



YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM SELECT COMMITTEE

Members present:

Ms SL Bolton MP—Chair
Ms JM Bush MP
Mrs LJ Gerber MP
Mr AD Harper MP
Mr JJ McDonald MP
Mr DG Purdie MP
Hon. SJ Hinchliffe MP
Mr SJ O'Connor MP

Staff present:

Dr A Beem—Committee Secretary

**PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY TO EXAMINE
ONGOING REFORMS TO THE YOUTH JUSTICE
SYSTEM AND SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME**

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Friday, 22 February 2024

Southport

FRIDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2024

The committee met at 11.32 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. My name is Sandy Bolton. I am the member for Noosa 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 eldest past, present and emerging. 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: Jonty Bush, the member for Cooper and deputy chair; Aaron Harper, the member for Thuringowa; Laura Gerber, the member for Currumbin; Jim McDonald, the member for Lockyer, Dan Purdie, the member for Ninderry, and the Hon. Stirling Hinchliffe, the member for Sandgate, who is substituting for the member for Hervey Bay. Also participating in the committee today is Sam O'Connor, the member for Bonney.

The purpose of today's proceedings is to assist the committee in its inquiry into youth justice reform in Queensland. The focus of this hearing will be on the seven priority areas the committee has identified based on the evidence received so far. These priority areas include: improving support for victims of crime and confidence in the youth justice system; whether there is a need for a long-term youth justice strategy; better early assessment, intervention and prevention; improving young people's engagement with therapeutic programs; supporting their transition from detention back into their communities; reimagining youth justice infrastructure; and the operation of the Youth Justice Act 1992.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is 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 do remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public and attendees that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. These proceedings are being recorded by the parliament. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times.

As we have heard elsewhere, witnesses before the committee have called on all sides of politics to deliver bipartisan youth justice reform. I would like to restate the bipartisan approach that each member of this committee has committed to in the undertaking of this very important inquiry. As chair, I remind all members of the committee that questions put to witnesses must be relevant to the inquiry, and it is my expectation that these are asked in good faith.

I would like to remind everyone that you may be filmed or photographed during proceedings; images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I would ask everyone to turn their mobile phones off or switch them to silent mode.

Before I welcome our first witness, as I have said many times, the committee has reopened submissions, so please just head to the committee's webpage to find out how to make a submission online or contact our secretariat for assistance.

TE PUNI-FROMONT, Mr Joseph, Founder, Everything Suarve

CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement before committee members have some questions for you?

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Yes, absolutely. I also want to acknowledge the original owners and custodians of these lands and seas and pay my respects to all elders past, present and emerging.

I am the proud founder of Everything Suarve. We are a not-for-profit organisation that was established in March 2020. Before I go any further, I want to give you an understanding of why I started this and where I have come from. I grew up as a young person around commission housing. Gangs, drugs and alcohol were in my community and often I saw that every day. At the age of 14 I lost one of my very first friends to suicide. At the age of 15 I was expelled from school. When I turned 16 my dad, who was a police officer, caught me drug dealing. Between 14 and 18 I lost six of my best friends. I was heading down that path, and I advocate very passionately for these young people because I once was one of them. I had community, I had family and I had support around me that changed my course of life. That is why I stand here helping these young people today.

Everything Suarve has been located in the northern corridor for the last four years. We have managed to help over 200 young people. We have over a 90 per cent employment success rate. Of the young people who have graduated, we have only had two who reoffended and went back into incarceration. Our program was designed to have mental health and wellbeing at the forefront. I understand that I took drugs and alcohol and made the choices that I did as a young person because I did not have a safe environment to express my emotions and my feelings. That led to me making poor choices around fighting, taking drugs and alcohol. Those were my coping mechanisms because I was not shown anything else. As I got older, I went through my own programs to heal the stuff I had gone through as a young person so I could be the man that I am today.

I created a 10-week big brother program that is full-time, Monday to Friday. The first two weeks are all on mental health and wellbeing. First and foremost was lived experience. These young people can engage quite quickly with us and build trust, but that comes from us sharing our stories and what we have gone through in life as well. On the second week we take our young people away camping so they can disconnect from their environment, what might be happening at home, so they can connect with the group and connect with themselves, more importantly. Over the following eight weeks we do a Certificate I in Construction, White Card, first aid and CPR. We do Bronze Medallion as a life skill, and inside of the program our young people build tiny mobile homes so we can give back to the community. I have a lot of young people who come from homeless backgrounds, residential care, and I understand firsthand why these young people are making these choices. Quite often they do not have a safe home, so we thought, 'Who better to build these homes to give back to community than the young people who often do not have one?'

Inside of our program there is so much accountability with these young people. We teach these young people that if they make a choice that choice is no longer theirs; it is a reflection on the group as a whole. What that does for a young person is make them understand the ripple effect of what they choose in life—not only in our program but hopefully, more importantly, outside of our program. Inside of our program we teach them budgeting and life skills. They go and buy the groceries, then they come back and cook for a group of 20, and as a family we sit together and eat. That is important in this program. One of the biggest things our young people speak about is not sitting at home with their family and eating at a table together. It may seem small to others, but this is a big thing to these young people because they have never had that love and support in their life.

Throughout the program we do drug and alcohol testing. We make them aware of their choices. We are not the type of people to sit there and say, 'Don't do this; don't do that.' As a young person I was the type of person who, if you said, 'Don't do this; don't do that,' would go and do it just because I wanted to test the waters. We have a real way of thinking with these young people that when they do make those choices we show them the consequences that can come with drugs and alcohol.

By the end of our program we help them with resume writing and mock interviews. We take them out to different site industries so we can get them into structure by having full-time work or part-time work or going back into education. Our young people have to pass a drug test by the end of our program so we can place them into work. We are talking about an over 90 per cent employment success rate with over 200 young people, so that can show you the change these young people want. Most times when these young people who have mental health challenges take drugs and alcohol it is because they are numbing something. That is why we have a focus on mental health and wellbeing. I look at it like this: you can have qualifications and you can have a job, and that is nice, but if you do not have good mental health and what is happening inside, that is going to be a temporary fix. That is why we focus on mental health and wellbeing in our program.

We give them the qualifications, then we put them into work. We are not talking about it being your standard 10-week big brother program. It is not your normal 10 weeks. These kids become family to us. At graduation we give them the Steel shirt, and that represents that you have earned the right to be part of our family. Outside of here we still have kids from the first program four years ago who still knock on our doors, still turn up and just come to say hello to uncle and aunty. It is a family environment. Outside of here, my expectation with our young people is that they keep each other accountable. It is knowing what they represent not only for themselves but for other people as well.

Inside of this program the tiny homes concept came about because of homeless young people. Our vision moving forward for Everything Suarve is to build a retreat and wellbeing centre where there are tiny homes all over the property so young people can not only have structure in their life; they can have a safe roof over their head and they can have a community around them. We will transition them out once they have a full-time job and have their lives on track.

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Last year we were humbled that we were part of many awards. We ended up winning the south-east region training initiative of the year through the Queensland Training Awards. We won the meritorious award for Safer Suburbs from Mayor Tom Tate. We went on to the Queensland state finals and we won the Queensland training initiative of the year. We were also part of the Community Achievement Awards, where we were finalists. All of that is nice; it is great. It gives us good recognition.

We have just recently come through an evaluation by Queensland police and Bond University. They were able to track the criminal histories of 50 of our young people prior to our program and 12 months after our program. All of this data was conducted through QPRIME, which is the police database. All of the evidence that was submitted was without Everything Suarve being amongst it. Those findings showed a 74 per cent gain in full-time or part-time employment. Thirteen per cent returned to school. Out of those 50, only one person reoffended and is incarcerated, which is two per cent of the cohort. We have a 79 per cent decrease in recidivism rates. Of the 50, 83 per cent had ceased or reduced their offending for up to 12 months in the period they were following them.

Our program is for young people aged 16 to 24. Just to give you an understanding of where our referrals come from, we have young people who come from Queensland police, Youth Justice, the Southport court system, Queensland Education, West Moreton and the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre, so we passionately advocate for the young people who are often seen on the news.

Just to take it back a step, this program was started to go inside the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre, but when COVID hit they put a stop to that. That is why we chose to go down to the northern corridor, because we knew of the lack of services, especially in this area. Our age group is 16 to 24 but the majority of our ages are 16 and 17, which is a critical part of early intervention, before they move into the adult world as soon as they become 18. Out of the 50 we had 32 into full-time employment; seven went back to further education; three went into part-time employment; and one reoffended and was incarcerated. Of the young people who went into full-time work, they had 159 offences before our program. After graduating the program that dramatically dropped, to 34 offences.

In the same year that we had this evaluation done, between 2020 and 2021, there were 219 young offenders who were sent into incarceration. This cost \$161.7 million, which represents \$738,000 per person. In the same year, there was \$127.9 million spent on 925 young offenders for early intervention. What is frustrating for Esuarve is that we represent one per cent of that cost that we currently get. We are super grateful that we are funded by the government for Skilling Queenslanders for Work, but when I say 'funded' we get a quarter of what we actually need. It is the corporates that support us, especially Alceon and Rino Recycling. It is the community that supports us to allow us to get through. We are doing this with a team of three.

It is frustrating to know that we are getting these results with the high offenders, with the young people who continue to reoffend, but we are the ones who have to keep busting our ass. We cannot even look after ourselves, yet we are managing the hardest cohort of young people and getting their lives back on track. That is not even taking into calculation that they are full-time workers, they are no longer dealing with the police and they are no longer getting paid from Centrelink. These are young people who are contributing positively to society, paying their taxes and making their own way.

I wish that I could present these figures onto a screen for you because they show how little we get compared to the impact we are making—and I want to say this humbly: the biggest impact most likely in Queensland, with a team of three people who are busting their ass to do it. We are passionate. We have the ability to grow and help more people if we get the right funding. We have to apply for funding every 12 months and we do not know if we are going to survive. We do not know if we are going to get through to help people. Why do we continue to push? Why do we continue to fight? Because I was one of those young people. When we see the lives of these 200 young boys and girls who are in our program turned around, they are the reason we keep fighting.

CHAIR: Joseph, is it possible for you to share what you have with the committee and send it through?

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: I am getting permission for that. We can use this for funding purposes. I am just pulling out the facts. This has been formalised and signed by the assistant commissioner. This has been signed off so that we can use it, but I am getting that permission so this can be shown to the public and we can get it out there as well.

I will share some comments that were made from our young people while they were getting interviewed. One said: 'The family part is important. All other programs and courses I tried didn't have that. They don't make you feel like they care. Esuarve does.'

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This was from a young man: 'It still eats me up what I did but after a few weeks in the program I realised I had another shot in life. I couldn't be working with these fellows I'm working with now even if I was still acting up.'

Another: 'I'm not going to talk about these other courses this was mentioned. Courses that they make us do just treat us like kids. They don't trust us, but here Joe and everyone tells us they trust us. You don't want to let Joe and others down by ruining their trust.' I respected them more for that. We had a young person outside of here who we knew was doing wrong. I went and took his teal shirt off him so he knew that he had let us all down. Six months later, this young man earned the right to wear his shirt again and he came back to graduation. That reaction, the understanding of what he belonged to, still plays a part outside of our walls. That is the difference with Esuarve: these young people know they have got people in their corner who love and trust them and are there for them at the same time.

Another comment: 'All people running the course here have the same background as us so they get us and know what we are going through. It's not like that for other courses. They don't care.'

Another comment: 'Their son got made redundant a few months ago but instantly he called up Esuarve for a bit of help. He actually found his new job later that day through his own effort so he was independent but Esuarve were there and ready to help after the program had finished. The thing is, after-hours is when they need the support the most, and Esuarve is the only program I've seen to offer that.'

Also: 'I ended up in hospital one night on an overdose. Joe was the only one that was there.' That sort of stuff goes above and beyond for these young fellas. Often these people do not have support in their corner to even just show up when a young person is overdosing in hospital. We are the ones who are there.

Another comment: 'I tried another program which was great but he fell back off the rails after the program. With Esuarve he keeps in touch, keeps visiting them, because they're like another family so he has that support if he ever needs.'

Also: 'I was smoking a lot of weed because I had stuff going on in my life. But then one day we did the ice baths and started learning about exercising and stuff. I haven't touched weed since.'

When we talk about mental health and wellbeing, we teach young people to open up and show their emotions—do not hold it in. I was one of those young people who used to hold my emotions in because I was not allowed to show it. I teach these kids that it is okay, that it is safe, that there is a lot of strength in opening up and showing your emotions. These are exercises that young people are taking away and incorporating into their lives so that they have healthier, safer mechanisms, rather than needing to turn to suicide, drugs and alcohol.

A further comment was about the new coping mechanisms we teach when they are struggling with anxieties. One young person started meditating at home instead of doing drugs and suddenly he was exercising, eating more food, meditating and doing all the things he learned at Esuarve.

A comment: 'I started getting up to no good with some other kids. Esuarve made me feel part of a new group and suddenly I had less in common with those other kids. It made me realise I didn't belong with them doing these things that they were doing.'

That is just a snippet of what we do at Esuarve. There are other things that we also do. Young people who are on bail conditions can be placed into our program. If they have SPER fines, we have a financial hardship partner with SPER so we can help sign off their SPER fines because we know the difficulty of young people trying to get to work who had accumulated all these fines and cannot get a licence because of it. So we remove that barrier for them.

We are able to sign off community service orders. We have satisfied multiple community service orders so these young people can stay in a structured routine. We go and sit in court with these young people so we can support them and show there is love and support for them. I sit with these young people at Brisbane Youth Detention Centre so they know there are people there outside of the program so they can come and see a familiar face when they are released. We go above and beyond, but ultimately our program was created so that when you step foot into our doors it is a fresh start into life. We know that they have got a lot of things in life wrong, but when you have an understanding of why the majority of them have made these choices you soon realise how much wraparound support you need to place around these young people. We are talking about after-hours support, we are talking about housing, we are talking about young people who are homeless, who are stealing cars to sleep somewhere warm, to sell the car to get money to eat. It does not sit right with me with young people making those choices, but I understand why they make those choices and I have lived experience from that.

We are passionate but we are frustrated at the same time that we now have all this evidence behind us that shows exactly how successful this program is yet we are still fighting to keep our doors open. We go to multiple meetings. We email the government and we get the automatic response, the typical response. We get pushed onto another person and we have to explain it again and it goes around and around and nothing actually happens. That is the frustrating part of this. We go and raise our voice, we show these statistics—we have been talking about what we have been doing for the last four years—yet Esuarve is still in the same spot: we cannot grow, we have three staff and we are struggling.

Mr McDONALD: Joseph, thank you very much for the work you do in your community. Thank you for your courage in sharing your story. You have obviously got some great support. I am mindful of time so I will refer you to the member for Currumbin.

Mrs GERBER: Joe, you are fantastic and what your organisation does is truly changing lives and delivering the kind of gold standard intervention that we would like to see across the state. I understand that funding is a huge issue, and I would really love to see you funded, but part of what the committee is looking at is around systems as well. What are Youth Justice doing? Are they supporting you at all? We have heard a lot about the 72-hour plans and how they are not working as well as they should be. Can you tell us about some of the improvements that could be made and some of the pitfalls you are seeing in dealing with Youth Justice, in particular getting those referrals through? Have the youths you are getting had the health assessments? Have they had Education touchpoints in their lives? Can you give us that whole background so we can look at those gaps?

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: I am going to be mindful of not trying to discredit or downgrade anyone. I will speak about our experiences. The first experience when we first started was that we were going up to the Childrens Court on a Monday or Wednesday. Not too long after, because kids were engaging with us, we got emails from Youth Justice saying, 'You guys can't be going up there and approaching these young people.' We understand that around the privacy side of things, but I also reached out to some people and they said, 'No, that's not right. Young people have to be given a choice of options of where they want to go.'

My personal opinion was—and this is only my personal opinion—that I felt like we were taking numbers from them that maybe needed to be in other programs. It frustrated me because young people were willingly keen to engage into our program, yet they were stopped from being able to engage. I have heard multiple comments from young people that the department are a personal Uber service. These young people are smart enough to understand what they can get. They are not silly kids; they know the system. They know how to use it to their best advantage yet it is frustrating. We have also worked with some great support workers, also from Youth Justice, who are just as passionate as us. I do not want to discredit anyone.

Mrs GERBER: The reason I asked that question is that we have travelled across the state and heard from a number of community-led organisations like yours about how it is a scattergun approach to funding and there is not the connectivity there—that child services do not talk to YJ, that YJ do not talk to the community-led organisation—and that these kids are falling through the cracks as a result of a system failure.

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Definitely. I sit on stakeholder meetings with mental health workers, with Youth Justice, with CYJMA—everyone is attached to one young kid but no-one communicates. Everyone does their individual role and you are not actually working together. At the same time, we have had hundreds of youth justice referrals and I have asked if we can send them a fee-for-service or just something to contribute to the program and they have said that they do not have any money. That is frustrating as well when I would assume there would be money to help the young people get into a program that is doing super well.

Mrs GERBER: Can you remind me again how many kids you have put through your program?

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Close to 200 young people.

Mr HARPER: Joseph, you should be very proud of the outcomes you have achieved in a very challenging and difficult environment. I would like to pick up your program and place it into Townsville. Your work is so incredibly remarkable. Funding is definitely an issue. Would you like to see that funding over three or four years so you are not reapplying every 12 months? Is that something the committee can consider?

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Absolutely. Recurring funding and a bit more funding would absolutely help. It would give us the ability to bring on more staff so we can take on more people.

Mr HARPER: How do you engage with young people who are in a youth detention centre? Are you able to access them while they are in there and talk about the program and that is how you get these referrals?

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Absolutely. I get welcomed onsite via the transition officers from Brisbane Youth Detention Centre and West Moreton. When they know a young person is coming out or is going to be released, they invite me up. I go inside, I see the young person, I make a connection with them, and upon release they come straight into our program. That is what we are trying to create here. Quite often when a young person is released it takes, from my knowledge, three to six weeks before they are picked up by Youth Justice or anything happens. I believe the figure is that 80 per cent or 90 per cent of young people end up back in incarceration within 72 hours. We are closing that gap. When a young person has reoffended, we have kids coming straight into the program upon release. That is what is needed. When you have time up your sleeve, like any young fella, you are going to get up to mischief. We are trying to close that gap, get them into a routine, build trust with them and have that connection with young people where they feel safe.

Mr HARPER: It is incredible that you have mentioned the trusting relationship, because we have been in Townsville, Cairns and Mount Isa and it is repeated everywhere we go. Congratulations once again and thank you.

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Thank you.

Mr O'CONNOR: Thank you, Joseph. That was a really powerful presentation. Your numbers speak for themselves. To have two per cent of your young people reoffend is extraordinary. I want clarification on your funding. You were saying that the only money you get from the state government is through Skilling Queenslanders for Work, so through the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training?

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: And Youth Justice, yep.

Mr O'CONNOR: That is all you get—just Skilling Queenslanders for Work funding from the employment side of things?

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: On the employment side of things, we also get federal funding for a local jobs program, which is a five-week program, but it is not focused on offenders; it is more so for young people who have had a long term out of employment. That is a different pool of funding. When talking about working with young people, Skilling Queenslanders for Work has been the majority of it. Tom Tate and local councillor Mark Hammel have been huge supports of this program. They have given us land up in Pimpama. They have covered our overheads of the modular buildings onsite because they know the importance of keeping this program here on the Gold Coast. We get community support. Again, our corporate sets support us and our local councillors, but we get minimal—minimal.

Mr O'CONNOR: And that only covers a quarter of your current programs?

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Correct.

Mr O'CONNOR: That is unbelievable.

Ms BUSH: Thank you, Joseph, for the wonderful work you are doing and for coming here today. I want to pull back a little bit. Joseph, obviously we all want the same thing, which is to be safe in our communities, and it sounds like the interventions you are offering—housing, family, education—are really making that difference. Can I hear from you about what happens when kids are then going in and out of detention and what that interruption is doing to your service delivery and whether we can get that piece working a bit better in your view? It sounds like, from what you are saying, that consistency is quite important.

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Peer influence is a huge thing. All these young people are hanging out with the same crowds, and all these young people know the same people. An example of that is: when I need to get a young person back into the program because I know they may be doing wrong, I can reach out to any one of my young guys and on social media they can reach out to the whole group of them. When we talk about the reoffenders, I believe there are only maybe 400 or 500 of them; it is not a lot. I guess I cannot speak on that experience of going back into juvie all the time because I have only had a couple of young people who have done it, but the majority of the time they have done it is that they are in survival mode again. The tiny home concept came in because we saw young people sleeping in bus stops, not going home to anywhere, so they were making the wrong choices in life.

Ms BUSH: You mentioned social media, Joseph. Some people have spoken in front of us about the impact of social media and that the sharing of video content sensationalises it and actually can excite young people and gee it up a little bit. Some people have asked for greater regulations and take-down notices in trying to stop that behaviour. What are your views on that from your experience working directly with these young people?

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Absolutely. A lot of these young people value social media and how many likes they have or followers they have, rather than valuing themselves. That is what we are teaching these young people: value yourself and do not worry about stroking your ego on social media. For a lot of these guys, it is a feeling for them as well. These kids are walking around like zombies and some of them are numb because of the trauma they have experienced in their life, so when you go hang out with a mate and you get that feeling or that rush of the thrill of jumping in the car it is exciting for them.

CHAIR: Joseph, we have run out of time. I have one quick question, but I hope you won't mind if we write to you with some further questions, given the time constraints.

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Absolutely.

CHAIR: We have heard many different opinions through this whole inquiry regarding consent or whether programs should be compulsory for those who are just prior to heading into the area where they are going to reoffend. From your own experience and those you are working with, do you feel it would have been of greater benefit much earlier in their offending history if it was literally compulsory for them to partake in a program such as yours?

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Anything earlier on for anyone in life—that is when you learn everything. The answer is, yes, earlier intervention, but you also have to remember that the younger you go, the learning capability of a young person to actually absorb information they are taking on is sometimes hard. Working with the cohort that we work with, the ultimate vision for Esuarve is when we talk about a retreat wellbeing centre: it is out in the regions, out in the country somewhere, away from all the distractions. That is uplifted for 10 weeks to live onsite, to get into a routine, to have structure so that they can come back and they are not into the routines and structures they have back here. That is the big vision for Esuarve which will happen.

CHAIR: Wonderful. That was a yes to compulsory?

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you so much. We did not have any questions on notice; however, could you please get permission to send through to the secretariat the information you were reading from, or anything you can take out of it which will help us around funding? Also, we would love to know more about the set-up, including council's involvement and what they provide. Anything you can give to us would be appreciated.

Mr Te Puni-Fromont: Absolutely. I just want to thank you guys for giving me the time to come through and share my voice with you.

LOGAN, Ms Leisa, Director, Fight 4 Youth

SIEMONS, Mr Billy, Fight 4 Youth

CHAIR: I now welcome representatives from Fight 4 Youth. I would also like to recognise Rob Molhoek MP, whom you would all know. Thank you for joining us. Welcome to you both, Leisa and Billy. I invite you to make an opening statement. The more time you leave, the more time there is for the committee to ask some questions.

Ms Logan: Thank you for having us here. I have not really prepared anything like Joe did, I apologise. I did not do statistics or anything like that.

CHAIR: Anything you have there, if you have not done a submission, if you provide that to the secretariat afterwards, would be of enormous help.

Ms Logan: I run Fight 4 Youth. I established that 8½ years ago after working at the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre for many years. I also worked at the Brisbane City watch house and at several men's prisons. I was seeing young kids coming in and getting detained from a very young age, seeing their growth while they were there—Billy was one of those; he was a child then but he is a young man now—and seeing their journey all the way through to the adult prison. I set up Fight 4 Youth because I thought, 'We need to stop this from happening.'

Over the last 8½ years we have had a lot of success. We work with Queensland police with a lot of the crime prevention programs that are run, and they have said that these programs are working because they are no longer arresting these young people anymore. We work with local high schools who are saying that these kids who used to vape and smoke weed and never go to school because they were stealing the teachers' cars are not doing that anymore. Not only are they not doing that anymore but also they are junior coaches for us or they are volunteering down at our centre because it has become a home for them. When kids run out of school during the day because they do not know how to cope with something that has happened, or if they have had a fight with the teacher or their parents, they come to me. It is great because I can call the school or call the parents and let them know that is where they are. It is great that we can provide that safe place, because if they do not get that safe place with a healthy environment they are going to look for it in an unhealthy environment.

A lot of what we do is running early intervention programs, but we also do crime prevention programs. Early intervention obviously is the key, but what do you do with young people who are already going through the system? We run programs for them, too. I can go through what some of those programs are. Would you like the benefits of the early intervention?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Logan: The first benefit is reduced crime rates. Effective prevention programs can help reduce the incidence of youth crime. By identifying and addressing risk factors early, these programs can divert young people away from criminal behaviour, ultimately leading to lower crime rates in communities. Early intervention programs need to be implemented into primary schools for all children to reduce the likelihood of future peer pressure, antisocial behaviour and criminal activities.

The next benefit is cost savings. Prevention is much more cost effective than responding to youth crime through the criminal justice system. The costs associated with law enforcement, court proceedings and incarceration can be significantly higher than investing in prevention and intervention programs. By then it is too late. The next benefit is improved public safety. A reduction in youth crime contributes to overall public safety. Safer communities are more attractive for residents and businesses which can lead to economic development and improve quality of life for all residents.

The next is positive outcomes for youth. Early prevention strategies can help young people make better life choices. These programs provide opportunities for skill development, education and personal growth which can lead to positive outcomes such as increased employment opportunities and better mental health. It breaks the cycle. Many individuals involved in youth crime come from families with a history of criminal behaviour. Early intervention programs and the prevention programs can help break this cycle by addressing the underlying issues within the families and providing support and resources to parents and caregivers.

Another benefit is enhanced social cohesion. Communities that invest in youth prevention programs often experience greater social cohesion and a sense of shared responsibility. When residents and community organisations work together to support young people, it fosters a sense of belonging and trust. Long-term savings is another benefit. By preventing youth from becoming involved in criminal activities, society can avoid the long-term costs associated with incarceration, rehabilitation and support for adults who have a history of criminal behaviour.

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Positive development is also a benefit. Early prevention programs focus on promoting positive youth development, including academic success, social skills and emotional wellbeing. This not only reduces the likelihood of criminal activity but also prepares young people for productive and responsible adulthood. A further benefit is reduced victimisation and recidivism. Preventing youth crime means fewer victims of crime. Communities benefit from reduced property crime, violence and the associated physical and emotional trauma experienced by the victims.

Community empowerment is another benefit. Early prevention strategies often involve collaboration amongst community organisations, schools, law enforcement and other stakeholders. This collaborative approach empowers communities to address the specific needs and challenges that they face, leading to tailored and effective solutions.

This is what we do. As well as that, we run early intervention and preventive programs for young people at risk of disengaging from education and entering the youth justice system. We work with primary school children, with high school children and children coming out of the youth detention centre. We run intervention programs for people who have disengaged from education and have entered the youth justice system. We run anti-bullying and anti-drugs school talks and programs. We provide programs for students on school suspension, reducing the amount of young people committing offences in the community during school hours. We teach practical life skills to equip young people with the tools they need to make positive life choices.

We connect young people with elderly and disadvantaged people in the community doing community service, especially during our suspension program. We provide free programs and activities for young people in the community, providing a safe place with mentors and good role models. We create a sense of purpose and belonging for young people. We use innovative techniques and programs that activate the underdeveloped part of the brain to combat the effects of ADHD which in turn can increase engagement in education and decrease the risk of antisocial behaviour that leads to committing crimes.

On last year's figures, I have worked out that the average cost to run a 10-week program for us is about \$10,000. Then we worked out how much it costs to house a young person in detention from last year's figures. It was \$2,068 daily for a young person in detention compared to \$5.43 daily for us. That is based on us having 184 children, which was the median average, but, honestly, we have probably 300 kids over a week coming through, so we have a lot more than that, which would bring the cost down to about \$1.80. The cost to run Fight 4 Youth should be \$1,000 a day—annually, about \$260,000—but we get no funding whatsoever. I work 60 hours a week unpaid and I work in my paid job on the weekends.

With respect to ADHD and the disengagement from education and youth crime, studies have shown that ADHD is an important risk factor for delinquency, but it has gone under the radar. No-one is doing anything about it. Young people with ADHD have been associated with double the risk of arrest. Young people with ADHD have over three times the risk of having convictions, and they also have three times the risk of a period of incarceration during adolescence. Young people with inattentive symptomatology are more likely to commit more forms of criminal conduct. A meta-analysis of 42 studies show that 25.5 per cent of the prison population met diagnostic criteria for ADHD. This constitutes nothing short of multiples of the prevalence in the general population.

My experience from working in the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre is that many young people who are detained have undiagnosed conditions that are not being managed. Some of the things we do in our programs, in particular things that we have researched in how to help young people with ADHD, are improve concentration, information retention, emotional control, coordination and discipline. We help develop eye tracking, which helps with reading; develop auditory processing, which helps hearing; and develop the vestibular system, which helps with balance. When you take away the problems that the kids are experiencing in schools, they are able to learn more, focus more and communicate better with people and build those relationships which is taking away a big part of why they end up committing crimes.

CHAIR: Leisa, I notice it is quite a lengthy document you are reading from. Is it possible we could start to ask some questions? We will be able to accept that so we can read it, because I know everyone is desperate to ask you questions.

Ms Logan: Absolutely.

Mrs GERBER: Leisa, you are fantastic. What your organisation does for your community is just so valuable. I know that you work with all of our high schools. You deliver suspension programs to keep those kids engaged. Can you give the committee some insight as to the kinds of battles you have been going through to try to get funding? When you say that you do not get funding, you have

been fighting for funding for two years now—maybe longer. Can you talk us through some of the barriers there and some of the steps you have taken to try to get some funding from the state government so that we can look at where that system is failing you?

Ms Logan: We have been applying for a really long time. We apply for every grant that comes up. It is always left to me to do. We have a fairly big team of volunteers, but we are all volunteers. Working 60 hours a week and then having my other job on top of that, I am trying to apply for grants at 2 am. It is a very lengthy process, as you probably know, and they are usually asking you to come up with a new program every time. We have a huge range of programs. We do not need any more. They are already working.

I had a meeting with the director-general from Youth Justice recently and I had some advocates with me—the officer in charge of Palm Beach Police Station and the chief detective of the child protection unit. They have been involved in my crime prevention programs and they said to him, 'These programs are working. We need to get them funded.' We just do not know where to get this funding. I have applied for two Youth Justice grants and the third one will be open to apply for soon, and they have not even determined the first one from December. I just do not know what else to do. I keep applying for grants.

Mrs GERBER: What is the future of your organisation? Tell us about the impact that is having on your organisation and the service you are delivering to our community.

Ms Logan: We have many high schools that are asking us to continue running the suspension program, but I cannot run a big program like that without a team. Of course, most people are not willing to work 60 hours a week for free, so I need to get a paid team. We were grateful to get some help from the Bendigo Bank for one of those terms, and it showed the schools how vital it is to run the suspension program for the community. However, we cannot get any regular funding, so we have not been able to run it. This really concerns the local police and the local schools, because the kids are not only not going to school but also breaking the law because they do not have the safe place to go anymore. We found out last week that our rent is going up \$1,000 a month. It is a struggle to pay our rent. I paid the rent personally with my weekend job; I was working weekends at the detention centre and the watch house to try to pay for it. After 8½ years of doing that, I cannot do it anymore. We are at the stage where we do not know if we can continue running.

Ms BUSH: Thank you, Leisa, and welcome, Billy. Thank you for the work that you do. You clearly have a really good, grounded experience in working with young people and seeing the things that help to drive down crime, in both the short and the long term, and I hear your points around the things that will shift offending. How do you balance that with what is sometimes a competing need from communities for accountability and consequences for minors who commit offences?

Ms Logan: For the kids we work with?

Ms BUSH: Yes. How do you explain that when we know the things that will work but what community sometimes want is what they say would be accountability and consequences for action? How do you get that balance and how do you explain that in a way that makes sense?

Ms Logan: I have different ideas of what should happen for repeat offenders, if they are the sort of people you are talking about, but I believe if young people are committing crimes, getting out on bail and committing crimes, they need to have harsher consequences.

Ms BUSH: What does that look like?

Ms Logan: Sending them into the detention centre is not working. When I was there, they would say to me, 'I don't care if I come back in here. I don't care if I go to jail.' Billy saw it all the time.

Mr Siemons: I was a kid that was in and out since a young age. I met Leisa before she started running Fight 4 Youth. I have been convicted of over 1,000 charges—breaking into houses, properties, stealing cars—and it just shows you that what Leisa is doing is actually working because I am out here. You wouldn't picture me. I am 23 years old and I have done nearly 10 years in detention and jail, locked up all together, and now I am sitting in front of a panel with the most important people trying to make a change.

Ms GERBER: Amazing, Billy.

Ms Logan: With a full-time job and his own place. He has his own apartment.

Mr Siemons: If it wasn't for Leisa, I would either be dead or be back in jail.

Ms BUSH: What worked for you, Billy?

Mr Siemons: Boxing worked for me. Boxing was my main route change. I have been through a lot of adversity in my life. I have lost a lot of people and witnessed a lot of bad stuff in my life. As I said, if it wasn't for Leisa and Fight 4 Youth and what their gym represents and me mentoring the young kids—like, young kids are messaging me on Instagram, asking me, 'I want to relapse. I want to go out with all my friends. What can I do? How can I stop myself?' I just come down to what Leisa has shown, what Fight 4 Youth has shown, what the detention centre has shown, and I just tell them. I try to deter them from what they are getting themselves into—vaping, smoking weed; they are out in the middle of the night. Parents have come into Fight 4 Youth worried about their children who have been out all night. I just try to spread the same message that I have been spreading. I am a reformed criminal. If it was not for Leisa, as I said, I would be dead or in jail.

Ms BUSH: I am sure you are making a really big difference.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you very much, Leisa and Billy, for the work you have done. It is a really great story and you should be commended. I am trying to get in the head of a young Billy. One of the things we are grappling with on this committee is that there is not a one-size solution that fits every person. What would work for you, Billy? You were in the system and you knew the system. We have heard of people in the system. What would be the consequences for action that might have stopped a 13- or 14-year-old from doing it?

Mr Siemons: The main thing I struggled with when I was going through the streets and doing crime—I was stealing cars, breaking into houses, and in and out of crime from a young age. I have been admitted to juvenile detention 32 times. I have been admitted into men's jail twice. I have done nearly 10 years all up—just under. What I struggled with when I was doing youth crime is that I never had a packed structure. My youth justice was sort of on the dull end of it. I had to encourage the youth justice system to give me more programs to stay out. I needed work. I needed my weekends full. Even the weekends were the main struggle for me, because I would go out and I would be free on the weekends, and that is where I struggled as a kid. I was always in and out of the juvenile detention centre because my structure was—the programs and stuff were somewhat harsh in the youth justice system. I do not want to downplay that Youth Justice was the main factor of me becoming reformed, but what I lacked was a lot of structure.

Fight 4 Youth and a lot of these organisations down here—the Gold Coast Youth Service—helped me a lot. They helped me get my structure into play—finding jobs, being active, looking for work and getting my life sorted. That is the main factor. These kids need a good, strong structure in something they enjoy doing. I enjoyed boxing. I took the thrill from stealing cars, breaking into houses—all that sort of crime—and I transformed it, turned it into boxing. That was the main factor for me with Fight 4 Youth—training every day, having a full structure under my belt and being able to say if one of the boys hit me up, 'Oh, do you want to come out?', 'No, I've got work. No, I've got to train.' The structure was the main focus on my success in being reformed.

Mr McDONALD: Well done.

Mr PURDIE: Good on you, mate.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Thanks, Billy. You actually answered one of my questions very succinctly there by setting out that it was what filled your days and what filled you with a new passion and a new commitment and something that could give you some of that recognition. Would that be fair to say?

Mr Siemons: One hundred per cent.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Even if it was just for yourself, recognising what you had achieved.

Mr Siemons: That is the main focus that I feel that these programs and kids should be focusing on which is what they want to be doing, not necessarily what the youth justice system wants them to be doing. Yes, crime prevention is the main factor in what they are going to do, but if you can deter them—replacing the crime, the weed, the drugs and all that sort of stuff with something they like doing, whether it is boxing, art, singing, surfing—anything—that is what is going to make change.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Thank you, Billy, and congratulations to you. Thank you and congratulations to all of the people who helped support you on that journey, including in the elements of the youth justice system that are not perfect but have helped you, as you have identified. Leisa, I really want to acknowledge your commentary around the funding situation. That is clearly dire and we want to learn more about that. I want to understand more about, how you described it, what you have been doing in your own time in trying to fund the different programs and applying for things and going through the grants process. I know how frustrating that can be. Did you apply at any stage to the federal government's Safer Communities program?

Ms Logan: Yes.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: It was unsuccessful, obviously.

Ms Logan: Yes. I applied for that one several times.

Mrs GERBER: I want to point out that we are talking about the amazing work they are doing, but Leisa literally just mentioned that she is about to close her doors because of lack of funding. She has had a meeting with the director-general of Youth Justice. She has written to ministers. Billy, what would it mean to you if Fight 4 Youth had to close their doors as a result of lack of funding or support?

Mr Siemons: To be fair, I do not even want to imagine it. The amount of kids—I am in the fighters' group chat. As soon as we hear that it is going down, that she will potentially close her doors, it literally makes tears come to my eyes. There are no words that can explain. If Leisa shuts down—

Mrs GERBER: This is a bipartisan committee so I know every member of this committee will fight—

CHAIR: Member for Currumbin, we are running out of time and we are trying to get everyone to have the opportunity, so one question.

Mr HARPER: I have no question. I just want to commend you on your outstanding work. We have heard you.

Mrs GERBER: That was not even a question, Sandy.

CHAIR: With regard to consent or things being compulsory, back when you started your offending would you have responded to a compulsory program of something you were interested in versus being given a choice?

Mr Siemons: If I was interested in a program, 100 per cent. In some sense, the only rule there is to the CROs and the SROs for the youth justice system is that you need to attend a program: 'You need to attend a program. Whether you like it or you hate it, you need to do it.' I think they should sit down with the youth. If I was a 13-year-old kid knowing what I know now, if I had the same mindset, I would sit down and say, 'I want to do this program. This is what I am interested in.' I would prefer that to be something on whatever condition it is. Usually it is five days a week, and you have to do a program every day. You have to contact Youth Justice. I would prefer it to be something that I was interested in, whether it be boxing or art, like I said before. The kids are going to be pushed away if they are doing programs where they are not liking it, they are pressured to do stuff that they do not want to do and they are under the pump. They are not going to want to do that stuff. You need to listen to these kids more and what they want to be doing. If there is a kid that wants to be a rapper, we have to teach them how to record songs. We have to teach them how to spread message through what they want to be doing. To me, I do it in talking to youth through Fight 4 Youth training, trying to give the reform words. It is going to be hard if she shuts her doors. It literally will be my and everyone's crash.

CHAIR: Was there ever any fear of detention?

Mr Siemons: The first ever time I got admitted I was in fear, but after that it went away.

CHAIR: Once you went in the first time, but then there was no fear afterwards?

Mr Siemons: None after that.

CHAIR: Leisa, we have heard commentary on our inquiry that community service needs to be more meaningful. There is really nothing. Can you just let us know—obviously you have done this successfully—what it looks like?

Ms Logan: The sort of community service that we do with the suspension program is connecting young people with elderly people, because there is not a lot of respect between them. A lot of the time, elderly people are looking at the news saying, 'Oh, that is disgraceful what these young people are doing,' and the young people are going, 'Oh, he's old' or 'She's old,' but when you get them working together and a young person helping an elderly person—sometimes they have never seen anyone really old—they develop empathy for them and a little bit of an understanding. Then they are less likely to want to hurt someone like that, because now they know that lady or they know that man. I have seen it happen. Sometimes the people we go and mow lawns for or help out around the house will make morning tea, afternoon tea or something for the kids and they sit and have a chat after. When we talk to the young people at the end of a program and ask, 'What was your favourite part?' usually it is, 'When we served food to the homeless' or 'When we helped that old lady around the house.' They never get those opportunities. I know exactly what Billy is saying. I love that. I think if you have a list of things and say, 'These are the programs; let's find the one that is going to help encourage you to be the better version of you' and then they can choose, they will put more effort into it.

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CHAIR: We have heard a number of times that programs are too short in duration and need to be much longer, offering the pathways and ongoing support afterwards. Did you say that your program was for 12 weeks?

Ms Logan: No, we work in school terms. Our programs are 10 weeks, but they do not end; they kind of evolve to something else: 'You have finished this one, and these are all the different things that we offer that you can now be a part of.' Kids keep coming down—after school, during school, when they are on suspension—and there is always something for them. There are leadership programs, too. We have seen so many young offenders become leaders.

CHAIR: At the moment, how many of the ones you are dealing with would be serious repeat offenders?

Ms Logan: None of them anymore—not the ones who are coming anymore. They have all turned their life around, which is amazing. A couple of years ago we probably had quite a few repeat offenders, but none of them are now.

CHAIR: You said that 300 a year come through your program?

Ms Logan: No, a week. We have hundreds of kids coming in there. We offer a huge range of programs. We have music, Indigenous art—

Mr Siemons: That is 300 kids in general a week.

Ms Logan: We do dancing, boxing for all different ages, the suspension program, the community service ones, the ones for kids with disabilities, the ones where we bring kids with disabilities together with kids who do not have them from regular schools and we go out and do activities. There are so many different programs. There is something that everyone can fit into it so that they feel they have a place to belong. Billy was talking about encouraging the kids with rapping. We have our own music studio that we fundraised for so that the kids can do that, too—big kids, too.

CHAIR: Before we finish, is there anything either of you would like to say? Billy, is there something about which you could impart your wisdom to this committee to create safer communities because, of course, you have seen there is great fear within communities. What is the path forward?

Mr Siemons: To be fair, you sitting there and me sitting here is the rawest form it is going to get. I was 32 times in juvenile detention and twice in jail. I have done nearly 10 years all up. I met Leisa before she had Fight 4 Youth. Before she had Fight 4 Youth she was still inspiring to me to try to change, even though it did not happen until a later time. It took me a while to snap into it. It just shows that, if we can get into these kids' heads in a good way, we can change all these kids—one kid at a time. We see 300 kids a week and 10 of them might listen to us, take those words home and take it in. They are going to change, especially with what Leisa is doing with our programs—especially the Inside Out program. I have sat in for a few programs and have spoken to the young kids. Even me spreading my message and sharing my story, they will go back and tell their parents what they learned in the class. It is relayed back to Leisa. The reviews speak for themselves.

CHAIR: Billy, it is really heartening and I am so glad that you have been able to speak and that you are spreading the word and working with those who are yet to turn their lives around. Congratulations.

Mr Siemons: I appreciate you giving me the time.

CHAIR: Thank you both so much. If you could email the document you were reading from to the secretariat, we would really appreciate it. I wish you both and everyone you are working with the very best.

MARSHALL, Ms Justine, Team Leader, Youth Homelessness and Outreach Support Team, Gold Coast Youth Service

SLAVIN, Mr Matt, Team Leader, Gold Coast Youth Foyer

CHAIR: Good afternoon. Would you like to make an opening statement before the committee asks some questions?

Ms Marshall: Thank you, Chair and committee, for the invitation to speak today. We would also like to acknowledge the local traditional owners of the land, the Kombumerri people, where we meet today. Leisa explained beautifully that research has shown that prevention and early intervention are more effective to prevent the onset of young people offending. Today we would like to talk to term of reference 2.a around prevention, early intervention and diversion of young people.

Early intervention and prevention are most effective to prevent the onset of young people's offending. Across-agency collaboration will support sustainable diversion strategies while increasing a young person's protective factors. This also requires strong, genuine engagement strategies and flexible support for young people. Street CRED, being a multiagency assertive outreach program to engage vulnerable young people, and the Queensland Youth Partnership Initiative, which includes partnering with Westfield to provide activities and prevention strategies in shopping centres, are two local initiatives effectively engaging and diverting young people from offending. I can certainly provide a couple of examples of those positive diversion outcomes should the committee wish to hear.

Through both the proactive and the responsive activities of these two initiatives, it has become repeatedly evident, though, that there is an increasing number of young people with early disconnection from services or education, resulting in young people effectively falling through the system service gaps. Key stakeholders, including government and the not-for-profit sector of the Street CRED executive leadership team, have agreed and identified that a care coordination model with a multiagency approach will support these young people and their families to re-engage, increase their protective factors and reduce their risk factors. Being a coordinated approach at a pace that does not overwhelm families or result in service fatigue, the key relevant agencies for family will be involved, supporting goals of re-engagement and addressing the identified needs of the young person. This will include social, cultural and economic needs, for example, from increasing a young person's access to positive and sustainable pro-social activities—as Leisa just explained—to establishing a lead agency for further case management through to referral to existing youth panels on the Gold Coast for more complex cases.

It is these initiatives—Street CRED and the Queensland Youth Partnerships—that allow young people to feel valued and identify alternatives to antisocial behaviour. With the addition of a care coordination model for those who are disconnecting and require further support, the multiagency early intervention framework will provide for positive re-engagement and support as required and further diversion from offending.

Mr O'CONNOR: Thank you both for being here. Matt, I was wondering if you could reflect a bit on the youth foyer that is just up the road. I think it has been in operation for four-and-a-bit years?

Mr Slavin: Two.

Mr O'CONNOR: It was constructed four-and-a-bit years ago. It took a little longer to get built than it should have. Could you reflect on the 40 young people there and the success of that program?

Mr Slavin: The youth foyer program for 16- to 25-year-olds is supported accommodation. It has a real particular focus on education, employment and providing the social skills required to help young people. It is a two-year model. It is not forever. It is a period-in-time support for young people to work towards getting off social welfare dependency. It is an international model. There was a recent announcement from the government that there will be eight more across the state, because they are proven to work. The Foyer Foundation put out a fairly compelling *Under one roof* report that talked about the cost benefits of early intervention, and supported accommodation generally, through the foyer model. There is a \$6 return for every \$1 spent nationally—just in Australia—through this model. Locally, we have been able to really uphold that.

To date, we have supported about 70 young people; 80 per cent of those young people have gone into private housing. They have had the support to learn to do those things. As Leisa and others said earlier, it is important to have someone championing you and being in your corner. We understand it; the literature is very much there. That is what the foyers can do—supported accommodation has helped with that—over a sustained period of time to help make those real linkages for young people. In that time we have seen, as I said, people finish their degrees and get really good outcomes with housing.

Being a sceptic myself, I was a bit worried that when we hit that two-year mark we would not know where we were going to put these young people, because we have a duration of need underpinning what we do in housing, but they have bought in to having a thriving future and that they are more than dependency on social welfare. They believe that they have inherent worth. That is really important, because when you have had a life of trauma and being pathologised and told you are some thing, it is amazing when you start having something over a sustained period of time to counter that.

We have seen so many great results—people coming from Meraki straight into the foyer now starting families, about to buy their own house, having a full-time job and being reconnected to family. Things you could not believe are happening. We are not stuck, because they believe in it. They feel heard; they feel believed in. A lot of it is choice, too. We are not coming in and case-managing them, saying, 'Hey, you have to do this to do that.' We just go, 'Hey, we have some social theories of change and they include education, volunteering and giving back. This is what it is.' We try and help them with these kinds of ingredients to help them succeed, and it is working. Internationally it working, nationally it is working and locally we have had phenomenal results.

I could talk about the foyers all day. From my perspective, it fits into a continuum of care. The foyer is not the one-stop shop that can fix everything. The Gold Coast Youth Service has 10 different programs—from early intervention to other housing programs which are getting good outcomes as well. We need diversification. We need a continuum of care and to stick to what the models provide. We run monthly info sessions for young people about the foyer and how to get in, and we work with the sector on what we call 'foyer readiness'. We are not classed as accommodation. There have to be a few things to get people ready to live in this accommodation, because it could quite easily get quite complex when there are 40 young people with complex trauma and the rest of it going on. It is really important that we are not siloing.

What is really good about the Street CRED initiative is that they are taking a multiagency, multidisciplinary approach and really getting these government agencies talking to each other. It is siloed; it is really quite bad. Here in this region, the great work that Street CRED has done and Justine is doing with Street CRED is getting Youth Justice, the department of child safety—all these key people—working together, going out on the street, doing that assertive outreach for young people and getting them in so they can start finding those touchpoints to help them get ready and link in with services like Fight 4 Youth, because they do not know it is out there. That is really important.

Mr O'CONNOR: If it were up to me, I would let you talk about the foyer all day! Just so the committee is completely clear on the model, you were the second foyer in Queensland after the first site in Logan. The department of housing built the unit block. Your young people are aged 16 to 25. They have to be homeless or at risk of homelessness. A lot of them are couch surfing or have been through pretty horrible family situations. They pay a fixed portion of their income to the department as their rent?

Mr Slavin: Twenty-eight per cent of their gross income.

Mr O'CONNOR: Twenty-eight per cent of whatever they are earning or what other payments they are on, and they have to be in education or training?

Mr Slavin: Yes.

Mr O'CONNOR: You basically have the contract to run the foyer, where you provide a 24/7 service—

Mr Slavin: Onsite support, yes.

Mr O'CONNOR: Justine, you have been with the department for many years on the Gold Coast and now you are here today with the youth service. Do you have some reflections from those two sides of things—the departmental/government side of the response and then from the community organisation side of the response? How do they work in with each other? I believe you are on secondment at the moment from the department; is that right?

Ms Marshall: Yes, that is correct.

Mr O'CONNOR: How do they work in together and do you have any further reflections on where the gaps might be between those two parts of the sector?

Ms Marshall: Yes, I believe it is quite crucial and vital for departmental agencies and the not-for-profit sector to communicate and work together. There is a risk of working in silos. The department is increasingly under the pump. They are so busy and they are focusing on core business. We have to be mindful that we do not let community work slip as well, engaging with community to

work together collaboratively for young people. I think there is a great opportunity around Street CRED and the care coordination model that I can discuss today to bring together those key agencies to work in that early intervention framework to try and target these young people who are at the early disconnection stage before they get to youth justice. We know that early intervention works, and I think that has to be quite a strong focus as a preventive.

Mr HARPER: We are four weeks away from opening the Townsville Youth Foyer, based on the success of both Logan and the Gold Coast. Mission Australia is running that, so we are very keen to see those doors open. I want to get your views on post-sentence programs. When someone comes out of detention, should we compel people to go into programs—we have heard two great examples of programs today from former speakers—or should it be voluntary? Do either of you have a view? Should it be court ordered or should it be voluntary?

Ms Marshall: I agree with what Billy was saying before. It has to be the right fit for the young person. There is no point in forcing a young person to undertake a program they have no interest in. It is just going to contribute to further noncompliance. There needs to be a range of programs and initiatives available for young people. In the NGO space, there is a great opportunity for young people also. There needs to be extensive support around those programs for young people. You cannot expect young people to provide their own transport, for example—especially on the Gold Coast, which is quite a long area. Transport can be a challenge for young people who want to get from one end of the coast to the other, especially when they do not have family support. There needs to be food; there needs to be transport. These young people need a lot more support around them rather than just saying, 'You need to be here at a certain time. Come in, gain your learning and off you go.' Absolutely there needs to be a variety of programs and extensive support for young people to engage.

Mr HARPER: About seven years ago we had the Townsville Stronger Communities Early Action Group—comprised of Housing, Health, Youth Justice, Child Safety, Police and a range of agencies—which was a deliberate attempt to de-silo. That has been rolled out in Cairns and Mount Isa. Could that be established here?

Ms Marshall: That is a very similar model to what we are looking at on the Gold Coast—the care coordination model—however, I believe the Townsville one is predominantly government.

Mr HARPER: All government agencies are working together. The intent was to de-silo a number of years ago, and that model is being rolled out in Cairns and Mount Isa.

Ms Marshall: Most certainly we would be hoping to establish a government presence and also not-for-profits to open up those pathways for young people into various programs and intervention opportunities. The care coordination model, through the leadership executive team with Street CRED, which includes government and non-government agencies, has agreed that is a gap on the Gold Coast. We do not have a care coordination model similar to the Townsville model. We have a funding submission through the youth justice grant currently. If we can establish that on the Gold Coast, I think that will go a long way for early intervention for these young people who are disconnecting so that we can really work together—not in silos—and work to support young people.

CHAIR: We have been hearing that over 90 per cent are reoffending. They are just cycling through detention. When they come out, it is very disjointed. The programs can be short and not effective, obviously, because of the cycle. It has been suggested that that transition needs to be something that is very clear: it goes for nine months or a year, it is in education or it is in training, and it has a residential component. A lot of these offenders do not have a safe place to go back to, so they are cycling through. Do you see that all of that gives value in reducing the numbers that are just endlessly cycling through?

Ms Marshall: Absolutely. I think another significant gap on the Gold Coast is that we do not have residential programs for young people. There is no residential rehab, for example, for drug and alcohol and there is no residential rehab for mental health either. They are both significant gaps. Even just those as standalones would go a long way to support young people. If we have a young person now in the Gold Coast Youth Service who says, 'I want to go to rehab,' there is nowhere here in Queensland to support those young people to go. We would be looking down at New South Wales, for example, to PALM, to the options down there. That can be like a whole world away, a foreign place, for those young people. It is a significant gap on the Gold Coast.

Mr McDONALD: You started to answer some of the questions I wanted to ask. Many of the funding programs appear to cater towards the pathway into work through grades 10, 11 and 12 and getting in apprenticeships and that sort of thing. With your experience, could you talk to us about those gaps? You just mentioned drug and other rehab, but are there other pathways we could think about to get these kids into and actively engaged outside the school environment?

Ms Marshall: Yes, I think we have seen the trend that increasingly there is a younger cohort of offending. Through Street CRED we have identified a number of 12- to 14-year-olds who are out on the streets at night-time—antisocial behaviour, at risk of offending. If we do not target these young people very promptly and try to re-engage them into education, programs and prosocial activities then they are the ones who will end up in the system as well. We really need to have more opportunities for young people of that age range when they are disconnecting early from school and a variety of prosocial activities that are accessible for families and that families can afford, because we know that is what is going to help young people feel valued, feel connected to community and give them that sense of belonging, which is vital for that younger age.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Thank you for your presentation and thank you for your work. It is quite clear from what you have described that the programs you offer are quite interdisciplinary and work across the different agencies that are involved. We have been speaking and hearing about the silos and the difficulties with that. I want to come to a particular part of that. Do you have any specific experiences where a lack of information sharing has made it harder for you to provide the support to young people that can make a difference?

Ms Marshall: Yes. We have spoken about agencies working in silos, and of course agencies can become very concerned about sharing confidential information under the Privacy Act and the Youth Justice Act. There are provisions to share that information if it is for the wellbeing of the community and there are protective factors for the community and the young person; however, I think there is a great fear amongst agencies to openly share relevant information. If we can work towards communities really having true dialogue, then everyone is on the same page working together. We see that it is starting to play out more in panels. We have the Complex Needs Assessment Panel on the Gold Coast and there is also the multiagency panel with Youth Justice. We see that starting to develop, but we need to ensure we have the right people around those tables and the opportunities for earlier diversionary opportunities, which do not exist for complex young people at the moment.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: When you say the 'right people', what does that mean? Is that the right agencies, the right NGOs, the right level of people?

Mr Slavin: We help facilitate the YJ network, which is a combination of all the services around. Maria, our CEO, would often talk about the decision-makers not being in the room, and that is a big thing. We have the services coming together, and we really lead that from the Gold Coast Youth Service perspective. We have been around since the 1980s, so we are a grassroots kind of organisation that really believes in collaboration. We have really spearheaded that at our own cost. Not getting the right people in the room is a big thing, so not getting the CEOs from other organisations coming in. I think we need to get decision-makers together to make it happen.

Mr O'CONNOR: I want to talk more about youth foyers. Matt, what sort of need do you see there being on the Gold Coast for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness? You have been able to help around 70, but how many more do you think are out there?

Mr Slavin: We could fill another foyer tomorrow, but we do not just want to talk about foyers. Foyers are part of that solution, but I think it is an ecosystem or continuum of care that is really important. That is critical. At the moment, we do not have any crisis beds. People are not foyer-ready: they sign a lease and they are very responsible. If they are not foyer-ready there are some real ramifications, because they sign a lease with RTA and it could actually be quite counterintuitive for them coming in.

Working together collaboratively with the sector is really important. At the moment, we do not have crisis beds. We have NGOs that are really struggling at the moment because of this grant issue. They are trying to get grants, but they only go for a year and they are small. It takes six months. If you have a grant for six months, you do not know where you have to go. Then you are scrambling to do it and you are losing all of that data. More and more we are talking about impact data. The smaller guys do not have the resources to talk demonstrably about the data we are doing. We are doing incredibly important work, but we cannot prove that anymore. That is what everyone wants. We are chasing our tails every six months to try and not go under. If you start losing grassroots places like Fight 4 Youth and Everything Suarve, you will know.

Mr O'CONNOR: Have there been proposals to get crisis accommodation on the Gold Coast that have not been successful in getting funding?

Mr Slavin: There was a service that was doing it but they could not do it anymore. They could not sustain it. We are working with contract management to try to get that space again. It is tough. I am talking youth-specific, the 16 to 25 cohort. There are service gaps we are trying to fill with the network, which is good, but it is just slow and tired. We are trying. I think mechanisms such as these grants and getting that extended out would really be advantageous.

Mr O'CONNOR: Longevity in funding.

Mr Slavin: Yes, that is right, because it is not feasible.

Ms BUSH: I have two questions. Will I have time for both?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms BUSH: I will try and ask them quickly. Justine, we have heard a lot from every region we have gone to about the importance of place-based, multiagency responses, and I have seen that in action and I totally agree. There is no legislative barrier for organisations to come together and share information or work in that way now, so it sounds to me like there are some soft barriers in place to prevent that; is that right? The funding model is not supporting it or information sharing; would that be correct?

Ms Marshall: Potentially, yes. There are definitely opportunities for growth in that area on the Gold Coast and absolutely we are getting there.

Ms BUSH: It is great work. Matt, something that you said earlier piqued my interest. These kids have been traumatised and pathologised and told they are a particular thing. I am interested, because there is a strong media and social media narrative out there that I think could be driving crime up. I understand why people are frustrated, but we have seen some of these minors called quite horrific names. There has been talk of capital punishment and threatening vigilante action towards these young people. What is that actually doing to your work? What impact is that having on your work and your ability to get outcomes with these kids?

Mr Slavin: Fundamentally, it creates polarity and division. These are divisive words, which then lead to distrust, which compounds what they have experienced. If you have not had a supportive parent in your life, if you have not had the privilege of a stable upbringing and you are told that you are this or that time and time again, that creates an ethos in your self-belief and essentially your identity. That creates difficulties for us and the work that anyone is trying to do. We are trying to foster that 'we do believe in you'. One of the greatest things about the foyer for me is the chance to show people that the community wanted this: 'The taxpayers believe in you. They want to give you this beautiful home and they want to invest in you. They believe you have a future.' I get to steward that and remind them that the community made this happen.

It is divisive. Services distrust is so strong. I understand the compulsion to mandate people to do things. I think what Billy said was really good. I think you need to have some choice so they have some empowerment, because they have just been robbed of all that. It makes our work a lot harder and it compounds an already crappy narrative in their head.

CHAIR: I want to ask a question I asked the assistant commissioner yesterday. At the moment Youth Justice and its realm, I suppose, starts when a young person comes before the courts. I heard you speak about the siloing. When we are talking earlier intervention, would you see value if Youth Justice came way up into the continuum to when youth first came in contact with the police instead of waiting until they are before the courts? Is there value if access to the mental health assessment and all of the things that currently appear to only happen once they get into detention was brought forward?

Ms Marshall: That is an interesting point, because on the one hand we want to keep the young people out of the system, but on the other hand there is a missed opportunity, such as an early assessment, as you say. I think there is a space there for possibly the NGO sector to target that so the young people are not brought into the system—and if we can work together with QPS and Youth Justice to provide those supports around that space. Often young people might appear in court, for example, and then it could be some time before they are actually dealt with—perhaps they are granted bail on their own undertaking. If they are not linked in with services at that point, they are just floating until they end up with Youth Justice on supervised orders. I think there is an opportunity there in that kind of earlier intervention space and diversionary space, whether that sat with Youth Justice or NGOs. I think that is a great opportunity to really target those young people when they very first come to the attention of police and Youth Justice through the courts.

CHAIR: What we have heard is that Youth Justice should be the lead in that space, and obviously NGOs, but everyone at the table much earlier. We have heard that it should be from birth, but I am speaking specifically now about those youth who are coming into that space. There is obviously an amount of work that needs to be done at different times, but I was talking particularly about that space. As we are out of time, I would like to give you the opportunity to tell us anything that you feel the committee could take forward and look at to assist us in the task we have.

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Ms Marshall: What is lacking on the Gold Coast is that care coordination model, to really target the early intervention of the young people who are falling through the gaps—that coordinated approach at a pace where the families and the young people are not overwhelmed, at a pace that sees their priorities being met as well to gain that buy-in from the family. I think there could be a really great opportunity through a multiagency approach to divert those young people from offending. That is something that is missing on the Gold Coast right now so I think that is something we should be looking at very closely.

Mr Slavin: I echo that. A big agenda for us is to get that. You get worried about government intervention very early. You just look at Child Safety, for instance. It is not working, and I think the NGOs are a safer place to go to and I think care coordination helps with that. We need the grants for the NGOs to help them to do the work they need to do. It is not sustainable each year. Care coordination for us would be a big one, as is having extended grant periods for the NGOs to be able to do that good work, having more things like the GC network and having more decision-makers working collaboratively.

CHAIR: I want to thank you both for the work you do. We did not have any questions on notice, but would you mind if we send any of our remaining questions through to you?

Ms Marshall: Not at all.

CHAIR: Thank you.

FRENCH, Mr Matthew, Founder and Director, Veteran Mentors

METHORST, Mr Troy, Director, Veteran Mentors

CHAIR: Welcome. Thank you for joining us. I invite you to make an opening statement and then the committee will have questions.

Mr French: To start, I would like to explain to the committee what we are all about, if you have not heard about us before. Veteran Mentors is a transformative, national, nine-day youth development program dedicated to empowering children and families across the nation to overcome a range of obstacles including tech addiction, lack of discipline, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and, most importantly, low self-esteem. This unique program is tailored for children from diverse backgrounds, encompassing high achievers from affluent families as well as those from low socio-economic backgrounds, representing every corner of this great nation.

Veteran Mentors is a veteran owned and veteran run company with around 65 veterans on our books. All of my veterans are paid and work every school holidays, leaving families and careers behind to come and change the lives of families nationwide. The by-product of our programs is the purpose we are able to instil back into the veterans who come and work for our company. Veteran Mentors started seven years ago with 24 participants and in only one location on the Gold Coast, with four programs a year. Currently we fill every program with 70 participants and run simultaneously in Queensland and New South Wales, so now we run eight programs a year which equals around 560 families a year coming through our programs.

For every one participant who attends our programs, five cannot afford it. As directors, what Troy and I are most proud of is the fact that we did this ourselves with no government support or donations. We are a profitable company and the only real sponsor we have had is Kempsey RSL group, which give us \$50,000 per year. This will be doubled next year to \$100,000. All money that is given for sponsors goes directly to the fees of parents who cannot afford our program. We have also set up Payright for interest-free 12-month payments. We are NDIS certified and 24 months ago had our first working with children check audit, which we passed with flying colours.

We have been in every major news network multiple times, we have worked overseas in Singapore, we have been approached by the United Arab Emirates and Germany, and PNG's government has put \$2.5 million aside and contacted us in the hope that we could start a program in Port Moresby. They were meant to come over with a delegation last program but there were issues in Papua New Guinea. The reason I state this is that we have been operating for seven years and not once have I had a phone call from the Queensland government—not once.

Often described as a boot camp, Veteran Mentors is so much more. The nine-day junior leadership program is broken down into three phases: the breakdown, the build-up and the test of objectives. During the first three days, participants are broken down so that negative learned behaviours bubble up to the surface. The participants learn very early on that behaviours that would work to get them out of situations they do not like—such as school—do not work in this environment and that no matter how much they kick, scream, punch or swear, my mentors will never give up on them. For a lot of these children, society as a whole has given up on them—counsellors, teachers, youth workers. For some of these parents, relinquishing—and I will say that again: relinquishing—custody is basically their last option but the only option they have left. These are parents relinquishing their own child because there is no support for them out there. That is pretty full-on and we hear that often.

Many of the participants have been in the mainstream mental health system for years and their negative behaviours are only getting worse. Families are torn apart, law enforcement has their hands tied behind their backs and schools have zero solutions. After exhausting all avenues, many participants will be medicated and in a vicious cycle of endless counselling and altered medication, which totally destroys the self-worth and confidence of the child.

I want to quickly paint a picture there. The average participant we get on our program has entered the mental health system and has been told that there is something wrong with them and that if they seek counselling it will improve. However, after two or three years it has not improved and medication is entered into the mix. Now we are looking at five years down the track and that child has only got worse. They are on medication and counselling, psychologists and psychiatrists. What does that do to a kid's mental health? Now that kid also has poor mental health. It is destroying these children.

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Veteran Mentors has filled a gap in this system that gives parents and guardians an option other than the ones stated above. Without the breakdown phase and absolutely crushing those negative learned behaviours, phases 2 and 3 would not be possible. During the first three days, participants are put through rigorous PT sessions designed and run by my personal trainers, bed-making drills, self-reflection, resilience and discipline lessons, just to name a few. This three-day period is designed to be some of the hardest three days a participant will ever experience, within reason, as a teenager. To finish the breakdown phase, participants will become comfortable with vulnerability by sharing their personal stories with their 10- to 12-person sections.

Like everything, our mentors lead by example, and on the second night I share my personal story around a campfire of an incident I was involved in in Afghanistan on 29 August 2012 where I lost three mates in a green on blue. It is paramount that participants hear our stories and see young, confident male and female mentors get emotional and sob and cry in front of them. The whole purpose of this is that we need them to understand that opening up and talking about these deep, dark feelings can be done in a less clinical setting, such as a counsellor's office, and can be better done in a group environment surrounded by like-minded individuals.

On the third night, the final stage of the breakdown phase, is where magic happens and these participants release all of these built-up emotions and get everything off their chest. This has two major effects: they get everything bottled up off their chest and they also hear other like-minded stories from other participants and they realise they are not alone and that everybody is going through their stuff. When they are a child going through issues, they feel very isolated and so do the parents. Everything feels very isolated, so this is good for them to understand that they are not alone in this environment, not alone in this world; we are all going through issues. We finish the end of day 3 and we all become a tribe and we no longer have that victimhood mentality and we are able to work towards a brighter future.

On day 4 we switch gears from a boot camp style program to a more holistic style program where we start introducing: multiple forms of meditation, from sound bowl, controlled breathing, forward visualisation to box breathing; job and interview lessons; nutrition and cooking lessons; ice baths; and more entertaining PT sessions which show the participants that exercise does not always need to be a smash session. We start doing high ropes and low ropes and prepare them for the 100-metre abseil with a 20-metre abseil. Our programs are not designed to replace more conventional means of mental health treatment; they complement and work alongside them. All participants are fed five extremely healthy meals per day with sugar reduced. We like to think participants will arrive on our program with a toolbox empty and that, after our intensive nine-day program, working 18 hours a day, they will leave our program with a toolbox full of tools they can utilise when they go back home.

The final three days is a test of objectives, where we get the participants to design their own PT sessions and abseil off a 100-metre cliff, and those 16 and over go skydiving. The challenge is a four-hour PT session that can only be completed with teamwork and a load of resilience. To finish off the program, the participants march out with all family and friends watching. Our program removes the cottonwool wrapped around these children and we put them in difficult situations with a load of support and love and watch them build their confidence as they complete these tasks. As we all know, we can only build self-worth and confidence by overcoming adversity, and this is what we provide in spades in a safe and caring environment.

From day 1, we have a bunch of children who are total victims—hating their parents and absolutely hating their instructors. But, most importantly—and this is key—all of these children hate themselves. They absolutely hate themselves. By day 9, the victimhood mentality has disappeared, and participants are accountable for their own actions, understand the importance of family, love those around them but, most importantly, are able to look in that mirror and love who is staring back. Participants are able to create a healthy meal, create their own PT sessions and turn a dream into a goal by using techniques used on programs, such as positive forward visualisation and writing a detailed road map for success. After seven years and 3,000 families using us, it is clear as day that our methods work with tremendous success.

Another reason for our success is involving the parents, and we do this through our parenting group chats and bringing these families together to share stories and bond like no other youth development program. We have parenting group chats that are active before the program. Parents are able to communicate and connect with each other and share stories. They form a family. We still have group chats active from five years ago that they are still communicating in. To try to change a child's mental health, you cannot put them in an environment for nine days, get great results and send them back into the exact same environment; that is never going to work. You need to involve the families.

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We also hold a parenting workshop on the second-last day of our program at a separate location. This goes for eight hours. In these parenting workshops we give them tools and techniques that we utilise on the program that they can utilise back home. We also get the parents to start realising that they need to concentrate on themselves. A lot of these parents are torn, they are broken, they are stressed. Their marriages are falling apart. They do not know how to control what is happening in front of them. We are able to let them vent and then get them to understand that they need their cup full before they can start filling their child's cup. Every parent thinks, 'I need to be the best parent I can be.' No. You need to be the best 'you' you can be before you try and be a parent. Unless you are able to do that, you are never going to be able to fill up your kid's cup.

As a director of this highly successful, tried and tested youth development program, I strongly believe that our company can help tremendously with the youth crime and mental health epidemic we find ourselves in. If utilised right, we could be used as early intervention. Obviously I have a lot of testimonies—about 40 of them—not from the last 40 programs; just from the last one. I have noticed three things wrong at the moment. I ask every group a series of questions. One of the questions I ask during my tech addiction lesson is, 'How often are you on social media?' The average is eight hours a day. I know this is probably even way too big for this committee, but, plain and simple, social media is killing our kids. It is destroying them.

The next thing I would like to point out is suspension. Children get suspended a lot from school. If they get suspended once and they got out of an activity they did not want to do, they get suspended again. Some of the children in our program have been expelled two or three times and suspended 12, 14, 16 times. It is very common. Suspension does not work. It is not working. To send a kid home while two parents are trying to survive in this economy while they are working—what do you think the kid is doing at home? Social media, playing games, out stealing cars. Suspension is not working. There needs to be an alternative. When a kid is notified by a principal or a youth liaison officer as a school, they need to connect with the parent and say, 'We're going to send them off to this particular camp.' Yes, us—whoever—but something rather than just being sent home. They need to be identified. This suspension maybe worked 20, 30 or 40 years ago, but it does not work now. It is failing.

The next point is parents working with GPs. I know that down in New South Wales they get six free sessions if they are identified by a GP to get a mental health plan, but that is it. The kid comes presenting with issues such as ill-discipline: 'Get a mental health plan.' Is there anything else the doctor can suggest? My understanding is that there is not really. The doctor would not want to risk his reputation by sending a kid off somewhere that is not regulated, so it is basically going down the mental health route. Not every child in the mental health system has mental health issues. A lot of it is ill-discipline—not all of it, clearly, but from what I see. That is only from my perspective from the types of kids I see from around the country who come to our programs.

You have a big job ahead of you to come up with solutions. I am sure you have heard a lot of advice, but we get results. A pretty prominent senator spent nine days with me on our last program. I will not mention her name. I am sure you will hear all about it in the near future. Something needs to change and something needs to happen urgently. That is all I have to say. Thank you for inviting me and Troy to appear before you.

CHAIR: Are you able to email everything that you read from to the secretariat?

Mr French: Yes, no worries.

Mrs GERBER: Thanks for coming, Matthew and Troy. I know that I heard from you before. You presented to the PBC Alliance; you did a fantastic job. What I want the committee to hear about from you guys today is the transition out of your program. We have heard a lot from different organisations around the country about how trust and relationships are key when an at-risk youth or a youth who might be disengaged from school finishes a program. Keeping them on the right path by building trust and relationship is really key. I know that your Veteran Mentors do a great job of that. Can you talk to the committee a bit about that relationship that you build with them—the ongoing nature of that and the importance of that to the child and how that might be better utilised?

Mr Methorst: Like Matt explained, our junior leader program is a really good reset button for a lot of kids, or a circuit breaker or whatever you want to call it. Post going home, our hope is that they have learned enough from the junior leader program and the parenting workshop to implement change. Sometimes they need a little bit of extra support, which is where we have developed a couple of programs to support this transition back into the community. We offer one-on-one programming where we have a mentor or a veteran from the local area community and they can engage with the service—it is kind of like a big brother or big sister program—weekly or fortnightly. They are able to

touch back in with a mentor with whom they have shared this experience for nine days. It is a deep and powerful process. The groups they are put in for the nine days stay together for the nine days and they have the same leaders, so they have built this respect and trust like have you just spoken about. For them to touch back in with that on a fortnightly or even a monthly basis is often just enough to go, 'Oh, yeah, that's right, I did that,' and they get the anchors from the positive main reason thing. We really encourage that. Sometimes they find it in other areas in the community. It is really important to have that support for sure.

Mr HARPER: Full disclosure: I have a relative who has done your program. I come from Townsville and worked very closely with Oasis. I think your program is outstanding and it should be scaled anywhere that we can fit you in. How do you get your funding, Matt?

Mr French: Parents. We are a privately owned company. We pride ourselves on that. Government could come to the party if we wanted to get our own facility. We also have Payright systems that we have set up. The only funding that I get really is from Kempsey RSL group, because he sent both his children through our program. It has been \$50,000, and then he has ramped it up on the last parade and said he is going to start giving \$100,000 next year.

Mr Methorst: We are Army veterans and we have been in the game. We are a bit softer these days, but our mentors are quite intimidating folks. You can imagine the wit's end these parents are at to send their kids from Townsville to people they have never met in the hope they will make some change. We have built that trust and that foundation that parents are like, 'We're at our wit's end. We don't know what to do; send them to these guys', and, boom, we are making some massive changes.

Mr HARPER: I know that you take a heap of troubled kids who are disengaged for whatever reason, but what about kids in detention?

Mr French: I would prefer to be used as early intervention before kids in detention, to be honest with you. I would have to trial that. I do not think I have come across a child directly out of youth detention.

Mr Methorst: Not yet.

Mr French: About 30 per cent of our children could be in youth detention, to be honest with you, but they just have not been caught yet.

Mr Methorst: Nearly three or four years ago, when we were operating at a different location on the Sunshine Coast, a magistrate—I cannot remember the community—suggested to a child who had committed an offence that he would probably go to juvenile detention. It was presented to this kid that, instead of going to detention, he had a choice to do two or three programs with Veteran Mentors. He went, 'I'm definitely staying out of that system,' and he came to us. Initially, like Matt said in his brief, he was the kid who was pushing back, rebelling, whatever. He got through that phase and completed the program. He did okay; he went home. We did not have that support set up at that time and he kind of slipped back under the wheels, but he had a second program booked in with us. The next school holidays he was back in the program with us again, and this time he realised that once he implemented the lessons he learned the first time they would make a difference. He knew that we would support him and that we really cared for him.

The second time coming through, he was open to everything that he was learning. He did not have resistance from day one. He had ears open. He wanted to take it in: 'I want to change my life because these guys care and they have such a wealth of experience.' After that program he went home. He ditched his friend group that was pulling him down. He did cop a punch for it, but that sort of reinvented his desire to not be in that group anymore. Since then he has become a plumber or something, so he is nearly 20 years old. We got him back as a junior leader, a junior mentor, to show that we are not just angry Army people; we actually care and it works. When he came back he was like this prefect of a guy, just singing our praises. It was really awesome to see that was a possibility. He did not go through the juvenile detention process. He was not involved in taxpayers' money. It took him two programs.

Mr HARPER: Thank you both for your service, your passion and your drive. I personally know that you are changing lives.

Mr McDONALD: That was a great presentation. We heard from a witness the other day who said, 'We don't need a silver bullet; we need silver buckshot across a scattergun approach.' There will be people who look at your program and say, 'That's not going to work.' There is a continuum that you fit nicely with; I can just see it. I really appreciate your answer to the question before about early intervention, because it is clear that kids need that hope and support. I think you said that you work with 12- to 17-year-olds. That is quite a range of ages. Are they integrated or are they separate cohorts with younger people, and how do you reckon that can fit within the schooling system?

Mr French: We have a platoon layout, and in that platoon we will have sections of about 10 to 12 participants in each section, two mentors. We have a one-to-four ratio: one mentor to every four participants on our program. That is why we get such tremendous results. They are integrated. There are 12- and 13-year-olds who will push the older kids' buttons and they need to learn resilience, but at the same time the 12- and 13-year-olds bring fun and entertainment for the older kids as well. The only thing we do is separate the females at night-time, but they are all integrated during the program. Sleeping quarters are obviously separated. If you think of a school ground at a unisex school, that is exactly sort of what we get. A snapshot of a school ground is what we get here on our programs, but from every corner of the nation.

Mr Methorst: The average age of participants is 14. Year 9 is the challenging point in their brain development so that is the average age, but we get a snapshot either side of that.

Mr McDONALD: Well done; it is really great.

Ms BUSH: Thanks, Matt and Troy, for coming along and for the fantastic work that you do. I have a bit of a comment and then a question. I just want to recognise that a lot of what you have said today we have heard throughout these hearings: the importance of working with families; the importance of health; the impacts of social media; reducing and ending suspensions and exclusions, which we have heard a lot on; and the power of physical activities and role models. I just want to acknowledge that I heard those things in your submission today. Also, there is a need for a variety of programs that are available for young people, and particularly for you in that early intervention space. Are there young people you have dealt with that you have found you would not be suitable for?

Mr French: The only type of children that are not suitable for our programs are heavily addicted to drugs and extremely violent outside of the household. Because they are sleeping in dorms, the last thing I want to do is run up to a room and find a kid whose head has been bashed in. It is weird that extreme violence inside the home is acceptable, because we find those participants do not generally attack outside the home. So mums that are getting bashed up, dads that are getting bashed up, sisters that are getting pushed downstairs—they are acceptable to attend to our program, but if a kid was out stabbing people we would not accept them. My sales assistant Caitlin has a very extensive list that she goes through when enrolling participants onto our program. Basically, they are really the only type—and on the autistic scale, if they are still capable.

Mr Methorst: The child needs to be able to look after themselves without a carer, if that makes sense.

Ms BUSH: It is interesting you say that—if I can just make this comment—because those are responses that people often give me: 'Why don't you take these kids and just give them to some military blokes for a little while?' Often I say that you can for some of them, but for some kids where there are drugs or really severe disability that is not being managed it is not the right solution. Would you agree with that? Have I got that right?

Mr French: With the drug thing, yes. Having a kid addicted to ice would not work. Then again, if a kid has come in and partaken in recreational drug use every weekend, sure, we will take them. It is just heavy, addictive drugs. They have to be capable and not extremely violent outside the household.

I just want to touch on one thing. When I say veterans, we are so much more than veterans. On my last program, my medic is a pharmacist. I had two firefighters, one of them from Townsville. My platoon commander is a counsellor and works at headspace as a team leader. I am surrounded by absolute experts but from all different backgrounds coming together. They look after their bodies. They are fit and healthy, so you can imagine what type of role model that is to a participant, a child of that age. It is phenomenal.

Ms BUSH: We could talk all day about the impact of veteran wellbeing and what these programs must be doing there, but I will let it move along. Thank you for your work.

CHAIR: We are just about out of time. If we have any further questions, can we send them through to you?

Mr French: Yes, 100 per cent you can.

CHAIR: How much would it cost somebody?

Mr French: \$5,500 for nine days.

CHAIR: In relation to the member's question regarding the constraints around who you can take, we have heard that such a high percentage of those who are repeat offenders have severe cognitive limitations, fetal alcohol syndrome—

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Mr French: We take those kids, too.

Mr Methorst: We are not teaching rocket science or anything. Our aim is to teach kids to live from here.

Mr French: To love themselves.

Mr Methorst: So we show that. It is pretty straightforward.

CHAIR: Thank you so much for the work that you do. It has been a pleasure to meet you both, Troy and Matthew. If you do not mind us sending some questions to you, we would really appreciate it.

Mr McDONALD: Congratulations on the lives you are changing.

Proceedings suspended from 1.32 pm to 2.04 pm.

GRACE, Mr Ian, Founder and President, Youth Music Venture Inc.

CHAIR: Good afternoon. Ian, would you like to make an opening statement before committee members ask some questions?

Mr Grace: I would love to make an opening statement. It will be quite a long one because there is probably a lot to cover but, hopefully, that will get across what we do and what we would like to do if we were given the ability to grow further. I will mention at this stage that we are a voluntary organisation. If you look at what we do and what we have done, which we are very proud of, imagine if we were elevated, say, to being full-time. It would be like a volunteering Gold Coast structure with a paid management structure and volunteers. Then the sky is the limit.

To give some background, I came down from Brisbane 16 years ago. When I got here, guess what: youth issues. There we were at the lake thinking, 'This is lovely,' but then on Friday and Saturday nights we had no sleep. It was that kind of thing. I got to know the police very quickly; I had to have them on speed dial. Out of bad comes good. I had done a program for adults in Brisbane. I am not actually a musician, and here I am running a music program for kids. We were mucking around up in Brisbane. We ended up on stage playing like very bad rock stars. It was one of the few things I thought of for kids: 'I wonder if I could adapt something like that for kids.' It took me a couple of years to get it off the ground. Here we are now 14 years down the track.

As I said, we are a registered charity. It is voluntary. It is totally free. I know the guys from Veteran Mentors well; ditto with Leisa before. Our program is free. It is totally free for the kids. We said in the early days, 'If there is a choice between a packet of cigarettes and them coming to rehearsals, it is not going to happen,' so everything is free—equipment and everything. We have the lot. We have three complete sets of equipment at the airport, which is our Gold Coast home. We partnered with the airport several years ago. We have three complete sets of equipment at Seagulls Club. They built rooms for us down there. We have two complete homes for the organisation.

'Want to be in a band?', as you can see from the little flyer, is our catchphrase and what has probably made us unique Australia-wide. Other people have said that there is nothing like it in Perth or wherever. It was just that idea I had from Brisbane. I fumbled and stumbled along and we got there. The model has worked.

I have been travelling around the world for 25-plus years. I lived overseas for 16 years—teaching, advertising, customer service et cetera. I have worked in Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and UK. The only reason I mention that—I also did about 250 business plans through the federal government's New Enterprise Incentive Scheme as a side contract—is that I was able to use that business experience. As Laura knows, I have been a committee member for many years and also vice-president of the Southern Gold Coast Chamber of Commerce. That has all given me a large contact base, shall we say. I know a lot of people. That and my business experience has helped to run the organisation from day one like a business, as opposed to a mums and dads not-for-profit.

In terms of proud moments, we were awarded the Gold Coast Community Organisation of the Year Award in 2022 and the Volunteer of the Year Award in 2022 and were finalists for both of those in 2023. This year, very proudly—because it is all about kids—one of our young musicians was awarded the Gold Coast Youth Volunteer of the Year. That kind of recognition has been quite amazing.

I have always said that the program is about music but it is not about music; it is about teaching kids life's values. Music is the vehicle. We have done okay musically. We did 13 gigs at the Commonwealth Games which no-one else did. We did the opening ceremony preshow in front of 35,000 people, which was enormous. We did the exclusive entertainment for the media preview at the athletes village—again, amazing. One of our musicians who sang at the Commonwealth Games opening ceremony went through to the semi-finals of *The Voice*, and we have just had little Shaylee on *Australian Idol*. We have kicked a few goals in the music field, but that is not the focus.

What is interesting is that a few years ago now Youth Association Network Queensland, YANQ, came down and did some research on us. They said to us, 'You know what, Ian? Your organisation seems to be solving a lot of problems that a lot of organisations are set up specifically to solve, and you are solving them without setting out to solve them.' In other words, we do not look for the problems; we just make them better people, better equipped to better deal with whatever comes their way. That was their feedback at the time.

The police have been part of our committee for the entire 14 years as well. They helped me so help them: I chaired the police community consultative committee meeting since 2015, up until COVID. We are very much involved with the police and dealing with them for the entire time.

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We have had over 600 kids aged 11 to 17—very similar to the Veteran Mentors group. They have come through and are just amazing people. They do amazing things in the community. In terms of further education—this is observation plus research—it goes through the roof. That is why we are totally involved with the education industry on the Gold Coast. We are a member of Study Gold Coast, which is the overarching body. In fact, we joined their delegation in Tokyo back in 2019. We have partnered with Southern Cross University—they are financial sponsors as well—Coomera TAFE and Emmanuel College. They have now brought us in as part of their arts academy. That is a great honour as well. The list of schools just goes on and on. That is another major benefit of it.

When kids have been through the program, they get encouragement and lots of love. I say to them, 'Guys, step out there.' At the beginning of a program I say to them, 'Do stuff that you think is going to make you look stupid, because no-one here is ever going to tell you that you are stupid.' I will just say, 'Good for you for having a go. Now, let's see if we can help and see if we can improve.' The kids who have come in playing one instrument are now playing two, three and four. Someone said in year 1, 'I can't sing. No way can I sing.' He has been a professional musician now for about seven or eight years. When he starts singing his signature tune *Hallelujah*, the whole room just stops. It is amazing what can be achieved if you have that right kind of enthusiasm. We get musicians wanting to help at times. We have a chat with them, they go away and we say, 'No. They may be very skilful at what they do, but they will not have the empathy with kids.' That is vital.

It is also about influence. The 600-odd kids have probably had influence on hundreds if not thousands of other kids. I was talking to two of the police sergeants up at Coomera and Nerang. They were both having lots of youth issues. They said, 'You know what, Ian? Every kid you put in that program is one we do not have to worry about, but they are going to influence two, five, 10, 15 or 20 other kids who will follow their positive example in life rather than the dropkick down the road who will get them into trouble.' It has a lot of influence out there, apart from just the numbers that have been through the program.

I will tell you one story. We have bucketloads of stories. The program is open to all kids; it is not just for disadvantaged kids—it never has been 'just for'. The police have sent kids to us—of course they have. We have kids with special needs in virtually every single program. Just one story: we will call him 'Luke' for the sake of anonymity. Luke was 12 when his mum died of a drug overdose and he was 14 when he came to us. He had been kicked out of every school. He had been kicked out of Arcadia, which is kind of like the last resort, supposedly, after that. I wrote a letter to the judge for him at one stage. He was going in one direction, as you can probably imagine. Probably the only time I have ever sworn in front of one of the kids—we do not do that stuff—was with Luke. I went over to him and said, 'Luke, you're a dickhead. Those kids are not your friends; they are never going to be your friends. They are going to continue to get into trouble and I am not writing another letter to the judge. Are we cool?' He said, 'Yeah, we're cool.' I get emotional telling this story. The Smith Family committee member we had arranged for him to go into TAFE. At the same time, we had an amplifier that had been donated and we said, 'Luke, would that go with your guitar?' 'Fantastic.' I said, 'Okay, it's a loan. You show me your school certificate when you complete it and we will take the "L" off.' That is what happened, seven years down the track. It was a beautiful story of what it did for him as well. As I said, I have been travelling around the world. On my business LinkedIn I got a message from the aunt and uncle whose care he had been in. They said, 'Ian, we just had to reach out and tell you: we still talk today about what you did for Luke.' Just that one story makes the whole process worthwhile, and there are plenty of others.

As I said, the program is teaching the kids all of life's values. Earlier you were talking to the guys from Veteran Mentors about age groups. It is amazing: all of those barriers are gone. While the 14-year-old and the 16-year-old will not talk at school because they are two years apart, here the 14-year-old will be telling the 16-year-old what to do and they will be saying, 'Wow, thank you so much.' It breaks down all those barriers completely. They support each other—communicating, compromising and all that: 'Your music sucks', 'Well, so does yours', 'Well, we've got to work it out,' and away they go.

I have mentioned the education industry as well. From our point of view, if we are given resources to double, triple or quadruple what we are doing then we will get double, triple or quadruple the results; it is that simple. There is not a maybe about that. We nearly had funding several years back from Kate Jones. She loved our program and allocated a big chunk of money. I will not go into all the details, but then council ended up appropriating it and we never got the money because she wanted us to become full-time. A bit like Volunteering Gold Coast with the management structure and then all the volunteers underneath so you can just keep increasing your size. If we get resources to increase further, then the results will carry on. We do not have to prove that; we know it is there. It is factual.

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I will mention a couple of things here. This is only pie in the sky stuff. This is me talking as Ian Grace, some bloke down the street, nothing to do with Youth Music Venture. There are things we cannot control, but I look at times, as I am sure a lot of other people do—and we have discussions in our groups of friends and so forth—about what the hell is going on here. A 10-time offender, a 75-time offender—you have to be kidding me. There is something dramatically wrong here. One thing is lowering the adult age to 16 or even 14, because I tell you what, if somebody stabs you, you are just as dead whether you have been stabbed by a 14-year-old, a 16-year-old, as we have had the tragic case in recent years, or an 18-year-old. I am just throwing that out there. There is nothing we can do. These are things that we cannot do, but things I thought I would throw out there. Why don't we get rid of the word 'repeat'? As I said to the guys at Veteran Mentors who I have known for a long time now—I am very involved in the veterans space as well—if they offend once, straight off to a camp, farm, whatever you want to call it, run by the guys like Veteran Mentors where they then get that military discipline, they get skills to help them in life and a bit of love—a lot of love as well—so that there is none of this 10-time route, out on bail, offend again. That is just me throwing it out there. I am sure other people have said the same kind of things. Surely it cannot be that hard.

The next thing is making parents absolutely responsible. The first time around, that is it. 'Oh, you can't take away their money because that means the other people in the family might suffer, too.' 'Work it out, guys.' They have to suffer as well. Parents have to be responsible, end of story. Interestingly, looking at Singapore, it also includes those from overseas. A lot of the times we have had problems with those who have come from overseas and we have had recently, as you have seen—and I am not singling out any one group or whatever, but it has been around for a long time—and over there they say, 'You do anything wrong, you and your family are gone, end of story—you and your family. If you do anything wrong. If you are carrying a machete, we do not do that. If you are into drugs, you are doing that or whatever, you are gone—you and your family.' I tell you what, it sorts it out very quickly because, guess what, the whole family is saying to little Freddie, or whatever their name is, 'Don't do it because we will all go.' I throw those things out there. Have a look at Singapore and their crime rate and jail occupancy compared to ours and you say, 'Maybe there is something there that we can be a little bit tougher.'

CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt you there. I am mindful of time to give the committee an opportunity—

Mr Grace: I am nearly done.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Grace: This is what we can control. What I am suggesting, what I would love to see, is that Youth Music Venture and Fight 4 Youth—Leisa who you spoke to before, an amazing lady; we have known each other for years—working together. An example, as I just said a minute ago, you have five kids in a stolen car. It is a bad act and the wrong thing to do, but they are not necessarily bad kids at that stage. They are show-offs. They are there, probably from a tough life and all the rest of it. I did discuss this with Jo McKenzie, the regional coordinator for Youth Justice as well—as a matter of fact, we are catching up again shortly—throwing out a different idea that nobody has done before.

Apart from getting into the Veteran Mentors camp, they are told that they will have the opportunity to be put into a band and end up on stage, performing like rockstars, in front of a clapping, applauding and cheering audience. That says, 'You have got to be kidding me. Five of us just stole a car and you are going to put us in a band?' There is not a kid on the planet who would say no to doing like their idols do—to be actually on stage in a band playing. That can be done easily. We do it with kids where they have to be playing a musical instrument or singing to a degree first; we cannot start from scratch. They are then mentored. We start off, if you can imagine, 'You are four groups of strangers. Say hello to each other. You are now an instant band.' That is how it works. Off they go. Eight weeks later, they are on stage playing like rockstars—Laura knows; she has seen it—and it just blows you away every single time. We even have a sudden death one which is a school holiday program at Emmanuel College where Monday morning they are strangers, but by that Friday night they are on stage playing like rockstars.

What we do at the moment is Leisa Logan's group teaches the kids music as we do not have the facility for or the time for that. They can teach them music and then feed them into us. Then if they are into Veteran Mentors on a farm being taught all the things, you split it into two areas: those who already do play an instrument or sing and those who do not. For those who don't, it is easy—you teach them. They get lessons and they are taught for six months. Six months would probably be the minimum—six months, could be nine months, could be 12. Then from stage they are playing well enough to then be put into the band program. All three organisations could be working seamlessly by putting those three together. However, there are rules with it. You do not get put into a band just because, 'Oh, that's nice. I'm going to be put in a band.'

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The idea is out there—I am sure you might be thinking the same thing; it is crazy—but if you think about it: ‘Five of us stole a car. They are going to put us in a band. We are going to be on stage playing like rockstars.’ It is similar to a school program that I was not involved in but a colleague of mine was. He was running it at a private school. Some of these rich kids should not have been there. They are troublemakers and so on, but their rich mummy and daddy put them in there and that’s it. ‘We will sort these kids out.’ They have a bunch of extreme sports. These kids love the extreme sports. ‘Okay. That is the program. You’re in, but if you do not follow the rules over here, you’re out and you don’t get any more of the fun of the extreme sports.’ In a way, it is the same kind of thing. ‘You do this here, but if you do not do the right thing over here, then you are out of your band.’ Having seen 600-plus kids in bands and what it means, they say, ‘Oh, to kick me out of the band that would be like hell has just descended upon me.’

In summary, I just want to say that is who we are, what we have been doing for many years now—14 years. If we were to get more resources to do more, we will get more results. If we are able to get resources to get all three organisations to work together, I think what we do would be nothing short of amazing, and we already know each other anyway and work together in certain ways. That is it in—I was going to be brief—in not-so-brief.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ian.

Mrs GERBER: Thank you, Ian. I know the wonderful work you do in the community with kids, allowing music to be that safe place, that community for them, which is fantastic. Describe to the committee or give the committee some insight about the funding environment and how difficult it is, or any ways that you think it should be changed in order to make it easier for community-led organisations like yourselves to be able to deliver youth services to at-risk youth.

Mr Grace: If you look under the table and see my knees, you will see how hard it is because they are ripped to shreds with all the grovelling, snivelling and pleading that I have to do, and have done for many years now. It is getting easier now because after 14 years, what do they say—overnight success. We have a reputation now. We have credibility. In fact, to add to our credibility, HOTA has just signed a three-year partnership agreement with Youth Music Venture, which for us is fantastic. Look for big things happening there. What a lot of people do not understand at times is they say, ‘You’re okay, you got a grant.’ A grant might pay for a project. A grant might pay for some equipment. It does not pay for our running costs. You can have all the grants in the world over here. We have \$10,000 running costs before we play a note. So if we do not have those and all the insurances that go with it et cetera, none of the other things work. It is only by getting Star, which has come on board, for example, that we are starting to cover running costs. That is why my hair has turned this colour. There have been many nights where we are sitting there technically in the red and you are you-know-whatting yourself. That is not good. Make it easier for organisations to have their running costs covered because unless you can get sponsorship where there is no acquittal required, no sort of, ‘It has to be done this way,’ or whatever, then you have the flexibility to do that. That has always been an ongoing issue because most of the grants say, ‘No, we don’t pay for any of this, this, this, and this,’ yet we need that to survive in the first place. That is one.

The other one is pretty obvious: there is just not enough. We had funding from Kate Jones, but that was a separate source through the Commonwealth Games fund. That was a chunk that would possibly have helped us kick off and become a full-time organisation. Probably the philanthropic side will be, in a lot of ways, more realistic. Even the amounts you see at times, sometimes it is just not enough to do the job. Sometimes it is trying to fit square pegs in round holes: ‘Here is something to do this.’ Would you not rather find out a concept that is going to work first and then go backwards and work out what it might cost? That will be more realistic. That is just my way of thinking.

Mr HARPER: Thank you, Ian, for telling the story of the 14 years you have been around. It sounds like music is the engagement tool and literally by stealth you are building trusting relationships and teaching life skills and values, or passing them on. Have you dealt with kids who have been in detention—post sentence they have come out and engaged with the program? Is there a role to play in that cohort of kids who have been offending? Do you think you could have an influence on the hardcore youth?

Mr Grace: The answer to the first part of the question is no. I mentioned Luke. Kicked out and he was on his way on the wrong path, no doubt about it. There was another one who tried to burn his school down. There were a couple of those kids, but not the hardened crim type. That is where Leisa Logan gets involved with those and also the guys at Veteran Mentors, yes. But between us, we can work with those. We are at the early stage, the pre-emptive stage, getting most of them and steering them along the right track in life. We often think, ‘Were we just lucky and got 600 of the best kids on the Gold Coast?’ We would like to think modestly that we have a lot to do with the way they are, the Southport

way they behave. People say, 'Don't you get problems with all of them?' No, we don't really get problems. We do things by example. They see how we all inter-relate, interact, the mutual respect and the rest of it. A couple of mentors came in once and wanted to be called Mr and Mrs, and I said, 'No way in the wide world. I am the one here with white hair. I am the boss and I am Ian.' It does not matter whether they are an 11-year-old or a 12-year-old. These kids recently or 11, 10—were you there?

Mrs GERBER: Your concert? Yes.

Mr Grace: Yes, the concert—the 11-, 12- and 9-year-olds—they were talking to me like adults, but they were so comfortable with it. That is just such a beautiful thing, when you add that trust from right across the whole lot. That is a big part of it. Leisa, through her organisation, with Troy and Matt and theirs, put the three of us together and it would be dynamite. We will cover all aspects, if that makes sense.

Mr McDONALD: Thanks, Ian for the work you do. There is obviously space for everyone across a meaningful, purposeful, thriving environment. I am interested to understand what sort of pathways of funding you are getting or have tried to get. I understand the one you mentioned before through the council, but do you get funding through NDIS or have you looked at that sort of area? Have you looked at even creating yourself as a school and getting money from that sort of pathway? What other options have you looked at?

Mr Grace: The answer is no. To take the last part first, it is a bit like Marco Renai with Men of Business—I have known him for years as well—who does a great job and the premises he has there is just fantastic. Again, they are dealing with a different cohort of kids. Even if you look at the bottom of that flyer, you will see Bendigo Bank which has been sponsoring us for 13 of the 14 years. Rotary helped us to buy our bus in the beginning as well. Roland gave us equipment which kicked me off. I had nothing. When I started I had zero, zip, zilch, and then seven grand worth of amplifiers and keyboards arrived from Sydney and I was like, 'What do I do with this lot?' Then Neumann Group put in funding for a year; they put in a substantial amount of money. Then we have, as I said, TAFE and—

Mrs GERBER: Bendigo Bank, community bank, gave you the bus?

Mr Grace: It was actually the federal government with Stronger Communities and then Rotary matched Stronger Communities and then Bendigo topped it up. Those three also helped us to buy the bus. Also Star have come in, but in a way they have been involved from the beginning, right from the very first year. We borrowed the rest. I got seven grand worth of amps and keyboards from Roland and we borrowed the rest. The first year it was a huge success. Then we got a \$23,000 community grant through what was then Jupiters. In a way, Jupiters/Star have been involved, the backbone of what we are, and in the last few years they have been pretty well catering for our running costs. It is a mix of sponsors and one-off councillors like Bob La Castra, for example. He will sponsor every time we do the Emmanuel College program. Gail O'Neill will sponsor with the one down south. It is bitty from that point of view—a bit of council and sponsorship as well.

Mr McDONALD: I understand there is a real shortage of music teachers, and I am trying to see how you could be a sustainable business with that and then creating the opportunity for the kids to be part of a band and all the teamwork and the benefits that you provide.

Ms BUSH: Thank you, Ian. You are very clearly passionate about what you do which is fantastic.

Mr Grace: You noticed.

Ms BUSH: We have heard, when we talk about these serious persistent offenders, that the wraparound support they need is actually quite fulsome. Have you thought about approaching other youth agencies that are working intensively with these young people and adding value to the programs they offer? We had the Gold Coast Youth Service in earlier talking about a coordinated care model and having all agencies working together to deliver what they do best, which may be music, to help support the kids. Have you explored that kind of model?

Mr Grace: Yes and no. We have had meetings and discussions and things like that as well with the youth services and we kind of at this stage leave it to them to come to us. We say basically anyone is welcome. If you have any kid or kids you want to come along, everyone is welcome. We are doing what we do and we are growing all the time. We used to do one program a year for the first eight years. The last two or three years we are doing three and four programs. It is the volunteers too. We get close to breaking stage. There is only so much you can do when you have your day job or your business to run so we have to be careful of that as well. Mostly we leave it for them to come to us. We are always there. We have had meetings with a lot of those people and organisations, but

we are not out pursuing it, going there and saying, 'Hey, have you got a bunch of troubled kids?' We are not pursuing it, but they are welcome. Everyone is welcome. That is why the police are there. A kid's tried to burn the school down, can you get him into your program? Of course we can.

Ms BUSH: There is a lot of capacity on the Gold Coast. It is fantastic to see.

Mr Grace: If we had the resources we could do four times, five times, 10 times what we are doing. Imagine if you extrapolate that out what we could be doing, but in the meantime we do what we can do, as I said, based on limited hours because we all have our day jobs and funding—and my knees are still working on that one.

Ms BUSH: Thank you for everything you are doing.

CHAIR: Thank you for what you are doing. I have found it fascinating what you do and the longevity in terms of the 14 years delivering your service. Has anyone you have encountered come through and done music been a serious repeat offender?

Mr Grace: As in like a repeat offender?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Grace: Put it this way, unless they were cleverly disguised, no. I mentioned the young fellow with the mum who drug overdosed. We have had the odd ones you can point to and say he is very much in that arena—he was up in court for doing things he should not have been doing. We put him on the right track and that is it. As far as the others go, no. That is more like Leisa would be, these guys are better mentors, but we are open, as I said, and because the police have been part of the committee they know any time they can. I have had meetings with the youth protection department up in Surfers, and I say, 'Guys, it's there. If you want it it's available', as opposed to going out specifically looking and saying, 'Have you got a bunch of bad kids right now?' We do not need to go looking for them. We are saying we are open. We have increased what we are doing three and four times compared to what it was for the first eight years so we have the numbers coming through, the rest is over to them, if that makes sense.

CHAIR: We have run out of time. Thank you, Ian. All the very best for the future year and also to all those in your charge.

Mr Grace: Wish us the best because we are hoping to send a band to Chengdu—our sister city—for the Chengdu Youth Music Festival. We have been asked to put in an expression of interest for that. Now I am out there on my knees again grovelling and begging to get the money. We are hoping to send a band over there to represent the Gold Coast.

CHAIR: The committee will now hear from some of the members of the public who registered their interest in speaking to the committee today. Before we begin, just to avoid any confusion, I would like to let you know that the Legislative Assembly and its committees recognise that matters under adjudication in all courts exercising a criminal jurisdiction should not be referred to as you are sharing your experiences with us—that is, from the moment a charge is made against a person until the matter is resolved in the courts. I am sure you are all familiar with why that is the case. Again, for everybody who is speaking, I remind you not to refer to matters as you are speaking. This includes reference to the facts of those matters. That is just to make sure that we all keep the process safe. I am sure you appreciate that.

BLAZEVIC, Ms Gordana, Private capacity

Ms Blazevic: Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for giving me a couple of minutes to say a few points. As you can see, I am not one of the recipients of youth services on the Gold Coast or anywhere else, but I am a criminologist and have worked in the area of community safety and crime prevention for decades. More recently, I have been working with organisations around the issues of funding, including both government funding and philanthropic funding. I want to raise a few things for your consideration. The first is today I have heard a lot of mention about early intervention, incarceration and all the things that are available once a young person has come to the attention of the system. I have not heard the word 'prevention'. Prevention is something that costs a lot of money and takes a long time, but it is at the core of these issues. I just want to refer to the excellent work of Professor Ross Homel in the late nineties—you are nodding so you know who I am referring to—Pathways to Prevention. I am surprised Ross is still alive after the efforts he had to go to to get funding to run this program for three years in the Logan area and then beyond that there were other iterations which drew from his work, so, yes, his work was very valuable. His work looked at the family, the community and the young person in both of those contexts. That is the value of prevention.

Unfortunately, sometimes with change of government and a heap of other factors, including economics and all the rest of it—you know what they are—programs that are funded lose their funding and the value of those programs dissipate over time because they have not been funded. Someone else comes along with a bright new idea, which really is not a bright new idea, it is an idea that spun from there but it has not had the continuity, so we start again as if we are on square 1 rather than learning from what has happened before. I would really urge you to have a look at history. We do not have to repeat the mistakes of our past. Of course the past should not dictate what we do in the future—then was then, now is now—but if we get the learnings from the past and say, 'Okay, what does that tell us about what we need to do now? What is different?' As far as I can tell from working with organisations that deliver these kinds of services for young people, the only difference is that we all have one of these now. The same people are involved, but we all have one of these and that has been the game changer. Once upon a time young people had to go out on the street to connect with each other, or at school or wherever. Now they sit in their rooms, do not move anywhere and have a million friends across the world. Some of those friends include people who are not looking after their welfare, people who will use and abuse them. That is history and there are a whole heap of other things we can learn from history which I will not bore you with here.

The other thing I wanted to say is as a person who is engaged by not-for-profits in particular to assist them to get grant funding. I have worked with them to get grant funding, I have also worked with them to set up ways of getting philanthropic funding. It is a difficult road to travel. Today I have heard the word 'collaboration'. It is very difficult for organisations to collaborate when they are all competing for the same bucket of money. I know they do not want to say that to you, but I can. I can say that. Also the thing is that I am engaged by organisations to help them work through the maze that is the funding that is available. Sometimes you cannot even find information about grants that will suit their programs.

Some of the organisations that engage me can afford my services, but some of them cannot because they are small organisations; they do not have the money to pay. Some I charge and some I do not, which creates an inequity because the large organisations can afford to have somebody work with them and work through that maze called funding. It does not mean that their programs are better, it just means that it is easier for them to get the funding because they have somebody else who specialises in that area to help them. Sometimes the organisations that cannot afford that are the ones that have the big, bright ideas, but they cannot do anything with them unless somebody actually supports them financially.

I have worked with organisations where staff are tied to the funding that they can obtain. What happens when they lose that funding? Not only do the recipients of that funding suffer but also so do the staff who have been employed to deliver those services. Unfortunately, sometimes the way that funding is organised, the way it is given, it appears—I am not going to say it is politicised, but it appears that it is politicised and that means that some people will not even bother. They go, 'The government already knows who they are going to give that money to. They are not going to give it to a small organisation like us, they are going to give it to that one over there that is really big and already has all the money.' That may not be true, but that is their perception and as we know with crime, it does not matter what the data says about crime, how people feel about it and how they perceive it is reality. It does not matter what you say, it does not matter what I say, that is their reality.

Like it is to my 86-year-old mother when the lady in Ipswich was stabbed by those young people. I had everything organised for her. She wants to live alone. That is fine. We will just put all the safeguards in place. She rang me and she said, 'Did you see the news? I cannot even go to the shopping centre anymore.' Of course I did some work with her around going to the shopping centre, but that is what hits home, that perception. Do you think she has let go of that perception at 86 years of age? No. So, we are doing a lot more things to protect her. She is focused on her protection. Other people are focused on working with young people who fall into that trap. That is what I wanted to say about funding and perception and how that influences things.

The last thing I will say, and I will not waste too much of your time, is that the process is politicised. I think government is there for two purposes, the way I understand government: it is there to protect those who cannot protect themselves; and it is there to stimulate the economy so that we can all thrive and survive. At the moment, that is a big ticket item on the government's agenda. If you give a promise that you are going to deal with issues to do with prevention and anything to do with criminal activity, for example, domestic violence, a big ticket item at the moment, and so it should be, but whilst we have been busy with the domestic violence issues and showing how much we are going to do, consultations all over the place, all the rest of it, these youth issues have been percolating in the background. This did not happen today. This did not happen when the lady in Ipswich was stabbed. These issues have been percolating in the background and because we are not looking we are not seeing.

I think the thing that government can do is actually look at the issues creeping up. At the moment we are dealing with domestic violence, what is happening in other parts of the community in terms of other issues, and somehow work out how to have an overall view of everything. Where does everything fit. Because at the moment people who work in domestic violence and family violence organisations are not saying, 'You have given us enough money, give it to somebody else,' they still want funding. Everybody wants funding because they cannot survive if they do not get it. So while you are funding that, the ones over here that are providing youth services, they will stumble along because they are always necessary, but a lot of organisations will close because they have not got the funding.

Here we go again. It is like a cycle. It happens, in my estimation, every decade. I have been around for four of them working in this field and it is about that 10-year cycle and it all comes up again, and we do all this again. I am not coming up with very many solutions for you, but I just wanted to raise those issues which I think sometimes funding recipients cannot raise as they would like to because they receive funding from government. Trying to get funding from philanthropists is not as hard, and that is a shame because it should be easier to get government funding and bring the two together and move forward. I am going to leave you on that and thank you so much for allowing me a couple of minutes.

CHAIR: Thank you so much. We do appreciate it.

HOLLAND, Mr Benjamin, Private capacity

CHAIR: Benjamin, welcome.

Mr Holland: I am not great at speaking. I have autism and I might get flustered. My name is Benjamin Holland. I have been on both sides of this coin. I was bullied at school so I ended up joining a gang that protected me. They focused on fighting bullies, cheats, thieves and all the rest. I felt like I belonged somewhere. I had a family with them. Although I did quite well at school, I could have done a lot better. After leaving school I suffered quite badly with mental anguish and social problems. Autism, ASD, ADHD and all of that was not really around then. On leaving school it was a struggle because it was Thatcher time, so there were not many jobs in Liverpool.

Eventually I joined the military. I went through all of that as well. As the veteran guys talked about earlier, if you want to be a soldier or you want to get away from something or be part of something, it is a great feeling to be led by people and have a similar thought pattern to everybody—the brainwashing, coming back and bringing you back as a great member of society, which happens so quick in 16 weeks. Yes, I was a man when I left basic training. I was respectful and went through my life. Then leaving the military with PTSD and everything else, depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicide attempts, that all goes hand in hand. A lot of it was as a result of the lack of family organisation you had while you were in the military. Whether you are part of a military force or the police or whether you are part of government, you have a certain family. I think the kids today are suffering similar to that, where they are not part of anything and whether their parents care or not.

I have seen it with my son adjusting. He got suspended for the first time and I went crazy at him, but he worked out that nothing really happens. I cannot tell him off because he has just been joking in class, but that is enough to get him detention for a day off school. That is not good because I cannot tell him off for that. He should not have been messing about in class, but I cannot chastise him. My mum and dad would have given me the belt, but what can I do about it? I would rather they spoke to him about it. Instead of him being at home, he should be in school in a room with other people finding out what is going on so there is an investigation. It is just crazy. Parents are the ones who suffer. I am lucky because I work from home, but other people would have to take time off work. That is just damaging their problems and causing relationship problems.

My whole life has been like that. I have had friends growing up who went off on the wrong path. They loved going to detention. They would just come out of detention and go drinking and partying and things. Then they would go and cause more mayhem, steal loads of stuff until they got locked back up, because that is where all their mates were and they just hung out. They were like, 'Oh, it's great in there. We've got more family in there than we do out here.' It is insane. I know your jobs are so difficult; the police's job is so difficult. It is difficult to tar everybody with the same brush because somebody might be like me, a fairly decent person who just got on the wrong path and then corrected himself. You could be somebody who has just such bad stuff going on at home that they just want out. Gangs are giving them that mentality of, 'We're here for you. If you go and steal those cars, break into a house, they can't do anything to you. But you've got us. We'll look after you, give you a bit of money.' That happens.

That is what happened to me as a victim. Ten of them came to my house at three o'clock in the morning with balaclavas and weapons. My wife looked out the window and saw them. I ran downstairs, and then they came and attacked me as I came out of the house. Luckily, I am ex-military and I am not afraid of them.

CHAIR: The matter you are speaking about, is that historical? It is not before the courts or anything?

Mr Holland: No, they never caught them. It was on the news; you can look it up. No-one really cares about it anyway. The fact is that I then did get run over and dragged up the street. I was covered in cuts and bruises. I have damaged my back again. It is like, 'Well, what's for me? How do I get help?' I am left here with nothing. The media were great to me. The police in the end were really good once I got the right officers involved. They tried their best, but I understand their hands are tied. I get it. I do not expect them to round up these people and say, 'Mr Holland, well done; there they are.' I think police are disheartened as well because they are like, 'There's nothing we can do, so what's the point?' I get that as well. It is easy to point fingers and say it is the parliament's fault; it is government's fault; it is the police's fault; it is the parents' fault; or it is his fault because he has autism. It is not. It has to be caught early. You are fighting it from both ends now. You have the people who are damaged, you have the ones who are coming through that are going to be damaged, and they are hanging around with the damaged. It is such a double-edged sword for you.

As a lot of people have said, the priority has to be about getting them early when they are messing about in school, when they are skipping school, when they are causing mayhem. Catch them out at that age early and get them into programs—whether it is NGOs or anything like that—to try and shape them towards being part of a family of people who actually care. I have helped a lot of people who had no homes, nothing. I have given them a place to stay and I have helped them out. I have taught them things and they have gone on to lead good lives, but you have to pre-empt it.

My last point is about how difficult it is for victims. I have been trying to get access to psychiatry and things for me, my son and my wife. I have slept under my car at 4 am in the morning to keep my family safe. Some police would call it stupidity; my wife would say I am brave. I am neither; I have no way of getting any help. I have applied through Victim Assist. I have spoken to them. They want a numberplate for the car. I do not know the numberplate. I spoke to the police; they do not know the numberplate. They have even said, 'We'll speak to them for you.' They will not answer a call from the police. They are like, 'We don't speak to the police. You have to have a car registration to claim third party.' I do not know; I was hit by the car. I do not remember looking for the numberplate while it was dragging me up the street. The police have not caught them, so they do not know.

Then they directed me to this other MAIC or something. I phoned them up. They wanted to know what car I was in. Well, I was not in a car, but I cannot advance the application unless I tell them what car I was in. I was not in a car. 'What's their car number?' 'I don't know.' That hit me. When I finished the form and sent it back to Victim Assist they were like, 'You still haven't got a CTP off them.' 'I know, because I was not in a car.' 'Well, they were. You have to get it from them.' I am like, 'But no-one knows that car.' 'Well, you have to go back to MAIC and get them to write a declaration to say there was no car involved.' I am autistic. They do my head in, so what do I do? I am like millions of others who go, 'Do you know what? This is just too hard. I can't do it.' So instead I am skimping myself now to pay for private health for my son and private health for my wife and me. I am the one who just keeps working. Even though I am destroyed, I just have to keep working because otherwise how do I keep going?

CHAIR: Do you get any support at all now?

Mr Holland: No.

CHAIR: You are getting nothing?

Mr Holland: No.

CHAIR: As you know, submissions are still open. Could you put what you experienced down for us and send it through to the secretariat, please? It is really important. The things that maybe you have not shared with us today, include all of that right from your interaction with police. I know it is difficult.

Mr Holland: No, that is fine. Of course I will. I would do anything to help. Even if you want to ask any questions about what it is like to be down and out, what it is like to be in the military and when you leave, what PTSD feels like or feeling suicidal every day. I had the wrong medication for 48 years until four years ago, when they finally worked out I have autism; that I was not crazy.

CHAIR: We will compile any questions and we will send them through. Today I really wanted to just give everyone the opportunity to speak.

Mr Holland: That is great. I just wanted to say my part and let you know that not everyone thinks it is the police or the government's or anyone's fault. I think the police even feel it is their fault sometimes and they try and defend themselves. It is like, 'It's not your fault. You don't even have working computers half the time.' It is the bigger picture. Thank you so much; I really appreciate it.

CHAIR: I am so sorry for what you went through. We will be in touch with some questions. If you can put a submission in, you have until 1 March. If you can get something to us that would be really good.

Mr Holland: Thank you, I appreciate it.

ALCANTARA, Mr Marcelo, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome. We would really appreciate you sharing with us your experience.

Mr Alcantara: Thanks for having me, members of parliament. I know that I cannot talk about specific events so I am going to talk in general terms. I am also a victim of having youth criminals with knives inside my house. This happened recently. Until then I was just living my life. I lived on the Gold Coast for a year and a half. It was a very traumatising experience. We now always sleep in a single room with my daughters. We are spending thousands of dollars thinking about fences and alarm systems and things that can make us feel safe in our own home.

From the beginning of all of the talk you have heard today we can see that everything is focused on youth criminals, how to reduce offending and how to make it better for society overall—which is great—but there is so very little about deterrence and how to make victims feel safer. Everything that you have talked about here so far does not make me feel even a little bit safer. All this has results in the long term. When these kids come to our home with knives, they know they are doing something very wrong. This has a lot of consequences for the families, for society, social media, and everybody here. It happened in my home, but my neighbours are scared. Everybody is now scared. When you talk to the police they say, 'We know who they are. We arrested them last week. They were doing the same thing last week. We just arrested them. It is a lot of work to arrest them and then they just come out.' How do we feel about that?

We had all these conversations before to say, 'Let's protect them with music, boxing and military things.' They go and do these things, it sounds great, but then they come out and do it again. In our case my wife found all of them on Instagram: Forty-Two Gang; You Sleep, We Creep. They stole our cars. They took them to a parking lot and they recorded rap music. It is funny, because some of the people earlier on were talking about programs to improve the kids with rap music. They recorded five cars with burning tyres saying, 'We steal cars. How funny is that?' We are investing all of this money to make the lives of the kids better, but what about the victims? How do you think I feel about knowing that these eight guys came to my house with knives, we had violence on the CCTV. Two of them were released from juvie the previous day. The police told me that juvie is fun for them. They congregate and there is a swimming pool. There is no punishment; there is no deterrence. They do not care. Then we hear from the Premier that he is going to forbid the sale of knives. People do not have kitchens at home? There are no barbecue knives there? Sure, they will not get fancy machetes or the ninja katana blades, but they will have the same knife that can cause hurt to my family.

CHAIR: Marcelo, do you have something you would like to share which you believe as a committee we should look at? Please understand that as we have been travelling we have received submissions. Have you made a submission yet?

Mr Alcantara: No.

CHAIR: Can I ask that you please do, again without putting any identifying information in there? I ask for your thoughts because they are very much part of the seven themes, I suppose you could call them, that we have identified so far, and one of those is around better support for victims. Is there anything at the moment or that you would be happy to put in a submission about that? Also in terms of what you see within those who are cycling through detention when detention is not a deterrent, what do you think should happen when detention is not a deterrent?

Mr Alcantara: If you see that they are just waiting to leave to commit another crime is a deterrent, because if they are going to commit another crime I do not want them to leave. I do not want them to get bail. If you saw that the person did two robberies, do not release them to commit a murder next.

Mr HARPER: So longer sentences?

Mr Alcantara: Minimum sentencing—for example, adult time for adult crime. They know what they are doing. They know what they are doing is wrong and they are causing a massive effect in our society by their crimes, so we need to improve them over time but we need to create a deterrent so they say, 'Let's not do that because this is going to be really bad for us,' and I do not think this is there right now. The other thing for me as a victim is that I feel there is no transparency. I was not assigned a detective. I do not know who the judge is. I do not know who the criminals are. Everybody knows me. I was in the media. I gave an interview. Everybody knows who I am. People know where I live, know my wife, know my two daughters. I do not know anybody: I do not know the detective, I do not know the judge, I do not know the criminals. Is it fair? If there is a recording with the cameras, they will get blurred. Everybody is hidden except the victim. The victim is not hidden. The victim has their

face out there and there will be consequences and maybe now retaliation. I am in the media. I am here with you guys because they will be released tomorrow. They might say, 'I'm going to catch that guy that was talking to the media saying that we should get some more jail minimum sentencing,' or whatever. How do you guys think I feel?

Mrs GERBER: Marcelo, in terms of some changes that might be able to be made to improve the system—

CHAIR: Member for Currumbin, just one quick question because, as I explained, this was not a session for that. We wanted to allow people to speak, not for any questions, so what would you like me to ask?

Mrs GERBER: Through you, Chair, I just feel that we have heard a lot about early intervention and this is the first time we have heard from victims and I would really like to allow victims the opportunity to be able to answer some questions.

CHAIR: What would you like me to ask, because I really wanted this time as we still have other people, so what would you like—

Mrs GERBER: Marcelo, I would like to ask you: are there some changes that could be made to both the law and the system in order to make it better for victims? For example, we know that in 2015-16—

CHAIR: Okay. Member—

Mrs GERBER:—detention as a last resort was put into the Youth Justice Act. What about the principle of detention as a last resort being removed from the Youth Justice Act and then what about opening the Childrens Court to allow victims and their families in the court? Are any of those changes something that you think should be made in order to better support victims?

Mr Alcantara: I think they are way better changes than forbidding knives to be sold to minors. I think these are really good initiatives. I do not know if they are all, but they probably will encourage judges to be a bit more strict and ways to feel safer to make sure that someone that has committed two robberies does not commit murder the next time. I think these are two really good initiatives, a hundred per cent.

Mrs GERBER: Those changes, yes. Thank you, Marcelo.

CHAIR: I will give a question over here. My apologies, because I wanted this whole time for you to be able to just talk, because we do have others who are ready to speak, but one quick one please.

Mr HARPER: Marcelo, thank you for sharing your story, particularly that the focus is needed around victim support. When someone is detained for a violent offence—let us, say, break and enter with violence—and they come out of detention, do you believe there should be a mandatory period of rehabilitation where they go on to a program so they do not go back into the community and mix with the same people and reoffend? Do you think there should be a structured exit compelled by the courts to undertake a rehabilitation program?

Mr Alcantara: A hundred per cent so that they can be monitored to not reoffend, because as we see the tendency to reoffend looks like it is very high. The only thing about the monitoring rights that could be a problem—it sounds great—is that they need to have the ankle bracelets to make sure. Usually crimes happen at night. They congregate and stuff. Can we make sure that they are not out at night? If they are out at night, they come back into jail, for example, or something very strict: 'If we catch you out, you're going to come back to jail.' We need to have the theories. We need to have something more strict. It was heartbreaking for us to hear from the cops that, 'We know who they are. They were doing the same last week.' This is insane.

CHAIR: I think what the member was referring to—and what we have heard about—is that with this high percentage that are cycling through, because detention is not a deterrent, on exiting detention they would go to a residential facility, which could be like the just announced relocation sentencing, which would be either around education for nine or 12 months or a pathway into employment through training so that they are not going back into the community and putting the community at risk but are given that pathway out of that cycle. I think what you were saying is that as long as it is mandatory so that they can proceed; is that right?

Mr Alcantara: Yes. I think that sounds like a good initiative, yes.

CHAIR: Is there anything you would like to, because we have some other speakers, share with us? Again, is there a problem if we write to you if we have any further questions?

Public Hearing—Inquiry to examine ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and support for victims of crime

Mr Alcantara: No, write to me a hundred per cent and I am going to make a submission.

CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you.

Mr Alcantara: I have never made a submission for something like this and I am going to write some ideas and things that I think could make sense.

CHAIR: That would be wonderful.

Mr Alcantara: Yes, I wanted to put the tone of the frustration of how we are feeling and with the other people I am seeing on the internet and congregating these other people here that came here today too to really feel from the victims. Before I saw all of the people with the rehabilitation, the programs and the things, but there is another side that as victims we want to make sure is taken care of by your team. Thank you so much.

CHAIR: Wonderful. That is why we are here. Thank you so much, Marcelo.

MOLHOEK, Rob, Member for Southport, Parliament of Queensland

CHAIR: I welcome the member for Southport. Before we start, for those who did not register but would like to come and share an experience with the committee, is there anyone here who would like to do so?

Mr Molhoek: I wanted to take the opportunity to appear briefly to talk about my personal experience with the restorative justice system, because I was a victim of crime at the beginning of last year—certainly not to the extent of some of the folks we have heard from today but nonetheless my home was burgled and my car was vandalised. At the end of the process, apart from the inconvenience, I was probably about \$2,000 or \$3,000 out of pocket after I had replaced locks and keys and got the car repaired. Before I go there, I just wanted to say how pleased I am you went to the MOB this morning. While Marco is getting all of the attention as the Queensland Australian of the Year, we should not overlook his beautiful wife, Amber, who has been on that journey with him for some 10 years and is very much a key player in the success of MOB.

Also, just for the public record, you have talked a little bit about Youth Foyer. There is a lady on the Gold Coast, Dr Ruth Knight—she is a doctor now; she was not 20 years ago. When I was first elected to the Queensland parliament she handed me a brochure from the United Kingdom about Youth Foyer, which I passed on to Tim Mander. It was when Tim was the minister for housing that our government at the time actually launched the first trial of Youth Foyer in Logan in a facility that had been built for another purpose but it was seen as a good opportunity to do a test and a pilot. As we all know, Youth Foyer is a great model. We heard from Matt Slavin and Maria Leebeek earlier. I am reliably told in speaking with both Matt and Maria that the cost of accommodating those young people in Youth Foyer in an earn-and-learn environment with the supports and the counselling and everything else that is provided is less than \$50,000 a year. If we compare that to the resi-care system it is in excess of \$700,000 a year—and I will not take the time up to talk about some of the obvious failings of resi-care.

With regard to the restorative justice system, as I mentioned earlier, I was burgled. My housemate woke me up at about one o'clock and said, 'We've been robbed.' I got straight on to the police and straight on to the bank. Remarkably, within about half an hour, they had identified that they had actually used one of my cards to buy McDonalds about 400 metres down the road from my home and it was because of the video footage that the police were able to apprehend this group of six young people from Logan who had taken a joy-ride down to the coast and then decided to just look for pickings around Southport. There was one young girl in this group though who at the time was 14 and then in the course of the discussions with youth justice at Logan about the restorative justice process had turned 15, so she was eligible to participate. They contacted me and asked if I would like to participate in the restorative justice process, which I agreed to. I thought, 'This will be interesting.' I understand it is different to what we have heard today in terms of the victims of crime and more needs to be done to support them, but the system is actually letting down the kids who are the perpetrators of crime as well.

From the day that I was asked if I would be prepared to participate with one of the offenders, it took nearly five months to organise the initial meeting. There were three different case officers from the department of justice and youth assigned to the case, so it kept changing. Then eventually when I met the young girl, I had to drive up to Logan. She came with her mother. As soon as they walked in I was just overwhelmed by the sense of desperation of this family. This girl is one of five siblings. She has one sister with whom she has a father in common. The mother has been a victim of domestic violence on multiple occasions and had to relocate several times. The kids had all been in and out of child safety and residential care and were back with their mum. They were finally starting to settle—I will not say which suburb—in one suburb and starting to make some friends and feel a sense of connection and then were forced to move to another location and then the kids lost all their connection and that is how this young girl came to fall in with a group of young people who basically led her astray, so I think there are other systemic issues.

It needs to be on the public record that the housing system is failing women and families particularly in the whole DV space. Young children actually need a roof over their heads for a long period and the security of the same school, the same friendship groups, the same neighbourhood and the same sporting connections. I will not talk about the whole cycle of cost that goes on around new uniforms, relocation costs and everything else that goes with all that unsettling. There needs to be a whole-of-government look at this. There needs to be a process of looking at how we break down the silos between Justice, Police, Housing, Child Safety and DV.

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To finish on this particular experience, we met. As the victim you get to choose the punishment. I am a bit of a softie so I did not go too hard on the punishment. I said, 'Here's my conditions: you need to go and find yourself a part-time job and, between now and the next time we meet, I want you to think about what are the things that you really want to do with your life and what are your dreams.' We had a long conversation about that. I even offered to go with her in the area where she lived. I said, 'I'll come with you. We'll spend a Saturday. I will do the same thing I did for my kids. We will find you a job. I will go out with you and hand out CVs and we will knock on doors until we get you a job.'

Anyway, she opened up and she talked about some of her aspirations. One of them was that she always wanted to work in marine biology. She was hoping that long term she could study marine biology. Her dream job would be to get a job at Sea World. I actually rang Bikash Randhawa, who is the head of Sea World and the theme parks. He very graciously agreed to find a position for her. We came up with a plan to provide for her transport to and from work and how that was all going to work. Sadly, as we see in DV so often, the cycle continued and she was not able to take up that opportunity. That was a very sad circumstance.

The biggest challenge around that whole restorative process is that there is not the continuity of staff in place. A lot of young people and graduates are coming in and out and providing these services. They are well-intentioned, really good young people but what young people need is continuity. They need boundaries. They need clear direction. They need some consequences. There needs to be some formal process of discipline around what they are doing. Sadly for this particular young girl—I do not know where she has ended up—the outcome was not great.

As a government, we put the systems in place. We need to have more rigorous systems. We need to really review and dig deeper around that restorative justice system because it really is not delivering as it should. I will finish there, Chair.

CHAIR: Rob, thank you so much. We really appreciate it. Danielle, would you like to come forward?

DUNSMORE, Ms Danielle, Private capacity

Ms Dunsmore: Thank you for giving me the opportunity. My name is Danielle Dunsmore and I am running for mayor on the Gold Coast. I came today because I continually get asked questions about safety, generally from people who are afraid. They want bars and they want gates at their communities. They are genuinely afraid. I came today to get an understanding of what is happening. When your findings come out, will they have recommendations of how a council could help or federally? How can we all work together to achieve the same outcomes?

CHAIR: I cannot pre-empt what will be in there.

Ms Dunsmore: Whether I am in there or not, will there be recommendations?

CHAIR: No, I mean in terms of the committee's recommendations and report. I cannot pre-empt that because, as you know, this is a very different committee. It is a bipartisan committee. What we are trying to achieve is an agreeance from both sides. I am an Independent so I am in the middle, between the two camps.

Ms Dunsmore: I just wondered whether you would be taking those multidimensional considerations.

CHAIR: There is so much. As you would realise, we started in October last year. We have had submissions. We are going through our second round of submissions. We have had public hearings. We want to pull together, literally from everyone, what has come in via those submissions. For example, with the silos that are happening, we want those greater partnerships. Again, I cannot pre-empt. All I can say is that everything that comes in is being pulled apart to have some cohesion around recommendations to be able to address the gaps.

Ms Dunsmore: If I get in I would like to see, when the recommendations come in, how a council could support those initiatives to make sure they work.

Ms BUSH: Danielle, we have published submissions that have been made to us from a range of stakeholders, including some councils. You could look at those.

CHAIR: Yes, they are all on our website.

Ms BUSH: You could look at those. They give an indication of things that they are doing or might like to do.

Ms Dunsmore: Yes, and what is actually working.

Mr McDONALD: Including from the Local Government Association of Queensland. It is on the website.

Ms Dunsmore: I will track those down.

CHAIR: It is a good start.

Ms Dunsmore: Thank you.

CHAIR: I want to ask everyone who is here and has not had a chance to share an experience if they would like to do so. I will open it up for Ben or anyone else who would like the committee to ask some questions of them. We have 13 minutes spare and we want to use it. I want to make sure that everyone feels they have been heard. I do not want anyone to go away today thinking that there was a lost opportunity or that there was no opportunity given. Of course, there are so many reasons for everyone to submit, even if it is just a one-pager.

HOLLAND, Mr Benjamin, Private capacity

Mrs GERBER: Thank you, Benjamin, for coming back. We have heard a lot about early intervention programs but I really want to focus on victims. I want to give you the opportunity to talk to the committee a bit further about the support that is needed for victims and what is lacking in that space. In your opening statement you touched on how you felt you were not supported at all. Particularly, in the space of property crime, we heard from the Government Statistician's Office at a public hearing that victims of property crime are not counted as victims in their reports. I want to understand from you how the system can better support victims, including yourself, of property crime?

Mr Holland: Any support at all, even a phone call, would be nice.

Mrs GERBER: So you got nothing?

Mr Holland: No. It was just finished. That was it. If it was not for Channel 9, I would not have had anything. I would have been just sitting on my own in my house because there was nothing. That was the problem at the time. My problem was not with the police, as they thought. It was not with you guys or anyone. It was that there was just nobody interested. Like the guy on the phone on the police line said, 'It's just a traffic incident. It's not important.'

Mrs GERBER: It felt like the parameters of Victim Assist were not able to actually deal with it?

Mr Holland: Yes. I was nothing but, if you had seen me, I could not actually move for nearly four weeks because everything that you use to get off the couch or the bed had holes in it. I just had to get through that on my own. I could not keep going to the doctors or the hospital because I could not afford to keep paying Medicare because I was not working at the time. I nearly lost my job over it. My wife had to quit work because she could not deal with it. My son who was doing well and has functional autism, the same as me, struggles to cope. Now at school if someone is picking on him he rages because he just cannot stand this whole feeling of being attacked, which he is all the time at the moment.

Mrs GERBER: It seems like a real deficiency. Thank you.

Mr Holland: One of the biggest things that needs to change is that the waiting times for psychiatrists are insane. It is, like, eight months. I need my medication and it runs out in two months. I could not get in to see a psychiatrist for six months and they were like, 'Well, you'll just have to go without your meds.' Without my medication, I would just kill myself. It is as simple as that. It is essential.

I heard earlier people talking about autism and things like that. When you mention the word 'autism', people have a specific picture in their head. That is not autism. That is a part of the autistic spectrum. I have a 147 IQ. I am not stupid. It is just that I find it hard to understand things that are not logical. If it is logical, I can work it out. I can work computer programs in my head, but I cannot put a shelf up. I really cannot. My wife just hates me for it! I am not the DIY person.

It needs to be understood that for me to get to see a psychiatrist to get my medication is the most important thing in my life right now. I am stressing about that, plus the fact that I still have to fill in these documents for Victim Assist, which are absolutely impossible because I am not in a car and I do not know the car that hit me. I am in a catch 22. There is no way out. They confuse it even more and more until it gets to a point where it is just like a big jumble of string. I am like, 'I'd just rather not.' I will just sit in my office and work for the rest of my life until I am dead because there is nobody to talk to. There is no-one to ask for help. There is no-one to ask, 'I have autism. Can you help me?' I asked them that on the phone. I said, 'I find phones really difficult. Is there anyone there who can help?' 'There isn't anyone here but you could probably phone one of the groups that are on the internet.' I was like, 'Well, who?', because I do not know them. You are just left and there is nothing. You just keep quiet and do not say anything and do not speak to anyone.

That is why I appreciate what you have done for me today to allow me to speak because really I am not just speaking for me; I am speaking for absolutely everyone. I see it on the victim groups and the community groups. These people are just lost and they actually just cower in their houses. Saturday is like a frightening time for them. They are like, 'We know they're coming back but we can't do anything. We just shut the doors and we have the lights on.' I cannot imagine how some of those live in fear.

Ms BUSH: Thanks, Benjamin, for coming back. I have a bit of a comment and a question. The comment probably goes to Marcelo's point as well. The chair and I have been on another committee, the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee. Last year we looked specifically at the issues of better victim

responses and made 18 recommendations. Some of those recommendations included having that one contact point through the justice journey and that the whole of the Victim Assist scheme be reviewed. It is currently being reviewed, just so that you know that. You have the Voice for Victims shirt on. You are obviously a member of that Facebook group. What services, support and information are they offering you at this time?

Mr Holland: To be honest, they have just been great to me.

Ms BUSH: In what way?

Mr Holland: Not in a way that you would expect. They contacted me. They do not know me and there are people contacting me and ringing me: 'Hey, mate. Are you okay? I saw what happened to you. Is there anything we can do?' Lyndy has been on the phone. She says, 'I'll send you a shirt down, mate. I'm just absolutely appalled at what's happening to you. If we can do anything.' Lyndy has been trying to help me get this through to somebody else, to fill out these forms or to find out how, because she is trying and she cannot do anything and I cannot. The people on there—Marcelo and everybody—really it is a community of basically us all sitting in a room whingeing because—

Ms BUSH: Has she referred you? When Victim Assist told you that there are other services, there are actually services that are funded to help you fill out those forms. Has Lyndy referred you to those services?

Mr Holland: I only sent it through to her yesterday and she has sent the documents to a person who is going to contact me and help me through it.

Ms BUSH: Has she told you that you have access to free counselling services?

Mr Holland: Yes. That is what she has been trying to do for me. It was only last night that we arranged it because I was mentioning it. I do not really speak to a lot of people. I am not somebody who puts everything on Facebook or whatever. I keep it to myself because I am, like, lost.

Ms BUSH: They tracked you down through social media?

Mr Holland: Yes. Not just her but there are loads of people, whether it is ex-military groups, Brothers Aus, the suicide guys. We help each other. Everyone helps each other. It is a great thing to have for all of those people, whether they are ex-service or not. It does not really matter. For me, being ex-service, you tend to think that you can stand proud in front of a battlefield. It does not scare you but trying to work out this stuff is the hardest thing. I would rather just go to war than try to work this out because it is baffling. I do not think it is designed to be, but it feels as if it is designed to make you lose focus and go, 'You know what, it's too hard.' It would save some money. It is damaging to small people. It is damaging to people like me. I am up the wall at the moment with bills and money and everything else. I have had to take a day off to come to this. Luckily, my work has supported me to come and I will work over the weekend, but what if I couldn't? I would not have my voice heard. I am sure a lot of people cannot take time off work.

Like I said, there is no blame allocated to anyone. There really is not. The blame does not fall at anyone's feet. It is a concerted effort by everybody. If everyone puts \$10 in the tin then it would be enough to pay Esuarve and all the rest that will help. It can help. Small amounts is fine. Then you can see the changes and the numbers and go, 'Do you know what? Maybe we can get this into detention centres.' Instead of them sitting out their whole term, maybe in the last three months they do Esuarve or something like that to get them ready. While they are still rebelling you are winning them over so, by the time they come out, maybe they will touch base with those companies and you can keep those steps going on and lead them on to a better life.

It is just like the chap before said how he helped the person but it got lost in the endgame. You have to keep the steps going until you remedy the problem now. That can get binned in the end because you will have been working on getting it from the start so you will not have this humungous problem that you have now. It will just be dribs and drabs that you will know how to deal with without throwing kids in jail or whatever. That's how it is going to end up. It could be good kids. It could be bad kids. It could be anyone. You get mixed up in that because your life is not working out or your mum has died so you have nowhere to go. Who knows what their problems are. If you caught this at schools and everywhere else on the way up, you will stop this. You just will.

Ms BUSH: That is really insightful, thank you.

Mr Holland: Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

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CHAIR: That concludes this public hearing. I thank everyone who has participated today. I know some who expressed an interest did not show up. Hopefully, if they are listening to this or read the transcript on the committee's webpage, they will know they can put in a submission again. It is vital. The address is on our committee webpage. Again, that closes on 1 March. As you would be aware, we aim to have the committee recommendations and the report done by 28 March. I thank our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 3.33 pm.