with non-Indigenous people through our partnership with CatholicCare. We receive referrals through them, through the police and a whole range of community service organisations. Self-referrals are some of our biggest referrals for victims of domestic and family violence.

Mrs GERBER: In terms of the victims of crime, do you deal with just domestic and family violence matters or do you take referrals for anything?

Ms Steedman: We are not specifically funded to support victims of crime more broadly, but we do see quite a broad range. Particularly through domestic and family violence, it is primarily related to the victimhood. With our mental health, alcohol and other drug services, often we have a lot of individuals coming through who have also been victims of crime.

Mrs GERBER: The terms of reference for this committee inquiry are basically in two parts. The first part is how victims of crime—and the victims that your organisation supports are victims of domestic and family violence—might be better supported through the criminal justice process and through the investigation process. The second part is how a victim of domestic and family violence might be better supported through an application for financial assistance through the Victims of Crime Assistance Act. Looking at those two terms of reference, does your organisation support victims of domestic and family violence in making an application?

Ms Steedman: To Victim Assist, yes, we do.

Mrs GERBER: What is your experience with those applications to Victim Assist in terms of the timeliness of payouts, in terms of the amount of red tape, in terms of the difficulty that your applicants or your victims of crime might have in obtaining the assistance they need?

Ms Steedman: Often gathering evidence is a barrier and a difficulty that they face. A lot of our service users do not have regular GPs. Access is really difficult. That is the primary avenue that a lot of people we are working with access in terms of evidence gathering.

I think there is an issue with the process being unfamiliar. A lot of people are really unaware that that support is there. I would make an assumption that there are a lot of people who just do not know and are not accessing that support because they are unaware of it. If people come to our service, we make them aware. Police are our primary source of referrals. Because of the environment in which those referrals are made and a whole lot of other complicating factors, even if someone consents it is often not a meaningful consent in that environment at that time.

It can be very difficult to engage people to continue receiving services and support. Even having communication with them to let them know about the supports that might be available to them can be really difficult. There is just a lack of awareness. I am sure that if more people knew then they would be trying to access that support.

Mrs GERBER: What about financial assistance? Does your organisation have experience in the timeliness of the payout of financial assistance under the Victims of Crime Assistance Act?

Ms Steedman: For victims it is never quick enough. As I said, a lot of times for us it seems to be the process. The application process can be very frustrating. It can be time-consuming. We are working with a lot of people who have really significant financial limitations. In some ways it is an

unknown and untrusted process. People's ability to commit and prioritise it over other needs, such as having somewhere to sleep tonight and something to eat—it can feel like it is not a priority. It is hard to see. People do not have a good idea of what they are actually going to get or what they are entitled to or how that might look, if that makes sense.

CHAIR: Yes, it makes perfect sense. If you are looking for where you are going to sleep or where you are going to get your next feed from, filling in a form is not a priority.

Ms Steedman: Having to get to the doctor or follow up is an issue. Sometimes it is taking three to four weeks to even get a GP appointment, even if you can. For a lot of our bulk-billing services like Bidgerdii and Mandalay now, if you have not been there in the last two years they will not take you. They are not taking new service users. I think there is a lack of understanding of how much of a barrier—

CHAIR: What were those two services?

Ms Steedman: Mandalay Medical Centre is one of our largest bulk-billing services and Bidgerdii Community Health Service is our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical service here in Rocky. They are another bulk-billing service. We are so low on GPs that if you have not been a regular client they will not see you and they are not taking new patients. It can be really tricky just negotiating that.

Ms BOLTON: Peta, within the services and from your experience and time working with victims, are restorative justice practices ever utilised?

Ms Steedman: That is a tricky one. Do you mean led by the police or the courts or by us organisationally?

Ms BOLTON: Is it being offered to victims? It is a voluntary meeting of the perpetrator and the victim. It is usually offered through the process. Are you familiar with it?

Ms Steedman: Yes, primarily in the youth justice space in Rockhampton through the youth justice conferencing process but not for adults. I guess the closest thing to that might be the Murri Court process, but it is not linking with the victim. It is the elders who will express the impacts on the victim and community and highlight the need to atone or make amends. Yes, within the youth justice space I am aware of the conferencing.

Mr KRAUSE: Peta, you spoke about keeping victims informed about court processes, especially when people are released or where they are living. Are you talking about that in the context of people who are offenders who are on parole or even when their sentences have been served or expired? What is the context around that?

Ms Steedman: Usually when people are released from custody. For a lot of our women, for a lot of the victims, when they know someone is incarcerated obviously they feel a lot safer because he is not there. It is particularly important for women where we know there have been ongoing breaches when men are out. They will come up for parole or bail hearings. They might be released on bail but the woman is not always notified in a timely way. As I said, we have had one just within the last three weeks where the offender was at her door by the time someone was calling her to let her know he had been released.

Mr KRAUSE: I know it is digging into the weeds a little bit, but in most cases is it a case of people being released on bail or parole in circumstances where these things arise?

Ms Steedman: Yes. The couple of examples I have given are quite serious. Normally when there is a breach there is a period of incarceration. Unfortunately, we have quite a few women in those circumstances. We are able to access that information, but it is a process and it can take time.

Often the support available to victims immediately after an incident is quite tricky, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, who are often reluctant to press or pursue charges. The requirements around accessing DVConnect support—they will give you accommodation if you are leaving the area. For our women that means leaving their families, communities, support networks. We work less with DVConnect than we would like to because there are some barriers there for our women in terms of accessing that immediate support.

We do have access to brokerage through our funding and our partnership with CatholicCare, but there is a limit to what we can do in terms of accommodation. I have worked at Helem Yumba for four years and we have not once had a woman go into the women's shelter in the time that I have been there. They are always full. It is hard. That immediate support for victims is a really tricky one for us and it is getting worse with the way that accommodation options are at the moment. There is just nowhere for people to go.

Ms BUSH: Peta, thanks for coming along. Barry raves about your service, so it is lovely to meet you. The question I have is around the service coordination here on the ground in Rocky. There are a number of services that are responding to victims, but what is the coordination, in your view, between those organisations and who is sharing information and responding particularly to high-risk clients?

Ms Steedman: You would be aware that we have the coordinated high-risk response teams. Rockhampton is not funded for a HRT. That is our coordinated response. In terms of high risk, that is where that sits. Our coordination is quite good, but Victim Assist, for example, is not part of that mechanism and neither are the legal services. That is kind of tricky. It is not the whole picture. It is potentially the whole picture around a lot of the risk, but it is not the whole picture around how we support victims and what is happening for them.

We work very closely with the organisations in our sector. We do have a lot of mechanisms that keep us working together. I do think there are some gaps. I am quite excited about the new navigator pilot that is coming out, linking the court support directly with Victim Assist. I see that as being a really good opportunity.

We know that a lot of people do not engage in ongoing service delivery, but most people who have applications or orders under DV are going to court. We see that as a really positive engagement mechanism—that you will be able to grab people at court with that specific goal of linking them with Victim Assist from that point. That is going to be really exciting and I think that will help meet a big gap.

Sometimes it is getting access to people to give them information. People are scared. There is so much stigma attached to domestic and family violence. Just getting them through the door so you can let them know the support that is available is one of the hardest parts of responding and helping them to access that. I think that new trial will be really valuable there. That will fill a gap.

Ms BUSH: Do you have an idea of when that will be starting up?

Ms Steedman: I think the funding round for that closed on the 18th or something. Indications were that organisations would be made aware in May, with service delivery to start in July. Helem Yumba made an application. I know that CatholicCare did too. Hopefully that will be a really positive engagement mechanism.

Mr O'ROURKE: As the member for Rockhampton, I just want to put on record my thanks to Peta and Helem Yumba for the great work they do in our community. I know that you work well across the whole of the sector, which is really great to see, and you are very much client focused and have wraparound services. I just want to say thank you.

Ms Steedman: Thank you, Barry.

CHAIR: There are no further questions. Peta, is there anything else you wish to add? Otherwise, we will conclude the session now.

Ms Steedman: No worries at all. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

CHAIR: Thank you for being here.

FRITZE-SHANKS, Ms Laura, Yellow Paint Inc.

CHAIR: Laura, the way that we do this is that we ask you to make an opening statement, if you wish. If you do not wish to do that, we can help you with the process by asking you a couple of questions while you lead into what you want to tell the committee. How would you feel most comfortable?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: I will make a statement. My name is Laura and I have lived experience in this area. I also am now a peer support person. I have started my own organisation in, I guess, the gap that exists in this kind of area. I will try to steer away from legislative amendment conversation because I know that is not what we are here to discuss. Where do I start? I will talk about the organisation.

Essentially, I do immediate support for only people who really know about me, which is mostly people I have made friends with in town and they then are able to tell others in dire need of what I do. I run around with a ute. When people need to get out of a dangerous situation, whether it be violence has occurred and the police are there, I am able to speak with the police and reassure them that this situation is what it is, which it generally is.

The police are usually pretty good at what they do, but sometimes I think there is a need for police to have—not so much education but maybe mental health support in that regard, being able to keep temper and everything. I think it was previously mentioned about the confusion that can happen when police attend a scene and there is conflict happening. The victim can be misidentified. I would really like to note that perhaps there could be some form of more regular support for police in this area to handle the very stressful job that they have in supporting this community.

I would really love to see more immediate support for people, victims of crime specifically, talking about domestic violence and being able to get those people out of the situation they are in before anything worse occurs. It is known that if you go back to the scene of a crime and the person who committed the crime is there, generally something is going to happen. I truly believe that being able to get someone out of the situation with as much of their immediate personal needs is very important to reducing the effects, community wide and so on, of violence.

CHAIR: It is a personal organisation that you have started. Do you get any assistance in terms of funding from anywhere?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: No, not currently. It is me and my colleagues and our fundraising, which is pretty minimal because I am running around a lot of the time doing a lot of removal type things.

CHAIR: Do you mind if I ask how many colleagues you have working with you?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: About 20, but we often do not have many who can jump when a situation occurs. It is generally just me.

CHAIR: What is the name of the organisation?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: It is called Yellow Paint Inc.

Mrs GERBER: Are your colleagues all volunteers?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: Yes, 100 per cent volunteers.

Mrs GERBER: It is a volunteer-run organisation. Who do you mostly support? In terms of victims of crime, is it mostly youth?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: It is domestic violence. I do not think we have had a young person as yet, except when it is dealing with parents and children.

Mrs GERBER: So it is mostly around domestic and family violence?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: Yes. That is what has been recent.

Mrs GERBER: In relation to victims of domestic and family violence crime, does your organisation or do your volunteers support those victims through court processes and through making applications under the Victims of Crime Assistance Act? Can you talk us through what you do?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: We have been lucky with Victim Assist. Recently a police officer I spoke with during an event actually referred my client to Victim Assist and I got a call from them, which was really amazing. Personally, I never got that myself and I had never come across that in what I do. Generally speaking, with other people in the community I had never heard of a police officer referring someone to Victim Assist. That was really great.

Other than that, if the opportunity arises and I can assist someone with a Victim Assist claim and link them in with a service then I try to, but my time is pretty finite and I do not have as many people like myself in my organisation who have the time and capacity to sit down and work with someone to do that application. I know that there are organisations. Peta is part of an organisation like that and I know there are legal services that can support people. The hope would be to link in with one of them that is more professional in this regard.

Mrs GERBER: In your experience in dealing in this space, are crime and domestic and family violence a bit of a problem in Rocky? What is your experience?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: Yes, very much a problem. It has been 95 per cent of what I have dealt with. That would be coming up to 15 people. I know that is a small number but, at 95 per cent, it gives you a perspective for how many people.

Mrs GERBER: At one point we probably had more politicians in this room than victims of crime. Why do you think we are not hearing from victims of crime at the hearing today?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: I think it has a lot to do with the fact that the community turns a blind eye to it. I have a bit of a problem with the way the media portrays this. It is not that it is not a problem; I think it is a conversation that is too large for a piece of paper or a clip on the TV or anything like that, really.

Mrs GERBER: Do you think people knew about the hearing today?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: No, which is a shame because it would have been a pretty interesting conversation, I feel, if there had been more people in the room.

Mrs GERBER: One of the concerns I have had throughout this process is the time frames for this hearing. It has been really short and the state government has made it really short. For example, there was six months for the mental health inquiry. That allows for communities to have a build-up and to know what is happening. For this inquiry it is only about six weeks. I am interested in your perspective, how you heard about it and whether or not you think there would be more people we could talk to if the inquiry was given a longer or a more substantial period of time.

Ms Fritze-Shanks: I found out through the CCDA email chain, which is a local organisation portal where you get emails about different things that are happening. It was lucky that I could get my colleagues to go to a meeting that was happening now so I could come here and bear witness and do what I can. It seems that social media is very popular for these kinds of events to get the word out, or newspapers. Media is good.

Mrs GERBER: I need to clarify that my statements are in no way a reflection on the committee secretariat. They have done everything they can to try to get the word out in the time frame that the state government has given this inquiry, but it is not a long enough time frame for people to understand what is happening and then put a statement together, present to the committee and formulate their views.

Ms BOLTON: At the beginning of your submission you spoke about the gaps. You talked about going back to a household. During an incident, is the gap that there is not the needed emergency accommodation or financial assistance to go to accommodation? Can you expand on what is needed right at that point to assist victims? Is it information sheets? Can you give us a brief outline of what is really needed, from your experience?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: I truly believe it is a matter of, yes, accommodation. As Peta mentioned, she has not had a single person go into a women's refuge. I spent two hours at 10 o'clock at night at Kershaw Gardens trying to get DVConnect to call us back and let us know how they were going to get a safe house for someone. It ended horribly. She went back to the house. She did not get anywhere. Unfortunately, there was just nothing available. I do think accommodation is a huge factor.

Financial assistance is needed, but I think more so there is an organisation—I am not sure of the exact organisation but the service is called Purple Hearts, and immediate response to a situation of domestic violence is their specialty. They have items removed from the house and transported to a storage facility. All of that is inclusive of the financial assistance bundle that Purple Hearts provides so they do not have to return to that house.

Ms BOLTON: Laura, are you referred to the victim in the first instance, as in is there a referral from the police? I am trying to connect how the process works for your organisation.

Ms Fritze-Shanks: We are not really linked in at this point. We are very new. We are about a year old. It has been very difficult to figure out how all of this works. I have just been responding to people I know personally. People who know me personally and know what I am able to do can contact Rockhampton

me in the event that they know someone in a situation who needs help. It is absolute word of mouth at this stage. I would love to be able to expand, but I do not quite have the capabilities and knowledge to do that.

Ms BUSH: Thanks, Laura, for the work that you are doing. I have had a look online at the work you are doing, which is really impressive, and I congratulate you for doing that. Some of the member for Noosa's questions have helped clarify a lot of the questions that I had around who you are and what you are doing. It looks like you are giving more practical support and assistance and getting people established in housing when they are vulnerable. As part of that work, you are encountering victims particularly of DV and trying to get them set up. This is a completely non-judgemental question. I am just very interested. How do you inform yourself of what supports are available? How do you know? What do you do to link victims in with other agencies or do you tell them, 'I cannot give you that advice. I'm not qualified'? How does that referral pathway work for you?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: It is through research and general knowledge, having been through it myself—which is why I say peer support—and being able to rely on other organisations in the community and say, 'I have this situation happening and I know that you do something similar. Is there anything more out there that could be better than referring someone who may end up falling off your books because they don't quite fit your model?'

Ms BUSH: You have that lived experience and you are providing a peer support service. In my mind I am thinking: is there value having more training coming out in the regions—

Ms Fritze-Shanks: Yes.

Ms BUSH:—so everyone can get the most contemporary policy and legislation updates so that you feel more included in that environment?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: I also have qualifications and have worked in the industry a little bit previously, so there is that. Yes, I totally agree. If there were what I would call free education for this kind of thing, I really feel there would be a huge swell in support for what I do and I would be able to make those expansions that I mentioned I am not able to do right now. I think there would be a lot of community understanding in this area with education being made readily available.

Ms BUSH: Is there a broader DV network that comes together? I should have asked that of Peta before.

Ms Fritze-Shanks: I believe there is. There are a couple of them. It is just about getting the time and being able to link in with them but, yes, I do believe so. It sounds like there is a new third-party organisation that is able to link people together nicely coming about soon. That is what I heard.

Ms BUSH: You mentioned the media portrayal and reporting of victims. You touched on that. Do you have any views that you want to share around where it can be harmful or what helps victims in that space?

Ms Fritze-Shanks: I think it comes down to the fact that people in the community like to gossip and like to talk a lot. That confuses the article, if you get what I mean. Instead of focusing on what is written, everyone reads between the lines and makes up their own story and regurgitates that. Then someone else reads that instead of the story to get a good understanding of what is happening, what is happening from that instance and how it impacts the community and how it all falls into place in regard to reducing the chance of it happening again.

Ms BUSH: Something that came up at our last hearing was that you have media reporting but then you have that media syndicate online reporting. People are hopping on and commenting in a way that might not be helpful to people.

Ms Fritze-Shanks: There is an organisation in regard to suicide and the media. I cannot remember the name. It would be great to see something like that come about for monitoring and supporting media—

Ms BUSH: Some guidelines.

Ms Fritze-Shanks: Yes, and for the community in that sense. If they hop on an article, I think there is a duty of care in that sense.

Ms BUSH: Thank you for all the work you are doing. It is fantastic.

Mr KRAUSE: Thank you for your work, Laura.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you, Laura, for being here and for the work you do around the community.

Ms Fritze-Shanks: Thank you.

CHAIR: That concludes this hearing. Thank you to everyone who has participated today. I thank everyone who has helped organise this hearing. I thank Hansard, the secretariat and all of the committee members. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare the public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 11.01 am.