



YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM SELECT COMMITTEE

Members present:

Ms SL Bolton MP—Chair
Ms JM Bush MP
Ms FS Simpson MP
Mr AD Harper MP
Mr JJ McDonald MP
Mr DG Purdie 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, 23 February 2024

Kawana Waters

FRIDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2024

The committee met at 10.29 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry to examine ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and support for victims of crime. My name is Sandy Bolton, 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 elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose lands, winds and waters we all share.

With me here today are: Jonty Bush MP, member for Cooper and the deputy chair; Aaron Harper MP, member for Thuringowa; Jim McDonald MP, member for Lockyer; Dan Purdie MP, member for Ninderry; and Fiona Simpson MP, member for Maroochydore, who is substituting for the member for Currumbin. Mr Adrian Tantari MP, member for Hervey Bay, is an apology today.

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 seven priority areas which the committee has identified so far based on the evidence it has received so far. These priority areas are: improving support for victims of crime and confidence in the youth justice system; the need for a long-term youth justice strategy; better early assessment, intervention and prevention; improving young people's engagement with therapeutic programs and supporting their transition from detention back into the community; re-imagining 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 remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence.

I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. These proceedings are being recorded by the parliament. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times.

Witnesses who we have seen before the committee across Queensland 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 important inquiry—to leave the colours and campaigning outside and not within. 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.

You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. Please turn your mobile phones off or to silent mode.

Before I welcome our first witnesses, the committee has reopened submissions. Please, if anyone has not done so, head to the committee's website to find out how to make a submission online or contact the secretariat for assistance.

ANDREWS, Mr Nathan, Team Leader—Youth Transitions, Integrated Family and Youth Service

LUDEKE, Mr Kurt, Operations Manager, Integrated Family and Youth Service

TOWNSON, Mr Conrad, Principal Adviser—Child Sexual Exploitation, Integrated Family and Youth Service

CHAIR: The representative of the Maroochydore Community Justice Group is not here as yet, so I now welcome representatives of the Integrated Family and Youth Service: Conrad Townson, Principal Adviser—Child Sexual Exploitation; Kurt Ludeke, Operations Manager; and Nathan Andrews, Team Leader—Youth Transitions. Good morning to you all. Thank you for giving your valuable time to this very important inquiry. Before we start asking you questions, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Townson: Yes, we do have a short statement prepared. At present, political, media and public discourse relating to youth crime and justice has focused very heavily on a perceived need for increased punitive responses that are not necessarily underpinned by evidence or research, instead often contradicting the empirical research and best practice approaches seen in use elsewhere. At times, popular narratives have specifically focused on children living in out-of-home care across Queensland being a large part of the problem. This has sometimes resulted in this particular cohort being disproportionately targeted by community vigilante groups who, through instances of mistaken identity, have placed children and their care workers at imminent risk of harm.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission has previously examined the criminalisation of children in out-of-home care and noted that there is a well-established nexus between children involved in the child protection system and their subsequent contact with the criminal justice system. Project Paradigm, and IFYS more broadly, is concerned that the current discourse and proposed responses to youth crime ignore many of the complex background drivers and, instead, oversimplify the problem by taking punitive approaches that do not adequately address the cause and in many cases exacerbate the problem—expanded incarceration models being a notable example. While we acknowledge the importance of accountability and the need for victims' voices to be heard, it is also important to note that many of the young people interacting with the youth justice system have themselves been victims of crime, often experiencing a history of trauma due to abuse and neglect including exposure to substance abuse and domestic and family violence.

It is our view that the solutions to youth crime start with a much better understanding of the diverse range of causal factors. Project Paradigm has consulted on many incidents of face-to-face, criminal and sexual exploitation occurring in correlation with incidents of youth crime across various community settings in Queensland. We have seen the deliberate targeting of vulnerable young people by adults and older teenagers—sometimes as part of organised crime gangs—for the purpose of criminal and sexual exploitation. We have witnessed cases across several regions in the state where children as young as 12 have been provided with a 'shopping list' of items to acquire, accompanied by threats of violence and intimidation if they refuse to comply. It is common for victims to be entrapped in circumstances that if viewed in an adult context would be considered sexual servitude or debt bondage, both of which fit within the Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act.

Over the course of the past two years Project Paradigm has been working closely with professionals and frontline workers from agencies across Queensland, both government and non-government, providing training, practice guidance and support. Feedback from this work has repeatedly demonstrated that what we see are not one-off or isolated cases. It would be progressive in both a state and national context, and congruent with the intention to reduce recidivism, if responses to youth crime in Queensland accurately reflected and properly resourced a trauma-informed understanding of the issue by first addressing the social and economic conditions that shape young people's lives and behaviour through more comprehensive primary prevention and early intervention strategies that actually have a proven track record of efficacy.

CHAIR: Thank you. I will hand over to the member for Lockyer.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you for being here and I appreciate the work that you do. Just for the committee's knowledge, I have a couple of IFYS properties in the Lockyer. I am sure we all do. I come at this question from an informed operational understanding of how these residential properties operate. One of the challenges we have found—and we have heard this right up and down the coast—is kids with higher levels of criminality being placed into residential situations that may not be ideal for them and they commit offences as soon as they are placed. Can you talk to us about how we can recommend to government improvements in that process and how Child Safety and Youth Justice can pick up the pieces in that area?

Mr Ludeke: That question is probably best placed with myself as I oversee those particular programs you speak of in the Lockyer region. I think it comes down to having robust conversations and really solid placement matching between ourselves, as one provider amongst many in the state, and the department of child safety. It is about having clear understandings of what has taken place for those particular young people and to not get into the difficult conversations around funding or overfunding and the perception of what should be in place for these young people and what should not. That is often the conversation—that what we might see as a provider often does not correlate with what the department may see in that particular situation. Therefore, it makes it really difficult to ensure that we have the appropriate resourcing.

I am highlighting that the ratio of staff to young people is probably one of those considerations. Often that is a big topic of conversation and often we do not agree in terms of that. It makes it really difficult. We need to be really solid around our understanding of what is occurring for the young

person, what the behaviour set is and ensuring that we have solid stakeholder groups with a clear understanding of everybody's actions and accountability stepping out of that. Then it is not falling back to what is probably a current set-and-forget default of a young person in a placement. We need to be sharing all of those responsibilities with key partners of Education and Child Safety and bringing our police colleagues on the journey as well who are often overburdened then by a large number of phone calls. I think the joint agency protocols speak to a bit of that as well.

Mr McDONALD: Just to add to that and the overlap as I said, how do you make kids be involved with school or other programs that might assist them whilst they are in placement?

Mr Ludeke: I think a key thing and what I see all too commonly—and my colleagues would probably have the same experiences—is that the young people are not at the table for those conversations. All too often the decisions are made for them and impressed upon them, so the children are then done too. They have no ability to have any control over what their future may present. It is so important to have the young people there to have input into those particular discussions and decision-making that is ultimately impacting them.

Ms BUSH: Thank you for coming in today and for all the work that you do. I have three questions. I will start and we will see how far we get.

CHAIR: Before you get pulled up.

Ms BUSH: That is right, exactly. You said a lot of things that interested me. I think what I heard you say generally is that the way we drive down crime and stop people becoming victims is to treat the root causes of crime in the first place and to refrain from policies that will overcriminalise and drive it up. The first question I had was around exploitation. That piqued my interest around the number of adults who might be coercing young people into committing acts of violence and property thefts. What work is being done at the moment to look at that and look at how we charge and apprehend the adults who are involved in that activity?

Mr Townson: That is a really good question. What we tend to see is it depends on your district and region as to how much understanding local law enforcement and, indeed, child safety services have around the issue. A big part of the problem we see is recognising that that is what is actually occurring. It is a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation. Our stance is that, if we are not going to clearly define that issue and therefore enshrine it within glossaries of terms or defining language in legislation, then you are essentially asking people to recognise something that they do not even know is a thing.

We know it is a thing because we provide education on this. I have worked within police public protection in the UK specifically on child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation and missing children. There is actually a correlation between all of them and their intersection with youth crime. I have seen this occurring in Cairns. I have seen gangs going from Brisbane all the way up to Cairns to target young people in out-of-home care and deliberately criminally exploit them. They start them with low-level petty crime and then once they have them in that space, often those young people will already be known to the justice system. So the power dynamic for the perpetrators is such that they are able to manipulate quite easily. There is quite a high level of coercive control.

Ms BUSH: I was going to say it is similar to coercive control.

Mr Townson: It is very similar. The actual patterns when you look at the power and control dynamics are very similar. You will then see young people often sexually exploited because they are not in a position to be able to reach out for help due to being on the wrong side of the law already. The difficulty we have with that dynamic—and I am just using Cairns as one example—is that, if you do not get accurate understanding or recognition of that and you do not get victims coming forward or reaching out because they do not trust the services they should be reaching out too, we have a problem with prevalence data. Again, we fall back to this chicken-and-egg scenario.

I look at Townsville as a good example of instances where we have seen coordinated action by organised gangs using young people to actually commit crimes at exactly the same time across the town because they know police cannot respond quick enough or police do not have the resources to go and target all of these crimes being committed or reported at the same time. That is an example of organised crime.

Now, that kind of brings us to another issue. That is the fact that we are not actually recognising organised crime in this. That is something we need to really think about and start moving forward with, because if we started to acknowledge that we see elements of organised crime occurring within the youth crime issue as a potential driver, it should in theory increase resourcing. We have done it with bikie gangs historically. We have this problem where when we look at young people we tend to

focus on what is immediately in front of us without understanding that there are complex dynamics in the background. A lot of these young people are actually seeking connection and attachment. If they are not getting it where they come from, they are going to seek it in places that are actually particularly risky.

Ms BUSH: It sounds as though you are talking about something similar to drug trafficking where you are trying to work your way up the chain to identify the orchestrator.

Mr Townson: Yes. We see quite a lot of that in terms of characteristics. You see a lot of peer-to-peer recruitment. Often, the strings are being pulled by adult perpetrators in the background. It is useful for those adults because young people will play the patsy, so to speak, and are less likely to actually disclose or complain because of those complex power and control dynamics. I am not saying that all youth crime that is committed is down to those circumstances, but what cannot be ignored is how prevalent that type of situation is across all regions. We have seen it in Bundaberg, Maryborough, Ipswich, Gold Coast and Logan. We know that this is not an isolated scenario. What is interesting is how many organised aspects are actually operating out of Brisbane. They know that, if they go regional, they are less likely to get picked up because they are in remote and regional locations where the resourcing does not adequately respond.

Ms BUSH: Thank you. I am sure we all have lots of questions.

Mr PURDIE: I have a question to follow on from that and then we will try to get back to IFYS's wheelhouse. It has been reported recently—and what police have known for a long time—that well-known, established organised crime gangs are recruiting these younger street gangs because they are violent and brazen and essentially can commit a lot of crime without any consequences, as we saw yesterday with the Toutai Kefu incident. It turns out a lot of them had done a lot of home invasions—

CHAIR: Relevance—please continue on, but be mindful—

Mr PURDIE: This was a youth justice matter that was finalised in the court yesterday. It is probably relevant and timely. Those offenders had committed a lot of home invasions were on bail and did not get a conviction recorded. Is that essentially what you are saying? These organised crime gangs are identifying these street gangs, mobilising them to commit offences for them and using them as cover to commit those offences knowing that those young offenders can commit offences with fewer consequences than the adults would face?

Mr Townson: I cannot really speak to the targeting of youth gangs, but I can speak to adult organised crime targeting vulnerable young people. We regularly see young people in out-of-home care targeted because of that vulnerability and pulled into gang scenarios. Frequently, you will see cases where teenagers group together in a gang context but it is often on the back of adult organised crime. My concern is that if we look at it as though that is one category in an isolated capacity we are not viewing the bigger picture. We keep seeing adults popping up in the equation where those groups of young people are concerned. There is no doubt about it that you have gang related crime. We know there are youth gangs that exist across the state. How they are manipulated by adults needs to be properly looked at. I do not think we unpack that properly or enough. We also need to recognise that we are not just talking youth gangs being targeted; we are talking about everyday young people in our communities where the vulnerability is recognised and targeted.

Out-of-home care is a really good example. If we look at the work of the Victorian children's commissioner, in 2021 the commissioner released a report called *Out of sight* that looked at the over-representation of young people in out-of-home care who were being both criminally and sexually exploited by adult crime gangs. We see the same thing happening in Queensland. Our problem is that we are not actually teasing out this issue enough to be able to understand the characteristics—what is responsible; what is driving this? It is more complex. There is no doubt about it that we certainly see elements where there will be hints of youth gangs committing crimes in a gang capacity, but it is difficult to comment on whether they are driving it or, indeed, whether they are being deliberately targeted in a gang-to-gang capacity. I would need to see more evidence of that from our perspective in our work, but what we certainly see is young people being targeted for their vulnerability to be then utilised in crime. Does that make sense?

Mr PURDIE: Yes.

Mr HARPER: Thank you, gentlemen, for being here. I am from Townsville so I am very interested in doing a deeper dive into that aspect of organised crime. Perhaps you can take that part on notice and provide a little bit more information as to what you know and what you can share with the committee. I want to get to some of the points you raised in your opening statement about that

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public narrative and popular narrative—and rightly so when there are violent episodes of home invasions and people are getting injured. Do you agree that there is an absolute need to contain or detain the offender for a period of time, particularly when there is associated violence? What is your opinion or view of the other narrative that we should remove youth detention as a last resort? What would happen?

Mr PURDIE: I raise a point of order. I am just wondering if we have strayed off track with IFYS? I do not know what expertise any of these people would have in relation to policing or the courts—

Ms BUSH: I think it is directly relevant.

Mr HARPER: Are you comfortable to answer the question?

CHAIR: You can say that you are not comfortable or are not in a position to answer the question.

Mr Townson: Can you repeat the question so that I am clear what it is you are asking for?

Mr HARPER: A lot of your opening statement was about this public narrative of ‘going strong’. We passed some laws last year, as you are aware, regarding breach of bail and serious declaration of youth offenders. The public is asking that we make communities safer. Do any of you have a view around removing youth detention as a last resort?

Mr Townson: I think the reality is—and I like to come at this from a children’s rights perspective—detention should be a last resort anyway. If we have hit a stage where you are having to detain a child in custodial scenarios then the system has failed. Something has failed in that process. It is very easy for us to focus on that end of it because it is easy for us to capture that occurring. It almost exudes this sense of somehow there is natural justice there. I think we can fall into the trap of thinking, ‘Well, the more we do that, the more we are going to solve the problem.’ Actually, the research and the evidence is contrary to that. You are better off actually focusing your efforts on the root cause and the drivers for it, because we know that that actually changes the trajectory of those young people. There is no coincidence when you look at adverse childhood experience in the lives of young offenders that that plays a significant part.

The research very clearly shows that there is a strong connection between multiple adverse childhood experiences and a young person ending up in a life of crime. That is quite well researched and documented. We need to actually take that kind of information and probably reshape our approach and our thinking. That is not to say that there is not a need to ensure those individuals who are a risk to the community might be better placed in an incarcerated scenario. There is always going to be a small percentage where, despite efforts of community and society, that is going to happen, but we should not be looking at that as the go-to. It should always be last resort. Nathan might have something to say on that, because he and his team work directly with young people.

Mr Andrews: As Conrad mentioned, to keep our community safe I am not going to say that detention should be removed completely. We know—and I have worked with young people—that, once they have been in detention and been released, that revolving door of coming in and out of the detention system becomes extremely prevalent. I have worked with young people who really feel that belonging and connection to detention. They have family members in detention. Going back inside is not a big deal for them. When we have created a system and a narrative for young people that that is the last consequence that we have and that is not that bad, we have created a system where we have essentially created young people who are then going to enter the adult system. From just a practical and economic standpoint, we cannot afford to have children locked up from 12 years of age through to their adulthood. It is just not something that is feasible.

If we are putting young people in detention, what are we doing when they get released? That is the key part for me. That is a whole-of-community and government response that needs to be addressed. Immediately after detention we see as a really important time for young people. They have maybe abstained from substance use, engaged in some really great therapeutic programs within detention and have then come back into the real world again and all of those other temptations, childhood experiences they have had, peer groups and people in our community who will literally prey upon that vulnerability of young people are right there front and centre in their face. If detention is on the table, we need to look further at what are we doing post release for young people to equip them to be able to have a plan of what they are going to be doing once they are released from detention. We still have situations where young people are released into homelessness at times.

Ms SIMPSON: I have some questions around how you are measuring some of your outputs. Governments get hung up on inputs. It is often what gets measured and not what the outcomes are. I want to be a little more specific. I notice one of your programs is Reconnect, helping young people

stay at school. I want to ask about the cohort of young people in your care and about outcomes you are seeing that are effective. What programs are effective in their staying engaged in school? There is another part to this: how do you measure success? I have talked to some agencies and their idea of success is that if the kid clocks on in the morning—

Mr McDONALD: Two hours at school.

Ms SIMPSON:—and spends a couple of hours at school that is success. How do you measure success in regard to engagement with school? With the services out there, you would have a bit of a landscape across the other service providers and what is going on in this space about engagement in education. I am particularly interested in the 12- to 14-year age group because once they are over 15 they can go into other training. With that 12- to 14-year age group, what do you see? How do you measure success with your program? What are you seeing? I might come back with a follow-up on this because I want to understand the interface with the educational piece.

Mr Andrews: That is a tricky one to answer, because what is success? For me, it starts in that early intervention space. It is about young people having the opportunity to engage with supports within a community perspective, having workers or supports available to meet their needs and talk through what is actually happening for them. To me, that is the starting point. Obviously, we want much more than that, but a starting point is that we want young people to know exactly where to go and who to speak with to address some of the things that they might be facing. We work with young people who have a whole range of significant barriers that they are working through within their lives across drug and alcohol use, homelessness, domestic violence. I know that everyone here is aware of some of the issues within our community, but further on from that in terms of success we want to see young people engage positively in community and feel a sense of belonging.

Ms SIMPSON: We have so many kids who are in care in that under-15 age bracket. You have not measured what their engagement is like in education—a little bit more granular than they turn up at school for a couple of hours? Do you actually keep those stats?

Mr Ludeke: We have been specifically targeting that type of data more recently. The reason for that is we probably have seen for a period of time that young people have these particular differentiated programs or alternate programs, as they are perhaps known in the education system, where they only engage for a certain number of hours. Our success is based around the Queensland Out-of-Home Care Outcomes Framework in terms of that engagement. We have been measuring it objectively through the number of days that the young people are attending, the time within those days that the young people are attending—so the number of hours they are actually there—and, of course, the educational demonstrated outcomes in terms of the standards against the curriculum.

We are finding some struggles in regards to the maintenance of that engagement with education whereby there may be small incidents—I classify them as small incidents—where a young person may be disruptive to a degree, and we know that happens on a regular basis, and then there is a propensity to suspend the young person for a period of time. It is easier to do it in the space of out-of-home care, whether it is foster care or residential care, because there is essentially a default for someone to care for the young person. That then brings about a difficulty in terms of the re-engagement for those young back into the educational institution. It brings about a whole range of increased incidents and escalations for the young people from that sense of rejection. We are measuring it objectively and then subjectively in terms of our critical incident reports and what comes about.

It is probably little known, and probably a good point to highlight, that in terms of the young people in care, if they are under the department's guardianship, so the chief executive holds the authority, they need to be included in that and also have a level of approval of what plan is in place. I raise an example of a young person who is nine years of age. Since he was in prep he has only been able to attend school on an alternate basis of two hours a day. For this young person it represents a really scary educational trajectory and ability to increase his engagement aspirations long-term. I think it speaks to the difficulties that we are having. I raise the point that I mentioned earlier that we are all key partners in that particular journey. That worries me when I have got a nine-year-old in a program that needs that particular engagement opportunity, not achieving it and then what might that lead to in terms of other negative outcomes for this young person and potentially an engagement with the youth justice system.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you for mentioning people younger than 12. I am interested to follow up on a point in some of the earlier evidence and tie it in with this because I want to understand what outcomes you are seeing. I am coming back to outcomes. I know that inputs are difficult. You must have a bit of an idea across the landscape with the interface with educational opportunities where

you see it is working well or where it could work better. Earlier one of you mentioned—it might have been in our notes—that it is problematic to know who is doing what and what sharing of information there is. I have had school principals say to me they do not know, even with good agencies out there doing their best, what the resources are and what the outcomes are across a multitude of people in this space. I want to bring it back to the educational interface. You say there are some flexible options, but what do you see in regard to what you believe would work well for young people in your care as far as opportunities for support, particularly in that 12- to 14-year age bracket with the multiple agencies out there, flexischool and all of that?

Mr Ludeke: We appreciate the resource constraints on behalf of the education department, but I believe recently there was some additional funding released for the education space. There are some really good ways of working with schools on the Sunshine Coast in particular and more broadly. What that has probably been based on is really strong stakeholder groups. When we have a stakeholder group inclusive of our educational colleagues connected together and we are meeting on a regular basis, that information is shared, it is timely, it is relevant to the young person, we are having successes because no-one is outside the loop. Communication and feedback around that young person is time relative. Where we see it fall down is when those stakeholder engagements are not being achieved. We know that everyone in their respective agencies is extremely busy, but it does not forego the need to have those particular arrangements in place.

I think that comes back to then probably resourcing more generally for each of our particular agencies. It is becoming increasingly difficult to have bodies in particular roles in order to have everyone there and not have overwhelming case loads upon one's work capacity. I think it comes back to those stakeholder groups and it probably sounds quite simple when I state it like that, but that is where the critical information is shared in a timely manner for everyone to be aware of what is needed and everyone is accountable within that particular space for that particular young person.

Ms SIMPSON: It would be fair to say then that there is not a clear framework showing who is getting more success with different models of educational engagement with the flexible options for some of these children who do not fit the mainstream or there is no discussion around how that is actually measured to achieve better outcomes. What does that actually look like? Where are the qualitative or quantitative outcomes saying this is a better way of keeping these young people engaged in education other than just saying they have been here, they have attended? Is that something that has been discussed?

Mr Townson: It is discussed more broadly certainly in the research across different jurisdictions. What we know is that when you do have young people in education it actually helps for a number of reasons, the very least of which is it is an additional protective factor for young people. It creates consistent routine. We know that when you have young people who are engaged in continuous education it is seen as a general life wellbeing benefit. I think the problem we have is the way education is sought in that space consistently can be problematic. We will often see across different regions different responses. It will often come down to schools and the way they operate and the way they engage. As Kurt says, in that stakeholder forum, if you do not get the multiagency approach then it becomes very difficult to actually measure those outcomes and it becomes more of a containment issue.

Ms SIMPSON: I guess what I am trying to get a handle on is what success looks like in the eyes of those who are trying to keep kids engaged in education and not just ticking off 'I have attended'? What does that look like, who is doing it well and how do we do it better?

Mr Andrews: I guess for me it is on a case-by-case basis. Sometimes flexible schools work for some young people. For some young people to keep them engaged and have that wraparound support while they are at our public schools, or private schools potentially, is what they need. On an individualised basis that is what we need to really be addressing in our responses to young people. Like with anything, the earlier we are aware of concerns that might be happening with education—as Conrad said, disengagement from education is the immediate red flag around potentially leading to offending behaviours—and the earlier, from a community perspective, we might be aware of some of the support needs for young people or get referrals through to support education around what might be happening outside of school and in the family home, the better. Early intervention needs to be as early as possible. I welcome the new funding for education and having those transition officers available because I think it is imperative that we are actually able to identify firstly who these children are—and they are children, a lot of the times we are talking primary school age children where we are seeing some of these behaviours or those concerns around family violence and those things becoming prevalent—and then the sooner we can wrap supports around them on an individualised basis the greater the outcome is going to be for those individuals.

Ms BUSH: Thank you for your responses. Given your role in working with kids in care and in residential care, obviously we are aware of what can happen, which is the over-criminalisation of children in the residential care space, I am interested in how that overlaps then with the SRO index, the serious repeat offender index, for young people. It might be that they end up on that index because of serious violent crimes or it could be low level but repeated crimes. What is your role in trying to manage that as an employer protecting your staff but also not wanting those kids to be over-criminalised for putting a hole in a wall? I know there has been a lot of work in that space. Can you talk us through IFYS's response to that, what you are seeing, opportunities you see to play a bigger role in resi-care?

Mr Ludeke: We have been playing a key role in the particular forum around the SROI and the young people who are measured by that particular tool via the MACP and the different tiers. For each of the tiers we have representatives from our organisation sitting on those so we are part of the conversations at each level—from the grassroots engaging with the young person as well as at the higher level in terms of senior leaders of organisations and what is actually happening proactively. What that is representative of is really good information sharing at that point in time, so time relative information around the young people. That forum is more specific to the Sunshine Coast at this point in time. What it is doing is obviously generating conversations, better understanding and a better ability to mobilise services and support to those young people.

Unfortunately, a recent experience has been that despite mobilising a really solid plan for one of the young people on the SROI across IFYS, Child Safety, Youth Justice, he was still at the mercy of the magistrate who determined that it was not appropriate to release the young person. We are actively getting together to develop plans that we believe will be of benefit to the young people and hopefully more meaningfully engage them. We have done that actively by developing a plan, seeking out the young person whilst they have been in the watch house, having the conversation around how that fits with them, getting their direct input, which I mentioned earlier on about not doing to the young person but involving them in the actual conversations and decisions around them, and we felt we had a good agreement. I think it is really representative of good information sharing, it is time sensitive and relative to the young people, it is across all agencies that play a key role and the accountabilities for each step are being really appropriately managed.

Ms BUSH: I have young daughters and if they fight with me, and they do, I manage that as a parent. They might actually hit me sometimes and that is not nice, but I manage that as a parent. In a residential care setting if that were to happen that is an assault charge potentially. I am interested in how you manage that. You want to protect your staff, but what we do not want is kids to pop out of care with 30 assault charges which might be they spat in the direction of a worker, as unpleasant and horrible as that is. How do you manage that?

Mr Ludeke: I suppose we are managing on a case-by-case basis each on its merits. I suppose it is dependent on the severity as well. There is also a level of autonomy on behalf of the worker to progress that on an individual basis as well. As an organisation we do not say you must or you must not progress with any charges around those things, but the worker has a choice. Obviously what we do do in relation to any incidences that do present in relation to a physical assault or property damage is debrief not only with the workers but the young people in regards to those incidents. For property, as an example, having the young people do the repair work alongside a particular worker so they can see and be engaged in remedying that damage as a meaningful outcome.

Ms BUSH: That restorative justice.

Mr Ludeke: Absolutely. We are very conscious of that and the impacts that it brings about for our workers so we are trying to upskill continuously around our TCI, or therapeutic crisis intervention strategies, that staff employ so we hopefully can avoid escalations that reach a level whereby a staff member is assaulted. Of course we cannot mitigate that completely and there are still instances, but we are making sure that the staff are still well supported after that and having that as a two-part process with a debrief with not only the worker but also the young person for a full understanding. To bring it back to that point as well, ensuring that our key partners are aware of that critical information as it comes about as well because they play a role in that continued reinforcement around what the expected behaviours or otherwise might be.

Mr PURDIE: Just to pick up exactly on that point, do your workers report a common assault to police like those examples or only if it is bodily harm? If it is a common assault where there are no injuries is that something that is regularly reported, or is it only where someone might be injured like a bodily harm type offence?

Mr Ludeke: I could not comment on every one, and again it is probably differentiated by workers—

Mr PURDIE: It is case by case. There is no protocol that you have to be injured; it is just a case-by-case scenario for the worker to decide—

Mr Ludeke: Exactly right. Absolutely not, no. It is case by case. With regard to scenarios and experience of the staff, you could be spitting at workers and spitting in their face. That could absolutely be an outcome.

Mr PURDIE: If it is in their face it could be serious.

Mr Ludeke: It could be physical violence, being punched in different areas of the body. We do not make a determination that staff cannot go to the police.

Mr PURDIE: That is fine. I think you have answered the question. I was interested to know whether there was a protocol to call police on every occasion or whether it is up to the worker to make that determination. You have answered that, thank you.

Mr HARPER: Nathan, with regard to that post-sentence space there have been different views on this question. I would be interested to hear your contribution to this. Should young offenders exiting detention be compelled as an order to undertake a rehabilitation program or should it be voluntary?

Mr Andrews: I think where we can have voluntary programs, in my experience I have seen the most growth and outcomes for young people. If you drag someone through drug diversion or other types of programs when they do not want to be there—they are not at the stage of change where they are even interested in looking into their behaviour—the outcomes are not necessarily going to be as prudent as if that young person chooses to be there. In saying that, I do not think there is a black-and-white approach to this. This issue is complex. It is going to require a range of diverse options because we have very diverse young people and very diverse communities that may need their own individualised responses. I do not think it is as black and white as some of the conversations have been; for example, detention as a last resort and we need to compel young people to do programs. Potentially, it is a bit of everything. I know that is not much of a response necessarily, but I think moving away from this black-and-white response, looking at it as a complex issue and on a visualised basis is something that needs to happen. Looking at what is right for that young person, what is right for the victims of their offending and for that community, taking all of that into account in our response.

Mr Ludeke: I was just going to add that it is also relevant to bring forward all of the early interventions and reflect on probably the intergenerational traumas and experiences of families that then obviously impact on the young people we are seeing now, who are going to go on to become parents and potentially have the same impacts pass on to their children unless we make the right changes now. Early intervention is the pathway forward for that positive change. I know that in the suite of programs Nathan oversees he has some wonderful programs that have diverted a large number of young people away from engagement with the youth justice system and had really positive outcomes. For me, I think it is that conversation of how do we turn the dial on young people's trauma and experiences earlier so we do not need to have the results of incarceration or placement into detention and there is less of a reliance or consideration on what else are we doing after release. Perhaps we need to focus a lot more on that early space.

CHAIR: I think through our inquiry we have totally understood that some of this needs to be prior to this, so in that continuum.

Mr Ludeke: Absolutely.

CHAIR: The other thing I want to ask about is when we talk about early intervention, we have heard from everybody that it is nowhere near early enough. We have seen that when somebody enters the juvenile justice space and goes into detention that is often the first time they are getting the mental health assessments and everything that should have happened probably when they first came into contact with the police. I am struggling, because on one hand we say that they need to be at the table for decision-making and it is about choice instead of mandatory programs. From what we have seen in some of the regions, up to 80 per cent have severe cognitive limitations. How do we marry that with giving them choice when they have been making bad choices already? If there was an analysis done, it may be that those who are saying no to interventions early on may have been successful. Statistics show that when they first come in contact with police 80 per cent do not reoffend, but somewhere in that chain of the 20 per cent it is breaking down. When youth justice gets involved at the point they enter the youth justice system, what would happen if they were right up in this space and everything that was available there became available to the police in that space? Would that make sense?

Mr Townson: Yes, but I think it could happen earlier than that. By the time you are trying to give that to young people when they have hit the justice system, I can guarantee they will already be known in that sphere of peripheral offending behaviour.

CHAIR: Yes, I should clarify. I do not mean that it should not be earlier, but to quickly capture the ones that are coming through at that time instead of going along and committing those extra offences.

Mr Townson: I think it is worth bearing in mind that to a degree police have a discretion in how they deal with certain scenarios and situations. We have already seen success with that level of early intervention in Victoria with the pilot programs they are running down there. Police are actually dedicating officers to specifically look at cases. They are removed from general duties. They are not dealing as a response directly with the young person. They are removed from it and they are reviewing cases to see what the background of that young person is and what the additional needs might be. They found a massive reduction in recidivism and often the ability to divert. I certainly think that if we look at it earlier in that process—so we are talking about before you hit youth justice—we are talking about the police response. A lot of that comes back to resourcing. Police need to be resourced to do even that. What we know is that pilot programs like the ones in Victoria worked. That is an active case in point. We see it in other countries; we have seen it in the US. We have seen in the UK where that kind of approach is not just police doing it on their own; it is actually that multiagency wraparound. You have dedicated police who are able to look at it on a case-by-case basis, take a discretionary approach and say, 'Actually, there's other stuff going on here. We need to be addressing that,' and pulling in the relevant people to do that at that point in time. It works well.

CHAIR: Part of what we are investigating is around infrastructure. There has been clear evidence that smaller therapeutic detention centres are required. What has not been discussed very much is that there are youth coming through who have severe impairments which restrict them from being able to be heard in court because they are not capable of doing so. In New South Wales they have secure mental health facilities. At the moment it seems they are part of the cohort that is cycling through detention because some go under NDIS and some may need some form of monitoring and care for life. Do you encounter the same situation on the Sunshine Coast as is being encountered elsewhere?

Mr Townson: We can probably all talk to that at some level. Yes, there is no doubt we have encountered those kinds of situations on the Sunshine Coast and in other regions as well. The reality is that it comes back to appreciating the fact that we cannot taking a one-size-fits-all approach. The need for that dynamic response is very much based on the individual. When I look at cases I have seen come across my desk this week, you have young people with very complex needs often because of a significant trauma history. We are often talking about significant abuse as well. Thrown into that mix are cognitive impairments and different kinds of disability, so when we look at how we respond we need to take several different approaches to that individual. Sometimes that is advocacy as well because you will have young people who are not able to articulate what is going on for them. If we are not making that effort for those people then we are ignoring a very basic right for children, and that is their ability to be heard. We often think it is about what they are saying and what they are speaking. Sometimes it can actually be in the behaviour.

CHAIR: Do you have the infrastructure to keep communities safe, and do you come across cases where we do not have the facilities to accommodate that severe violence that is occurring? How are we managing that? Obviously we are having some difficulty.

Mr Townson: It comes down to a regional resourcing. Kurt will be able to talk to this probably more in that out-of-home care space, but we have seen cases where, depending on where it is occurring or where that young person is, that will determine what they can access, what is available to them. If you look at the young people we encounter in Mount Isa, for instance, the resourcing there might look quite different to what it looks like in Brisbane. Often we overlook that when we think about our system responses because we are frequently basing it on that bigger urban situation. Then you have young people who might be out in places like Gayndah or in those inner areas out to places like Mundubbera, where their access to therapeutic support full stop is non-existent. That is before we again get into the medical aspect of what they can access. It very much depends on regional resourcing.

CHAIR: We are about to run out of time because we got immersed. Hopefully you will allow us to write to you with any questions if we do not cover everything.

Mr McDONALD: Firstly, I hope you do a submission so we can look at some of these things. Can you give us a quick run-down of the number of properties that IFYS looks after, the number of youth and a bit of a breakdown of that, and where your funding comes from? I understand that is from

Youth Justice. My next question is going to be a bit tricky. If a kid is in care in one of your places, whom do you rely on for support? Does Youth Justice coordinate that, or do you actually take the parental role and do that?

Mr Ludeke: I am really happy to answer that. Across Queensland we have a statewide footprint. Within that we have 45 residential properties spanning from the Gold Coast in the south out to Toowoomba in the south-west and as far up as Cairns and just a little further north, so there are quite a number of properties within that. Within that residential space we accommodate approximately 116, give or take. It sort of concertinas up and down depending on referrals and need. We also have an additional close to just over 500 in terms of our foster and kinship care space. Within that cohort we probably have close to 45 to 50 per cent kin, 50 per cent general foster carer pool in that particular space. The majority of the funding for the state comes from the department of child safety. There is no direct funding from the department of youth justice. It is all the department of child safety in terms of funding.

Mr McDONALD: That would mean that any of the youth in your care who are on youth justice orders have come through a Child Safety pathway.

Mr Ludeke: Correct. All of our referrals via our foster and kinship care stream or a residential stream are all from the primary referral source, being the department of child safety. However, there are obviously the links then with our colleagues in Youth Justice for a number of those young people in our programs.

CHAIR: We did have a question on notice.

Mr HARPER: We did.

CHAIR: Do you want to clarify that?

Mr HARPER: Yes, I will clarify it but I will add another one, if that is okay. You mentioned the Victorian police pilot. Is there a name for that?

Mr Townson: I knew you were going to ask that.

Mr HARPER: Can you take it on notice?

Mr Townson: Yes. I can do some digging and find out. I was trying to think of the name of the location where they have opened up the first program. It is in real time. It has actually been running, I think, for about a year.

Mr HARPER: It sounds similar to the Townsville Stronger Communities Early Action Group, led by police with all the agencies having wraparound services.

Mr Townson: This particular program that they are running seems to be led by police and I think a legal group as well.

Mr HARPER: I will let you find out.

Mr Townson: Yes. We are happy to take that on notice.

Mr HARPER: It is interesting that you said that. Victoria has nearly 16,000 police compared to 12,000 in Queensland. It is about resourcing: you nailed it. We are such a big state. Your example of Mount Isa was perfect. To clarify my question on notice, it was around organised crime. Could you perhaps expand on that in terms of what is happening in Townsville and give examples of organised crime affecting the kids or gangs or whatever is happening in Townsville? If you could unpack that a little bit, if possible, it would be helpful for the committee.

Mr Townson: I will do my best.

CHAIR: Answers to questions on notice are due by Friday, 8 March. I want to thank the three of you: Kurt, Conrad and Nathan.

Mr Andrews: Is it possible to make one more comment?

CHAIR: It will have to be very quick, as we have other witnesses. We can go backwards and forwards afterwards.

Mr Andrews: I sit in a separate space to my colleagues here: Conrad, who works in child sexual exploitation and Kurt is across out-of-home care. I work within the community space, providing interventions for those young people who are not under child protection orders generally. I can only speak to this region but I think it is important to highlight—and this ties in with your question around outcomes, Fiona, and also the conversations around early intervention—that I feel that our responses in terms of early intervention, given the resources, are actually having some really positive benefits to young people. I could give a thousand examples. There are young people living in tents who are

at risk of child sexual exploitation. We were able to have outreach workers go out and engage with that young person and give them safety and an opportunity to talk through their trauma history and put some safety measures in place. There are young people whose parents have had generational engagement with police. We are getting those kids back engaged with school and they transition through to adulthood not having any engagement with QPS. I think what we are doing is working.

I have been working within this sector for over 15 years and what I see is a resource issue. Currently I oversee four different programs. Three are state funded. One of our programs has not received an increase in funding for over 14 years. Two of our programs are 12-month contracts, so every year we are re-tendering. There are issues of continuity of service, being able to keep staff onboard and those sorts of things. Those programs specifically target young people who are linked with Child Safety or Youth Justice or Corrections to get them back into education, employment and training—the key disruptors to offending behaviours.

My real feedback is that I think we need to relook—this is just this region—around how we are resourcing our staff. I know our referrals are piling up. We get so many referrals coming through, not just for young people who are offending but we are addressing all of those criminogenic needs for young people around homelessness, DV, mental health. It is one of those situations where it is hard to say data wise how many young people we have stopped or prevented offending, but I know that if we are reducing those criminogenic factors we can, I think, confidently say that we are making an impact. That is my feedback.

CHAIR: Nathan, can you also put a submission in?

Mr Andrews: Yes, absolutely.

Mr HARPER: And name that program?

Mr Andrews: Yes.

CHAIR: You have until Friday, 1 March.

Mr Andrews: To your point, Aaron, around the police, off our own back we have a collaboration locally where we have one of our IFYS youth workers is based with the CPIU in Maroochydore. They receive all those referrals through for those young people who are coming onto the radar. They might be receiving cautions. They might be receiving RJ conferences. It is not just a case of, 'Don't do it again.' It is a case of, 'Don't do it again and here's someone to sit with you and talk through why this is all happening. You haven't eaten for a week. It is no wonder you have been stealing from a shop,' or potentially there is CSE happening and potentially we can try to unpack that and pull it apart.

Ms BUSH: Is that separate to the youth co-responder model?

Mr Andrews: Yes.

Mr HARPER: We can keep you here all day.

CHAIR: We will have to go backwards and forwards afterwards. Keep up the fantastic work. I know you do a lot of work in my patch as well. I wish you the best for the rest of the year. Do not forget those deadlines—1 March and 8 March.

PATTISON, Ms Cheryl, Community Development Coordinator, Noosa Shire Council

SENGSTOCK, Mr Larry, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Noosa Shire Council

STEWART, Ms Clare, Mayor, Noosa Shire Council

CHAIR: Good morning and welcome, everybody. We are nearly on home turf. I am getting excited. It is so good to see you all. You are fully aware of how these things run. You will have an opportunity to make an opening statement, and then of course if you leave time there will be some questions from the committee.

Ms Stewart: Good morning. Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members, for the opportunity today to speak on behalf of Noosa council and highlight our areas of significant concern. There may be a perception that Noosa, because of its prominent reputation, is immune or does not face the challenges arising from the youth crime issues affecting all of Queensland. This is simply not true. Whilst we are known to be, and continue to be, a highly renowned and safe tourist destination, this is but one area that makes up our shire.

We are very much a residential community with challenges that are not dissimilar to so many other places. To provide a quick snapshot, we are a shire of 56,000 residents that takes in both coastal and hinterland properties. Interestingly, the recent census data uncovers a notable income disparity in incomes in Noosa shire to that of the rest of Queensland. The median household income of Noosa shire falls over \$200 below the state average and nearly \$300 below the national average per week. This financial gap, compounded by elevated living costs, housing expenses and lower incomes presents hurdles in many ways.

Our shire, like any other area, has significant challenges and we need to be resourced and supported as much as any other place in Queensland—support and resources which to date we have not received. There are a number very concerning issues we are facing. First, there is the growing number and seriousness of incidents involving youth in Noosa. Reported offences in the Noosa LGA have jumped significantly in the past two to three years. When it comes to reported offences between the ages of 10 to 17 years, offences including assault and sexual offences have increased by 89 per cent from 1 July 2021 to June 2023. That is from the Queensland Police Service source data as at November 2023. Similarly, offences against property, including unlawful entry, unlawful use of a motor vehicle, stealing from dwellings, shop stealing and handling stolen properties have increased by 85 per cent.

However, the most significant increases in offences were committed by younger people aged 10 to 14 years, with offences having increased dramatically: offences against the person—grievous assault reported incidents have increased from two to 25 and for serious assault from two to 16; similarly, offences against property—unlawful use of a motor vehicle reported incidents have increased from five to 20; and other offences—drug offences from eight to 25. These figures are concerning but they are real and, worryingly, they are on the rise.

What is also alarming is the make-up of those committing offences. We are seeing a significant increase in ‘gang’ like behaviour. We are seeing a trend in groups gathering, damaging property and physically assaulting others.

Against the backdrop of this increase in reported offences is the fact that Noosa shire has stretched police resourcing which limits the ability for police to respond to incidents and an inability for them to undertake education and support. On paper we may have 30-plus police, but this does not mean that the positions are filled nor working at that capacity. Indeed, they are often under-resourced. Similarly, given the region the police are covering and the vast distances, it makes it incredibly hard for the police to do their job.

Our police are remarkable but we are lacking resources. Last year I wrote to the police minister requesting more resources and police for our area. Noosa council has had to, in peak times, employ at our own cost police specials to help with resourcing. Similarly, we as a council, in conjunction with our business community, are strongly advocating for the introduction of a safe night precinct in Hastings Street and surrounding areas where some of our clubs and pubs are situated. The issue of increased crime is right across our shire, from our hinterland all the way through to Tewantin and our eastern beaches, and the numbers mentioned support this.

Other key issues which we believe are pertinent from a council perspective are the lack of preventative intervention in Noosa and the lack of mental health services. Noosa shire has received little funding from the state government and there are limited state services to support at-risk families. Long before children even get to an age where they may think of offending there are many families

that could be assisted but we simply do not have the local support nor resources. We have no mental health services based in Noosa, we have no drug and alcohol services based in Noosa, and we have no services that directly help disengaged young people. Any state services require residents to travel south with limited public transport available. Our not-for-profits and our own council do a huge amount of heavy lifting in this space, especially through our northern network—and our not-for-profits should be acknowledged for the amazing work they do. However, we are stretched and are at capacity. Simply our local resources are not sufficient to deal with such complex matters. We need state funding and state intervention.

More needs to be done. As I said, we need state government support and resourcing. Noosa council and our not-for-profits cannot and should not do it alone. As a council we look forward to working collaboratively with all levels of government going forward. Thank you for the opportunity to present this morning and I am happy to take questions.

CHAIR: Thank you. The member for Ninderry has his hand up.

Mr PURDIE: Thank you for your presentation. In relation to duty police, can you quantify that? Do you know what it has cost the council to pay for extra police to police Noosa?

Ms Stewart: We use police specials on special occasions and events. New Year's Eve is a good example. We have also had to use them for illegal camping when police intervention is necessary. Our police who do a great job just do not have the resources. I will defer to my CEO as to the cost of that. Do we have the cost?

Mr Sengstock: Off the top of my head, I do not have the cost.

Mr PURDIE: Would you be happy to provide that to us or would it be too exhaustive to try to find that?

Mr Sengstock: No, that is okay.

Mr PURDIE: I would like to know what it is actually costing the council to pay for those extra police.

Mr Sengstock: Absolutely. I can do that.

Ms BUSH: Thank you for coming along today and I agree with your sentiments. We have heard that consistently that to solve these problems all levels of government need to be working together. I welcome that response. We have heard from some councils about some of the innovative youth programs that they have done to divert young people from a life of crime. What activities has Noosa council undertaken and what kinds of evaluations and successes are you finding with the work you are doing?

Ms Stewart: We have a great Living Well Noosa program. The initiatives are very much looking at youth and the programs associated with our young people. Last year we undertook a needs assessment for young people in 2023. Cheryl can talk more to that. We also have the northern network, which Noosa council facilitates and hosts, bringing together all our not-for-profits and our police. It is vital to that engagement and communication with our community. We are doing a fair bit in this space. As I said, we are a small council and we are under-resourced. That is where we are lacking. Cheryl, you might want to talk more specifically to the programs.

Ms Pattison: Living Well Noosa is a health and wellbeing initiative, also focusing on mental health and wellbeing. We identified that we did not have many young people's initiatives or programs in there. We did a needs assessment late last year with our lovely student Josiah and identified in certain areas where we could be doing some more work. We are changing our programming to suit that. We have a few things coming up, some focused around mental health and also some activities like boxing and things like that so disadvantaged people who cannot afford it or have barriers can achieve those or get to that. The identified areas were for young people.

We did a survey and we had 124 respondents. We also asked a few crime questions in there as well and, I guess, precursors to crime for those people. We went out to areas where there were not so much engaged young people who are quite easy to get to. We went to skate parks and all sorts of little events that they would be at where they would hide. We had two young people go and do that because, obviously, if they see me they will run a mile.

In our region, the areas of concern for the young people were mental health and wellbeing, skill development, employment opportunities, social support and inclusion, digital outreach with many not getting opportunities in regards to advancing digitally like everybody else, safety and youth crime and also what we could do in our health and wellbeing programs and access to health care and services. Those were their concerns. That is what it identified.

Ms BUSH: How did you get a good representative sample of those kids who are at risk?

Ms Pattison: Disengaged and disadvantaged?

Ms BUSH: Yes.

Ms Pattison: We went to our community centres so they have a safe space. We went to libraries. We went to skate parks. Josiah, who is behind me, did the study. We went to swimming pools. Skate parks were a good place that we went to. We tried to get a cross-section. We normally do just tend to get those kids who are engaged if we go to those places. They are already engaged. The ones on school councils are already engaged. They are not the ones who are out in community, thinking about crime. That is where we went to, mainly. I believe 124 was quite a good cross sample of young people. Some did not want to be a part of it, but I think we incentivised it with \$10 gift vouchers from the IGA and things like that.

Ms Stewart: We adopted our corporate plan last year and we have very much now focused on from the cradle to the grave. We are acutely aware that the young people and our youth are certainly a focus going forward for council. As Cheryl said, we are looking at implementing those programs in our Living Well initiative, undergoing this needs assessment will drive the implementation of programs and also, obviously, with the northern network we do engage with a number of youth. There are a lot of providers that work with youth in that group.

Ms Pattison: I am happy to share a couple of statistics from that survey: 17 per cent said alcohol and other drugs affect their health and wellbeing; 26 per cent identified as unsure about their future career and negativity affecting their health and wellbeing. I will not go through all of them. Fifty-seven per cent identified influence from older people and peer pressure as a source for youth crime; 45 per cent of people identified a lack of supervision and opportunities as a reason for youth crime.

Ms BUSH: I know some other councils have done some after-hours programming to try to provide that free entertainment.

Ms Pattison: We have limited resources and budget as a council. We do not have a YMCA. We do not have a PCYC. We do not have any of those key facilities that people can drop into. They do have them in the southern part. You have Teens Take Control and TDP. Nambour has a PCYC. They all show that kids feel they are a safe place to go to. We do not have a facility like that here at Noosa.

Mr McDONALD: In your opening address you mentioned that you made representation to the police minister about additional policing resources. Has that been successful?

Ms Stewart: No, it has not. We got a response but it was not successful. We have not received any additional resources to date following on from the request in that letter.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you also for your understanding of the demographic of Noosa. It is much more complex than I imagined. I am thinking Noosa and the high end of town, but \$200 less than the state average shows a level of complexity and vulnerability. Thank you for being here and contributing to the youth justice space because it does need a whole-of-government and whole-of-sector approach. In terms of your council's efforts, can you talk to us about some of the things that you have had to do for community safety such as CCTV, other security programs and things to make sure that the community feels safe?

Ms Stewart: The police specials are a big one. It is a big impost on costings for a small council. That is certainly a big one. We have CCTV cameras on Hastings Street and also in Cooroy. We are looking to do an upgrade for that. Again, that will be significant expenses. We engage regularly with the police. On the back of having some problems around school holidays in September, and the chair was a part of this, we called a meeting with the police. We work very closely with the police and our associations. The biggest impost is having to do the police specials and also the CCTV cameras and being responsible for that. Is there anything further there, Larry?

Mr Sengstock: They are probably the main things. The trouble with the CCTV cameras is that they are after the fact. We do need to upgrade that. It is an issue for us but it does come at a major cost. Funding support for that is the sort of thing that would go a long way.

Mr McDONALD: Did you say support with CCTV?

Mr Sengstock: Yes, funding for support for those types of things would go a long way, absolutely.

CHAIR: For those who do not realise, we come from the same electorate and shire. We have lots of discussions around not only safety but also what is needed. I have a quick question about the CCTV cameras. A lot of the ones in Cooroy were funded through grants. Council is eligible for accessing grants?

Mr Sengstock: Yes.

CHAIR: We all work closely with the police. I think the response has always been that we have a full complement of police. My question then is: how is a full complement actually modelled? How do you determine what is an adequate amount, especially when you have borderless policing? Since COVID, we have seen the absolutely incremental rise in domestic violence. I asked the minister whether the modelling actually incorporates what I see as a hidden demand given the increases, not only in the DV space but also the mental health space. That brings me to a question that relates to the seven priority areas and why we are here. Across Queensland, people are asking for alternative models of incarceration that are very much small and place-based, close to the community and also for programs and initiatives that are community-led and place-based. I have asked this question across the state: what would that look like with council being front facing for the community? What would you envisage that looking like?

Ms Stewart: I think community safety and having residents feel safe in their homes and in their community is paramount. That is first and foremost the job of the police. Anything we can do to—

CHAIR: I was not asking about the police. I went to the actual infrastructure because part of the seven priority areas is around infrastructure for not only incarceration but also the types of interventions, even for those who are transitioning out of detention because they say that that transitioning out needs to be place-based.

Ms Stewart: I am sorry, Sandy: what is the question?

CHAIR: What does council feel about facilities within the Sunshine Coast region for youth offenders? Are there any thoughts on that?

Ms Pattison: When someone is exiting the justice system, for someone to be housed or community programing into—

CHAIR: No, it is not only within programs. Even in our own area we have those with severe cognitive issues who require residential, therapeutic and sometimes long-term accommodation. The response from across Queensland—in hearings, in the submissions—is that everything has to be community-led and place-based. Instead of being somewhere centralised, say, in Brisbane, they are asking for smaller facilities within the regions. What are your thoughts on what that would look like?

Mr Sengstock: I think you are going down the path of support services. Is that what you are looking at? We talked about how we have volunteer support services in Noosa but not to any great extent.

CHAIR: No, this would be new infrastructure or new initiatives.

Ms Stewart: Like transitory accommodation; is that what you are talking about?

CHAIR: Sometimes, maybe, but not quite. We have heard that programs are too short. They need to be longer, for nine or 12 months, and they need a residential component.

Ms Stewart: I cannot comment on the length of times or stays or residential components. That is not in our remit as the council.

CHAIR: No, but as a council what would you feel about that concept in this area? Everyone is saying this to us and we are trying to get an idea of what that would look like on the ground because every community is different as to how they view that concept. I am happy for that to be taken on notice.

Mr Sengstock: Localising it—absolutely. Again, one of the things that Cheryl talks about is that we do not have the services in Noosa. If it is required, they have to come down this end of the coast to get those services and that is not necessarily an easy thing for people to do or something that they willingly can do. Localising it—absolutely. That is bringing those services back up into the local area so that they can be accessed easily and utilised without the stigma of it all as well.

CHAIR: Including the residential component, as in the live-in component for those therapies?

Mr Sengstock: Absolutely. I would think that is all part of that exercise.

CHAIR: It is basically like supported accommodation.

Ms SIMPSON: I want to acknowledge representatives from Teens Take Control who are in the audience. Good on you, Brenden. They do a great job in trying to reach a range of young people. My question is around after-hours services that are not residential or therapeutic services. I noted you said how careful you have been in your outreach to try to engage with young people so you could get more representative and broader feedback. My question relates to after-hours engagement. I know there are some very good youth agencies across the coast. A range of agencies, also involving sexual assault, have often said to me about young people in the street, 'We're not able to do after-hours; it is mainly daytime and by appointment.' I am not reflecting on any others who have given advice because that may not be their case. Have you seen anybody delivering after-hours youth services to kids where they are gathering, rather than by appointment when they have already hit the system?

Ms Pattison: No. We do have Pomona & District Community House operating on a Wednesday, from three to six and young people can drop in there as a safe space. We do get young people hanging around the libraries, but they close at 5.30. It is a gap. We do not have anywhere open for young people to feel safe at that time of the afternoon and evening.

Ms Stewart: Pomona & District Community House is run by the Noosa Shire Council.

CHAIR: And it is fantastic.

Mr HARPER: Mayor, I come from Townsville and I have a close working relationship with the Townsville City Council. My understanding of their structure is that they have committees. Does Noosa have a crime and safety committee, as Townsville does?

Ms Stewart: No, we do not, Mr Harper. We are a council of seven councillors, myself included. We are a lot smaller so we do not have a crime committee on our council, no.

Mr HARPER: I want to follow on from Jim's point about all three levels of government working together, which I think is important. I am not sure of the landscape here, but do you work with your federal member? Have you been able to access community safety grants? For example, in Townsville we got nearly \$900,000 for lighting in parks through the work of a former member. I am wondering if you have that relationship with your federal member? Those community safety grants can be quite significant. Do you work with your federal member to access those?

Ms Stewart: We work very collaboratively with all levels of government and we will continue to do so.

Mr HARPER: Have you been able to receive funding in that safety area?

Mr Sengstock: Not to any great extent, I do not think.

Mr HARPER: For cameras and lighting?

Mr PURDIE: I might be able to answer that. I know Larry is only relatively new. I think \$300,000 for the Cooroy CCTV cameras, back when I was a police officer, was funded by the feds through the Safer Communities Fund.

Mr Sengstock: Yes it was, absolutely.

Mr PURDIE: I do not know about the other CCTV cameras. That was probably before your time.

Mr Sengstock: That was before my time, but I do recognise that one, yes. In my time, no, there has not been a lot that we have accessed, but I am absolutely willing to access it.

CHAIR: We have run out of time. I deeply appreciate all three of you coming. It has been really wonderful. No questions were taken on notice. Mayor Clare, Larry and Cheryl, thank you so much. We will take a 30-minute break and resume at 12.30 pm

Proceedings suspended from 12.00 pm to 12.31 pm.

NEWMAN, Senior Constable Greg, Police Coordinator, Sunshine Coast Project Booyah

VOLK, Inspector Michael, Sunshine Coast Project Booyah

CHAIR: Good afternoon to you both and thank you for giving time to us. I am sure you have been to plenty of these hearings. Would you like to make an opening statement? Then committee members will ask questions.

Insp. Volk: For the record, I am the inspector who overviews all Project Booyah in the state and school support officers, which is the new capability rolling out in primary schools. I also overview the capability for school-based police officers, which is new to my portfolio, and the Blue Light Association and I have a previous four years as the inspector of PCYCs.

Snr Const. Newman: I have been in police 25 years, and for 14 or 15 of those years I have worked in this space with disengaged kids. I am currently registered with Education Queensland as a secondary school teacher. My last teaching gig was in 2021, when I took a year's contract with Chancellor State College working with kids in the community pathways or special education program who had challenging behaviours and were coming from very disengaged backgrounds. Since 2020 I have been working as the police coordinator for Project Booyah.

I am not sure what people know about our program and I am specifically going to talk about the Sunshine Coast Project Booyah and not statewide. As the good inspector is aware, our main role is to remove barriers to education and/or work. I have an incredible, dynamic team who are not only passionate but also incredibly educated and skilled in this area. We do not advertise ourselves because of the numbers that we can take. If I may, I would like to table some statistics for everybody to have a quick look at because they might be good to speak to.

Just to give you a quick run-down on those, the students have been blacked out for obvious reasons. Along the top is graduation, certificate (FSK) Cert II; whether they are ATSI or not; offending prior, which is based on charges; offending post et cetera. If you have a look at the first page, student 1 was a high-end offender on the Sunshine Coast. She had committed over seven armed robberies and five robberies with violence in company and was looking at the real prospect of going to detention when she used our program as a bit of leniency through the courts to stay out. Since coming onto our program at the beginning of 2022, she has not reoffended and she just got off her two-year probation.

The stats are all there. We take a blend of students. We do not just target high-end offenders. We work holistically with them to remove the barriers to education and/or work. In an unemotional way we will look at their situation. It may be a brother who is domestically violent and has moved down from Gympie and moved in with the sister who is looking after one of our clients and she now does not have a bedroom and is sleeping on the floor in the apartment. That to us is now a barrier to her education and/or employment, so we target the brother and we assist the brother to get adequate housing, go into rehab or whatever.

It is not just about the numbers here. It is about the numbers and all of their associated family and connections away from our actual site. That is something on which we pride ourselves on the Sunshine Coast, hence why our figures are remarkably good. We do not have to advertise to get referrals because a lot of the kids are referring other kids. An example would be a young person who went to detention last week who was supposed to start with us this week. He had been trying to get into Project Booyah for six months because he was desperate to do it because other people who had been through it were saying, 'Dude, you have to do this.' It is a real underground sort of operation that we have got going.

I do not necessarily like media to be involved in our program, because the kids know what we are about and they know when the QPS are using them for a purpose or whether we genuinely care about these kids. That is really what we do. I can talk passionately about it for hours—all of the problems we encounter as well as all of the successes we have had. If you would like to ask any questions around any of that, I am sure we will do our best to answer them.

Mr PURDIE: Thank you, and I know you have been passionate about these kids for a long time, as you pointed out, and as is evident by what you have told us. I have a lot of questions. Firstly, you talked about there being a bit of court leniency given to a child. Do you find that if a child is going before the court a magistrate has an option to say, 'I want you to go to Project Booyah'? There is no real compulsion to do that?

Snr Const. Newman: No. Technically speaking, they cannot be court ordered to attend Project Booyah; it is strictly a voluntary program. However, we work closely with Youth Justice as well as Education equally. Getting these kids into our program is not normally just a one-meeting situation. With that particular child, the first time she attended to speak with me she told me to go f myself and we sat there and said, 'We'll get you. We'll get you next week.' You chip away. That kid is so loyal to us now it is ridiculous. We have had one situation where a court has put it in a bail condition that the child attend Project Booyah and that was—

Mr PURDIE: How did that go? Was the child open to that then?

Snr Const. Newman: The child was already engaged with us anyway, so it did not make that much of a difference.

Insp. Volk: Other magistrates will effectively give a bail condition and/or 'will release on bail if they agree to participate in Booyah'. We have seen that in about three or four locations over the last 12 months.

Mr PURDIE: If they fail to attend do they then go to court?

Insp. Volk: The onus to report on that bail condition then falls to the Booyah coordinator to say 'have not met their bail conditions' or 'have not completed Booyah'. It is not something we have ever asked for. It has just manifested itself through the court system recently.

Mr PURDIE: Would you like to see more of that or less of it? If someone is coming to you on that compulsion is it harder to break them down, or would you like the court to send more kids your way and give you the opportunity to engage with them before they escalate?

Insp. Volk: As the inspector—and I will defer to Greg in a second and he can talk as the practitioner—at the moment we take 200 young people a year.

Mr PURDIE: Across the state?

Insp. Volk: Across the state. Now with Toowoomba, it will be 220. It is 20 kids a year per site. We have around 1,200 applicants currently sitting on our waitlist. On a very big year we will get 3,000 applications. Getting from that 2,000 list down to that 200 list is our challenge. Many of the applications come from regions of Queensland where there is no Booyah. We are very restricted by our sites. With the 11 sites, basically you draw a circle of an hour's travel around those physical locations and that is the Booyah catchment. On the Sunshine Coast we only have Nambour, so we do not have a presence in southern Sunshine Coast or northern Sunshine Coast.

Snr Const. Newman: But we take kids from southern and northern Sunshine Coast.

Mr PURDIE: How many Gregs do you have around the state?

Insp. Volk: I have 11 Gregs. They are not all as good as Greg. In the world of youth programs you need three things. The first thing is you have to have the right kids. At least in the Booyah model that involves psychometric testing, analysis through QPRIME and background checks with families. There is months of work to pick a young person to get on to Booyah and that is all done by the teams. The next piece I need is the right program, as in what we are teaching them and what we are trying to achieve. The program is like the school curriculum.

Mr PURDIE: They are all like best design per child? It is not just—

Insp. Volk: The programs are generic. The Booyah program is run through Education; it is approved by Queensland Education. It is a curriculum-based program around behavioural change. We are accredited with ASQA as the only national police mentoring program around behavioural change, although we are looking to move that over to a QCS accreditation. It is about the right kids, the right program and the last piece is the right mentors. Greg and his team are probably my most experienced and skilled mentors. I have seen Greg and his team literally get their kids out of car bodies, put them through Booyah and change their lives. For a less experienced team it is more—I probably would not let them take on high-end offenders. Greg's team, because of their experience and skill set, have made a success of it.

Mr PURDIE: You mentioned Education. Who pays for this? Is this solely QPS budget?

Insp. Volk: QPS budget.

Mr PURDIE: Does Youth Justice, Education or Health—

Insp. Volk: No.

Mr HARPER: I am going to fly the flag for Townsville and say that we may not have a Greg up there but we have Jen. I have seen the success on the ground in the graduations over the last nine years that I have been involved. I would like to try to get you to unpack 'framing our future', the second part to it where you keep in touch with those kids. Just going back to that particular high-end offender you were talking about where you changed—was it a condition of the court?

Snr Const. Newman: No. They used us in their pleading for leniency with regard to her being incarcerated.

Mr HARPER: I want to talk about that court process for a minute because there is some narrative out there that if we remove youth detention as a last resort you do not get that linear approach of court conferencing or going on to a program or rehab. Do you think there is value in keeping those steps going or should we just remove youth detention as a last resort? That is probably a little bit too complex. For the particular kids is it nuanced or should it be?

Snr Const. Newman: It is certainly not at all that simple. It is just not. I know that the *Courier-Mail* would like to make it out to be that simple, but it is not. On a case-by-case basis is the way we approach it, and I think, without a doubt, there are some people who need to be incarcerated. I do not think anyone disagrees with that. I do believe, though, in meaningful programs that are not short-term, because we are successful because we are involved with these kids long-term—and I mean over two years. Having someone who is stable and having staff that are stable means that that person can actually, for the first time in their life, rely on something.

A high-end offender was quoted as saying to Youth Justice, 'Booyah were the only place that's ever fought to have me,' because we sent her assessments away to Brisbane and she was knocked back because she was too high-end and we fought for her, and she knew that because we are very open and honest with these kids. The No. 1 thing we say to them is, 'We're not going to [REDACTED] you. We're going to be honest.' So we fought for her. We kept her aware of the process and she then said, 'They're the only people who have fought to keep me. Everyone else fights to get rid of me,' and that is the truth. I know her schooling situation and I know her family and all of that sort of thing. I cannot sit here and comment on whether we remove particular legislation to incarcerate kids or not. All I can give you is what we do and how it works and then talk about the problems with Booyah, which to me is the capacity for us to take more kids. That is really the only thing I could probably say on that.

Insp. Volk: I do not have statistics to back it up, but I would say that if we did not have Booyah in these 11 sites the number of high-risk offenders in those locations would be greater.

Snr Const. Newman: I can list out the children there who were criminal leaders. To me, a criminal child leader is someone who has the influence over the other children. If I do not take those leaders into my program and I take five lesser kids, they will just recruit another five and I have made no impact to the level of offending on the Sunshine Coast. This particular child that we are talking about was hugely influential with crime across the Sunshine Coast, so the mere fact that she stopped and the other kids were saying, 'She can't be around if we're committing offences because she's going to go in'—we talk to them about all of this stuff. I could easily say that there were five or six kids around her who stopped offending because she did. Even though the figures are good here, I think they are far better in reality. You can see that crime is on the increase with youth offending, and I accept that, but we do not know what it would have been had we not done the work that we are doing.

Mr HARPER: It is interesting the organic growth of the program, isn't it?

Snr Const. Newman: Yes.

Mr HARPER: You do not have to advertise.

Snr Const. Newman: Yes.

Insp. Volk: It becomes problematic, though, as awareness of the success of the program grows. We have a direct portal to families—it is on a website—and we are approached not just through Youth Justice and Education and other police, as in CPIUs, but also through direct approaches from families desperate to put a young person on a program. We do our best, but we simply cannot meet the demand.

CHAIR: So you need resources—more resources? Is it that simple or no?

Insp. Volk: It is the three things. The success of Booyah is linked to those three elements. We have the program. It is built. We have a process to screen the young people. It is built. Putting together the right teams is like anything: you have to put the right people in place to mentor those young people. We have submissions actively being considered to expand Booyah to other locations in

Queensland, but even with that we will have service delivery gaps up and down the state. My career ambition, and I only have 19 months left, is to see Booyah embedded as a core element of policing—not Booyah but youth programs embedded as a core element of policing across the state, not just a nice community program where we make people feel good but it is seen as core policing duties up and down the state in every district and we are changing that youth trajectory.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you very much, Michael and Greg, for being here and congratulations on the success. As you would appreciate, the committee is looking at the continuum—from parenting and early childhood all the way through to the worst offenders—so new programs that are put in place are going to take some time. Your program really fits well in a big area, but I recognise the screening of those kids through different assessments to make sure they are right for you, and I congratulate you on that. My question is around anything that you have observed in terms of what the kids who are coming to your program might have or could have had when they were eight or 10 or whatever. What is the need back at that end? With the ones you do not take, why is that and what sorts of services could be for those in that space?

Snr Const. Newman: At the risk of upsetting people, the assessments I do not put a great deal of value on with regard to the fact that I think we can take with our team kids that are prepared to have a go at me the first time meeting. Normally that would be a red mark and they are just not acceptable for the program because we are a voluntary program. However, on your question—and this is something that I have been toying with for a very long time, and the good inspector gave his career ambitions. My career ambition would be to have an educational hub on the Sunshine Coast, possibly at Booyah at Caloundra where the new place is and one at Noosa, because we have people even in Gympie talking about hiring buses and bringing the kids down, because we pick them up and drop them off. I am talking about an educational hub that was run by us and we had kids in primary school who have been identified by the SSOs coming from families that we know that early are going to lead to dysfunction as a teenager and we did a simple thing, because most of our kids are not going to school and most of the school refusals that I have dealt with—and I have dealt with hundreds—start to fall off when they do not have assessment done, they do not have homework done, they are coming out of domestic violence homes with substance abuse and alcoholism—all alcoholism. They end up not only having trouble at home but then they go to school and they are falling behind because their home is so chaotic they cannot do their homework.

I am talking about an educational hub on the Sunshine Coast where it was—and I hate to use jargon—a sort of one-stop shop for these kids where we reach out to the kids in primary school and to those families and we say, 'We understand that there's stuff going on. We're prepared to mentor these kids and do their homework with them.' We have had a number of volunteers come through to us to teach phonetics to kids in Booyah, and they are all ex-teachers. There are so many people in the Probus clubs, the Rotary Clubs and the Lions who want to help us. If you had a situation where you are picking kids up from school, you are taking them to an educational hub, you are doing their assessments and their assignments and their homework with them and then you drop them home, all of a sudden it relieves pressure from the home because they are not trying to say, 'I don't know how to do this.' The kid has a stable place, which is school, where they can go and actually feel confident to fit in.

I was one of the kids that would turn up and try and fake not doing my homework and all of that. It is stressful. If we had that sort of system set up and it was run effectively—it could be cost-effective, and you would have volunteers and you would also then be bringing in parts of the community that still feel valued because they have all this experience but they are retired—I think you would make a huge difference to retaining kids in school, and we know that retaining kids in school is the first step to stopping them from falling in with the kids at Quota Park and all around and then committing offences.

Insp. Volk: The only caveat I would put on that is: if we are going to run it—if the police are going to run it—those young people would have to be identified or selected because of potential of either victim-based or criminogenic pathways. If it is an education focused thing, that is the education department. If we are setting it up and running it, we are doing it for the purposes of diverting crime and victimology down here. I am just saying that the core functions of the police are that, not specifically education.

Snr Const. Newman: But education leads to the crime prevention.

Insp. Volk: Yes, I accept that.

Unidentified Speaker: But how can you people up there approach the education department to do something like this?

Snr Const. Newman: We are.

CHAIR: Yes, we are.

Snr Const. Newman: We have and we are.

CHAIR: Can I just quickly—

Ms SIMPSON: I have some questions, too.

CHAIR: Yes, and everyone will get their chance, do not worry. Just quickly, we went down to MOB, Men of Business. You are familiar with that? It was an incredible set-up. If something like that existed—because you have just said you are not in education—where they then in some way are in partnership with your program after—

Insp. Volk: Booyah on the Gold Coast use Men of Business.

CHAIR: Right. Thank you. And it works well?

Snr Const. Newman: We use our local PLO, Vern Corporal. He and I do a Yidaki program of didgeridoo making, so all of our boys come in—and this is where the difference is to school with the higher end of kids that we have—we are sitting around and we are making didgeridoos and we deliver the lesson while they are doing that. We have kids with high anxiety who cannot sit still; you have teenage boys with testosterone and everything going on. While they are sitting there making didgeridoos with broad knives and we are talking about cultural stuff and we are talking about all of the things that Booyah teaches—we are doing it in that environment—it makes a huge difference. It is not school, so I think those sorts of programs are fantastic. I have spoken with the TOs up here, who I am quite close with, and we use them whenever we can. Again, we are limited by funding to each site and we spend most of ours on didg blanks and getting that sort of stuff done.

CHAIR: I am going to go to a quick question here and then a question there because otherwise we are going to run out of time. Member for Cooper?

Ms BUSH: Thank you, Chair. I was hoping for two questions, but I might not get them, so I will start with Greg. Just for the record, Greg and I go way back. We used to do a lot of work together in the flexi schools in Brisbane and he has been a champion for young people for a very long time, so it is lovely to see you again.

Snr Const. Newman: As have you.

Ms BUSH: Thank you. You made a comment about a young girl who said, 'You're fighting to keep me in. Everyone else is fighting to get me out.' You have done a great job of talking about some of the challenges young people face in doing the right thing, recognising that we all want the same thing, which is a safe community, for victims to be heard and for our young people to flourish. I am interested in the role of stigma and the community narrative and the media narrative and how that impacts on the identity and the feelings that the young people you are working with are experiencing and whether that is a barrier for them in succeeding.

Snr Const. Newman: Huge barrier—a huge barrier. My team that are sitting back there work with the kids to break that barrier down, so that particular child we take out to lunch, and we have taken her up to Mapleton and we have taken her around. The first time we took her to lunch at a restaurant she had a panic attack because she is covered in homemade tattoos. She does not fit in with the community at all. She does not know how to hold a knife and fork, so we take her and we say, 'You're going to be fine,' so now she is happy to go to restaurants with us. We do that targeted with all of our kids, but that stigma is huge.

As a little bit of background, when I first met her she was 12 and living under a bridge in Nambour. She does not have the self-worth. Even just hanging out with us and going to get food that is not McDonald's, she actually feels as though she is not worthy to be there, but that is why it needs to be a two-year minimum program: these kids have been let down by everyone including the schools. It is a real barrier for us to get kids back into school so it can be difficult for us. The length of time is crucial, and that is why those shorter sorts of programs do not seem to work. I have done shorter programs, as you are well aware, but I have never seen—and I worked 10 years as a school-based police officer—the ability to have an impact on behavioural change as I have with this program. I look at the other school-based police officers that we have on the coast who I know want to work for Booyah and say, 'Wow, wouldn't be that great—one Caloundra, one Noosa,' but of course there are funding issues and then all of the government sort of stuff.

Ms BUSH: I just want to put a fine point on it. When you have media calling these people criminals, politicians calling them thugs, community calling them terrorists, that approach, as tempting as it might be to do it when you are angry, is not working.

Snr Const. Newman: Well, we are getting worse, aren't we? So I would suggest that it is probably not always helpful. I also understand the victim's point of view as well. We make that quite clear with our kids. By no means are we a nice team to be around when you are doing bad things.

Ms BUSH: I know. I have seen it.

Snr Const. Newman: These kids love that firmness, and it is good that we are not in a school because we can use language that is appropriate. I have restrained probably five kids. This is not a pretty program to watch unfold. We even have a deal with the kids: 'If someone from Education or somewhere is coming into the program, we all have to behave,' because they need to know. Their lives are chaotic. We are only matching them at this. Do you know what I mean? To them it is like, 'These people really care,' but you cannot let them run it. You do not want to invent a gang.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you for the clarity of how you report this. I know it is a snapshot across certain indicators, but that is really helpful. My question is: what does it cost? What is the budget for one year per site?

Insp. Volk: \$380,000 per site.

Mr PURDIE: Per year?

Insp. Volk: Per year.

Mr PURDIE: And you can hold how many kids? Was it 20?

Insp. Volk: Twenty. I will take more, but that is what I am spending at the moment.

Mr HARPER: Cheaper than most detention.

CHAIR: As we have run out of time and we all have more questions, would you mind if we sent some questions through to you?

Insp. Volk: I do not mind. Am I allowed to send them directly back to this committee?

Mr PURDIE: I think you would have to go probably through the minister's office. They will not be hard questions. You are doing a great job and it would be nice to learn more about it.

CHAIR: I think it is fantastic. The second part of member for Lockyer's question was regarding the wrong kids. What happens to those who are not suitable to Booyah? Where are they then referred to?

Insp. Volk: We have a very weak referral program. It is not strong. We try and push them onto T2S. There are really only a few key programs that are up to par. There is Booyah, there is T2S and there are a few in distinct locations around the state. There are many light touches. It is easy to pass them on through to the PCYCs or other places, but they are not going to give them the support they need. There are very few referral pathways for our kids.

Snr Const. Newman: We go rogue at times. We had one child that could not go to school because of sexual offending. We ran a program for that child individually because the rules around Booyah are that we are not going to bring them into a thing. We designed the same program and we just met with that child on one of the days we do not have a contact day. We did six months of that. If you do not engage that child you may have a child offender, like a sexual offender. If you do not engage that child, you have a really dangerous child. We ran a program for that one child. Obviously that was not reported, purely because there is no way for us to report it, but we do those things all the time. The kids that we find the most difficult to deal with are not the high-end offenders. The high-end offenders are the easy ones for us to deal with. The ones that are coming out of privileged homes and are just a little spoilt and like to smoke weed and not go to school are probably the more difficult ones for us to deal with. The kids that are in the stolen cars are not that hard to deal with. I have been saying that for years.

CHAIR: Why are we seeing the revolving door of them going into detention, coming back out and reoffending? From what we have seen, that appears to be the case. Is it that you cannot get to enough of them?

Insp. Volk: You are not seeing it with the Booyah graduates. If a young person gets onto Booyah, their life can change.

Snr Const. Newman: There is one kid on here, from the back page, who has committed 14 offences post. That was in the last six months. He is off program. When I saw that I rang him and I said, 'You'd better get your arse in here because something is going seriously wrong.' He is not a juvenile anymore—he is 19—but when you look at that you go, 'Hang on a minute, you're one of ours. What's going on?' That figure to me was horrifying. Then when I looked at what had happened, it was bad but it was not as bad as what I saw on the page. I said to him, 'We've got to get you back on track.'

I have made a commitment. I have another eight years before I retire. I have said to the kids on the Sunshine Coast, 'I'm here for eight years. The police will leave me here. I'm not going anywhere.' We keep chasing these kids up. Someone who has QPRIME can look at it and go, 'Whoa, something is going on here. How long is it since we had touch with this kid? What is going on, mate?' They all come in. I think it is that prolonged, serious attention that diverts these kids. He has not committed an offence since then. I could not say whether, if we left him to his own devices, he would or would not, but I would suggest that he would have, knowing the situation. By just bringing him back in, he feels he owes us something.

Mr PURDIE: Good job. Wow.

CHAIR: Did you get a chance for a question?

Mr HARPER: This is something that is completely relevant: who is Officer Krupke and why is he notable like you?

Snr Const. Newman: It is not me. Officer Krupke was from *West Side Story*. I use him as an example because everyone panics about youth offending. That musical was written in 1956, I think. There is a song called *Officer Krupke*. In it they talk about homosexuality, transgender, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, domestic violence and a young person who is arrested by Officer Krupke and gets sent to the court. The court says, 'No, no, you need to see a social worker.' He goes to the social worker. The social worker says that he needs to see a shrink. He goes to the shrink. The shrink says that he needs to go and see someone else, and then he ends up back in front of Officer Krupke. The last person says, 'Krupke, why aren't you doing your job?'

This whole thing we see in the media is nothing new. We have a varying situation at the moment, obviously, but this is not something that is new. It has been done all over the world for years. I calm the parents and say, 'This is not such a big deal.' It is a big deal for the kids in stolen cars because there is serious victimisation for people and we take a really hard line on that, but a lot of the people go straight to that or they go to the good kid, getting As in class. There is a whole grey period in between it and you need to have people who are prepared to say, 'Hang on a minute. This kid is here. We only need to spend \$200 on this kid, give him a bit of a rub and then push him back into school', or 'This kid is going to need more time, more money and more attention.' In fact, some of our greatest successes are not our greatest successes on paper because the mere fact that they are still alive, not offending and causing more victimisation says to me that we have had a real success here. There are other kids who are going to uni and doing great things and are hugely successful that I can put up there, but the ones that are just doing life averagely, not offending and causing more victims are the ones to me that are our superheroes. It is like, 'Right, let's really focus on these kids. The other ones, let's polish them and keep them going.'

CHAIR: Thank you again. You are both incredible.

Mr McDONALD: Thanks for your passion.

HINE, Dr Kelly, Lecturer in Criminology and Justice, School of Law and Society, University of the Sunshine Coast

MOIR, Dr Emily, Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Justice, School of Law and Society, University of the Sunshine Coast

MORITZ, Dr Dominique, Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching, Senior Lecturer, Law, School of Law and Society, University of the Sunshine Coast

CHAIR: Welcome to you all and thank you. It is wonderful to have you here. Would you like to make an opening statement before committee members ask some questions?

Dr Moritz: Thank you, Chair and all of the committee, for the opportunity to provide a submission and appear before the committee to discuss the opportunity for further reforms to Queensland's youth justice system and support for victims of crime. Collectively Dr Moir, Dr Hine and I, as representatives of the University of the Sunshine Coast School of Law and Society, have expertise relevant to this inquiry around young people's decision-making, crime prevention programs and policing young people. Before continuing, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Gubbi Gubbi and Kabi Kabi peoples, and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the very important role that our First Nations people continue to play within the Sunshine Coast and the broader Queensland community. We also note the committee's seven priority areas and will seek to respond to these where relevant in this opening statement and in response to any questions we receive.

In relation to the priority areas, we would like to take this opportunity to commend the proactive approach of instituting a 10-year strategy, identified in priority area 1. The solution of youth justice challenges is not just reacting to current youth offending but also instituting proactive approaches which will prevent youth interaction with the criminal justice system long-term. Given the rapidly evolving nature of youth justice, we also encourage the committee to consider shorter duration road maps as part of that longer term planning, including to prioritise and fund initiatives identified as part of this inquiry. For example, greater investment by the Queensland government into research and evaluation is needed as part of this strategy, including with respect to youth mental health, of which UniSC's Thompson Institute is a leading Australian research organisation.

There are three key perspectives which we propose as opportunities to address Queensland's youth justice challenges: improving our understanding of why young people behave the way they do is essential to changing problematic behaviours; preventing youth entry to the justice system will reduce young people's offending behaviours; and police play a fundamental role in shaping productive young people, as we have heard so eloquently today.

Firstly, understanding why young people behave the way they do is essential to changing problematic behaviours. This is particularly relevant to the committee's second priority, as instigating early assessment, intervention and prevention strategies requires an understanding of the contributing factors to a young person's offending behaviour. The catastrophic levels of child maltreatment in the community need to be addressed. There is an established link between child maltreatment and offending. Understanding that child maltreatment is resulting in offending behaviour amongst children is a very important consideration for policymakers. Children need better protection and support within their home environments to be productive members of society. Environments and situations also create risk for offending, especially for young people. A consistent finding within criminological research shows that crime is not randomly distributed but instead crime events are concentrated in specific places at specific times and among people. Most crimes involve a small group of repeat offenders and repeat victims. Understanding and diagnosing a crime problem can then lead to targeted strategies that aim to directly address the opportunities for crime. This includes ensuring responses to crime and disorder problems are crime-specific and prevention efforts being collaborative and not solely reliant on the criminal justice system.

Secondly, limiting youth entry to the justice system will reduce young people's offending behaviours. Recommendations in our submission include making detention of young people a last resort regardless of their age, raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 12 years of age, decriminalising normal adolescent behaviour such as consensual sexting and extending and reforming the presumption of *doli incapax* to all young people, including those over the age of 14—that is, presuming young people are incapable of criminal responsibility unless their capacity for offending is established. Combining these approaches with appropriate support for those young people is essential.

We need to further invest in implementation and evaluation of positive programs which prevent entry to the justice system. For example, the Queensland Police Service's 'I live my life ... without a knife' campaign in 2021 is a good example of an effective campaign which had an evaluation strategy resulting in a stronger understanding for policymakers of effective intervention programs. Understanding what programs work, how they work and who they work best for is fundamental to creating a solid evidence base in Queensland, and evaluation research does this.

Finally, it is important to recognise the impact that police interactions have on young people. The initial contact with police often sets the tone for a young person's perception of the criminal justice system. Positive engagements can foster respect and cooperation, steering young people toward constructive paths, while negative encounters can lead to a cycle of mistrust and further legal issues. To help build that trust and confidence, police need to actively engage and participate in community engagement and procedural justice practices—for example, non-enforcement activities such as sports, self-defence classes and youth challenges. These types of activities where police participate as mentors or coaches can be effective. This can enhance youth-police relationships and increase perceptions of legitimacy. In turn, young people are more likely to follow police directions and make decisions that align with social norms. Police also need to be educated about youth development. By understanding the unique psychological and social stages of youth, police can approach situations with empathy and care—again, building trust and confidence in police so that young people are more likely to follow police directions and also social norms.

Youth mental health is an increasing issue. Youth liaison officers, social workers and other health or support workers may be able to assist police in their interactions with young people, especially on decisions about police diversion. Police can play a crucial role by actively engaging in referring young people to effective diversionary programs if they are available. Such programs that focus on rehabilitation target the reason for offending in the first place in order to prevent recidivism. These are particularly relevant to priority areas 3 to 6.

As we outline in our submission, ongoing research into the relevance, inclusiveness and effectiveness of youth justice interventions remains critically important to understanding the efficacy of policy changes, interventions and system responses. Research aimed at improving our understanding of Queensland's specific needs and challenges, such as youth from marginalised and Indigenous communities, remains essential. Again, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today and we welcome any questions.

Mr PURDIE: Dr Moir, I see that you have done some reviews on the JT Academy and also 'I live my life ... without a knife'. Both are great programs and both have recently received some government funding. I hate to put you on the spot, but what did you think of that Booyah presentation and how could we organise the university or you to have a look at a program such as that, even if that were to cost some money? We have heard about a lot of programs across the state. One of the things this committee is trying to do is identify the best bang for buck and the ones that will have results. Is that something the committee should progress, to get you to do a review of it? How would that work?

Dr Moir: Absolutely. From what I heard about Project Booyah, it is definitely underpinned by best practice principles and having their mentors there. I was really taken by Greg's comment about long-term programs. I would wholeheartedly agree with that. I think a lot of programs that operate in youth justice are quite short-term. They can be effective, but that follow-through and that long-term engagement is incredibly important

Mr PURDIE: Can I just email Ms Bartlett or something and ask her to give you an assignment to do for us? How could we go about putting that on your list to have a look at? I do not want to give you undue work, but is that something your university could do?

Dr Moir: Yes, absolutely. I would be very happy. It is very simple: I can give you my email and we can keep in touch.

Mr PURDIE: Okay. I will talk to you later. This is not really part of our remit, but your comment about decriminalising sexting jumped out at me. I am a former child abuse detective and I know that a lot of young females have committed suicide—probably the most famous is Amanda Todd from Canada but there are others locally—when they have been encouraged to share an image, it gets shared and there are consequences flowing from that. I am just not sure if I agree with normalising that behaviour. I know that it happens all the time, but I do not know if I agree with that. How did you come to that position?

Dr Moritz: One of the challenges with young people is that they value peer interactions. With the increasing availability of technology—a lot of young people have access to phones—it is quite normal behaviour for them to be sharing images, sharing messages. It is part of their growing up. The particular challenge is working out the line between when the behaviour is not appropriate and the criminal justice system needs to engage and when the behaviour needs to stay out of the criminal justice system.

One of the challenges is preventing young people interacting with the criminal justice system. If young people are participating in sexting consensually—between two friends or in a relationship with a partner—and it does not go beyond those two people, it seems like an overreach for the criminal justice system to step in and then start engaging with that young person, because we know that when young people start engaging with the criminal justice system there is more and more recidivism and their reoffending gets worse.

Mr PURDIE: I fully agree with what you are saying. I think our police are not actively policing that, because everyone is doing it. It would be my experience—I am sure Greg and the others would attest to the fact—that it only really comes to the police when it has escalated. Should it be about giving the police the power to talk to kids about the seriousness of it? Anyway, I do not want to waste any more time on that.

Mr HARPER: You mentioned that you want us to continue to make detention a last resort. Why? Secondly, have you done any research into those compelled to do rehabilitation versus voluntary?

Dr Moir: I think generally speaking research shows pretty consistently that sending young people to detention is not helpful. It does not really work. In terms of those who are released, as the chair pointed out before, there is the problem of the revolving door. They go to detention, are released, reoffend and go back into detention. Generally speaking, if we are talking about youth justice, very punitive measures such as detention and strategies such as naming and shaming are not as effective as community-based programs.

In terms of mandatory versus voluntary participation, research shows that, regardless of whether treatment is voluntary or mandatory, if someone begins a rehabilitation or treatment program and they drop out of that program, they have the highest rate of reoffending. That is the important thing: if someone goes into a treatment program or a rehabilitation program, it is really important to keep them in that program.

Mr McDONALD: As you appreciate, there is a continuum that we are looking at. The issue of compulsion is one we are grappling with—when there should be or should not be—and you gave a great response. I look forward to unpacking that more. In the system right now there is a cohort doing some bad things. We have heard from experts—psychologists and legal people—that there are some kids who need to be confined or removed from the community. I am talking about really serious offenders, people with a lot of complexities. Can you share with the committee knowledge, internationally or nationally, around that best practice? We have seen and heard about some really good models of care and support, but could you share with us in that regard? There definitely is a cohort that we need to have removed from circulation for victims' sake—and for themselves, for that matter.

CHAIR: Do you mean for the longer term—beyond detention?

Mr PURDIE: Alternatives.

Mr McDONALD: Alternatives. I will put it a different way. We have to reimagine detention. At the moment, kids go into a watch house or go into a youth detention facility, and there are a lot of problems. What is best practice for that cohort? I understand there are models that have been there for decades around the world but not here in Queensland.

Dr Hine: I cannot talk to it directly, and I do not know if Emily can in terms of the evaluations she has done. Essentially, you want to deal with the underlying problem: why are they committing offences in the first place?

Mr McDONALD: We understand that, but that is going to take 15 years for some.

Dr Hine: Yes, but we need to start. We want to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Dr Moir: I used to teach a course in crime prevention and I would use this as a case study. This is not a program I have been involved in running or evaluating; I just use this as a case study. It is based from the US and was originally based with adult offenders. It is called Operation Ceasefire. I do not if any of the panel are familiar with that. It was originally set up in Boston to deal with gang related homicides, particularly shootings. This was in an area of Boston that was incredibly violent;

the homicide rate was through the roof. They developed a strategy that did not involve initially sending those gang members or people committing these very violent acts to prison. It was based on a model called focused deterrence. Essentially, they worked with community members and non-profit organisations, with the police, to identify the worst of the worst—the gang leaders, as it were.

They set up a workshop to which they invited these gang leaders. They knew the police were going to be there. They invited family members with them. It sounds very simple, but they asked them to stop. They asked them to stop carrying guns. They asked them to stop shooting other people. The accountability mechanism was: 'If we find out you are involved in another shooting, you are going to go to prison—maximum penalty.' There was this sort of carrot and stick approach. That was very effective. It sounds overly simple: they just asked them to stop. Also, they brought in community organisations, so those men in gangs then had an alternative. At these workshops were education providers, employment providers and housing providers, so it was giving them a way out.

In the US, that sort of focused deterrence model has been shown to be effective. As far as I know, they have trialled similar models like that in the UK, in London, that have been less effective. They have had some mixed results based on implementation programs. It was not resourced or funded the way it should be. They did not have appropriate people who were able to run those programs.

CHAIR: Dr Moir, just to be clear, I think the member was referring to a confinement or containment model. Within the submission, you did make reference to a particular model in the Philippines.

Dr Moritz: The submission related to the social workers?

CHAIR: Alternatives to existing detention strategies—to increase the options for the courts to get that longer term therapeutic benefit while keeping the community safe at the same time.

Dr Moritz: That specific program was particularly effective because it directly involved the families of the young people. It was less about imprisoning a young person to keep them away from the community and more about putting the young person in a safe place where they could not offend while also engaging family members to help take ownership of that young person's behaviour. That young person was kept in a facility where they were supported to receive whatever help it was that they needed—whether that was psychiatric, psychological or social work assistance—but family members came and were there regularly also learning tools to better support those young people.

It is also about the framing. At the moment, young people are imprisoned to protect the community, and that is very important. We also need to support and protect those young people themselves, because if they are offending there is something going wrong in their lives that is causing that behaviour. Further to Kelly's point before about finding the cause, we want to find the cause for offending generally, and that will take time, but we also need to pinpoint the causes for the individual child's behaviour because that might be different, depending on their background. They might have a drug and alcohol problem. They might have been maltreated or abused in their childhood. They might not have a supportive family. There could be multiple reasons they are offending, so to be able to rehabilitate them properly we need to understand why they are offending so that we can respond. It is not an easy task and it is challenging, because every child is going to be different and one size does not fit all children. That is one of the problems with detention: imprisoning these children without necessarily providing them with the support they need to be better humans.

CHAIR: Or addressing the contributing factors as to why they offended in the first place.

Dr Moritz: Exactly.

Ms BUSH: I am interested in your views on how important you think the role of problem definition analysis and context is in responding to youth crime. To put that into context, we hear that crime might be going up, and when you hear that as a policymaker it is tempting to rush in and resolve that, but what we are hearing through these hearings is that it might be important to actually stop and have a look at whether this is a trend versus a blip. Is it that all crimes are going up versus some crimes? Can the crimes that are going up be resolved in another way? I am after your views on that and any negative implications if we treat everything with boxing gloves to begin with. Does that make sense?

Dr Moritz: Yes.

Dr Hine: What you are saying is really highlighting the importance of ongoing research, especially in this contemporary time. Since 2020 we have seen a lot of societal shifts. We have seen a lot of shifts for all kinds of different reasons. It is really thinking about: 'Is it the long term? Is it a

blip? How are these shifts in society and changes that we have seen—dramatic changes—impacting it? We just do not have that research at the moment. It is so new. It is the importance of that ongoing research.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you very much for your presentation. I appreciate there is a very important role for research. It would be fair to say that you are not practitioners but you engage significantly with practitioners. My question is about process, because a lot of very good agencies will say that they do not have enough money, and they will probably be right. My question, though, is about procurement and building into the contractual side—how we better assess effectiveness so it is not just measuring inputs but having meaningful indicators about the outputs. I know that you have done assessments post program and probably have been involved in this space. How do we more effectively build in, as part of the process of engaging people and contracting people, meaningful indicators that are useful—not just time consuming but useful—so that we have continual feedback about what is actually working?

Dr Hine: I will say a couple of things. Emily is probably better placed to talk to this. It is about partnership, like you said. It is about our side as academics—we have a lot of practitioners within our university and within ourselves as well, so we have had that practice and academic approach. Taking the academic hat for a minute, it is about good research design, which is what our expertise is, and long term. It is not about knowing what happened in one year; you need a long-term base over a long period of time where we can examine that and ongoing evaluation.

Dr Moir: I would really like to see, if programs are funded, that they develop a program theory as part of their application. A program theory sets out what a program is doing, so what sort of activities they are doing, what they get the young people to do and specifically why they are doing that. That is also linked to the outcomes that they hope to achieve. The importance of a program theory is that you can also link that to measures. If your program aims to—it can do whatever—increase self-belief in young people, what measures or data can you collect while you are running that program to then evaluate that outcome? That is really important in terms of understanding and evaluating programs.

Dr Moritz: If I can also add, that is the value that we provide as researchers—that expertise in research—because a lot of these community programs do great work but they do not necessarily have the expertise to evaluate it and to consider the long-term impact of that. That is what is really valuable about research: we can partner with these organisations doing such great work and we are able to then lend our expertise in that evaluation to be able to add value in that regard.

CHAIR: We are out of time. I want to thank you all so much. I know your time is valuable, but this inquiry is so important and we need to get it right. All the best for the balance of the year.

The committee will now hear from some of the members of the public who have registered their interest in speaking today. For anyone who is here who has not registered, to avoid any confusion please come to see the secretariat because you need to register.

Before we begin, I would like to remind everyone about the parliament's rules and procedures to prohibit comments that relate to criminal cases currently before the courts, as well as comments that could lead to the identification of vulnerable children. This includes children subject to the Child Protection Act 1999 or the Youth Justice Act 1992. I need to read this out so that everybody understands that, because sometimes in open sessions there is not that realisation.

The Legislative Assembly and its committees recognise that matters awaiting or under adjudication in all courts exercising a criminal jurisdiction should not be referred to from the moment a charge is made against a person until the matter is resolved in the courts. This is so important. We do not want to have any impacts on those proceedings. All witnesses are therefore reminded not to refer to matters before the criminal courts in their evidence. This includes reference to the facts of those matters. As the committee travels across Queensland we do want to hear the experiences, but I really encourage you—please share this with anyone else you know who has been a victim—to put in a submission, even if it is just one page, because we do need to collate them.

KIMBALL, Mr Graeme, Private capacity

CHAIR: Graeme, thank you for joining us. It is really appreciated. I invite you to share with us your experience.

Mr Kimball: Thank you, committee, for inviting me along. I am not a good public speaker, so please—

CHAIR: You do not have to be. As you can see, we are trying to keep it as relaxed as possible.

Mr Kimball: I really hope this committee comes out of this with something good to put forward to make changes. My story is coming from a parent who lost a son. I will tell Ryan's story, if that is okay. I will not go too much into the court proceedings because a lot that has had a lot to do with the ongoing trauma that we are suffering, so I will not mention too much. I will give you a copy of my submission.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Kimball: On Thursday, 9 June 2022, our 16-year-old son, Ryan, was killed in a horrendous car crash. Ryan was asked out for a drive by friend that he knew, but he had never met the driver before. Ryan was a back-seat passenger and had no idea the driver was only on his L-plates until he was in the car. His last couple of texts to a friend mentioned that, 'This dude's crazy. He's swerving lanes and he is only on his Ls.' Ryan had no idea of their intentions, what they were doing that day, as he thought he would just sit the ride out. We have since found out that the passenger and driver were sent a video challenge by another driver of himself racing down Finland Road at high speed. After several failed attempts at driving to beat the dare, the driver and passenger believed that having someone in the back of the car would prevent the back end from sliding around, and that is when they decided to ask Ryan out for a drive. The front-seat passenger filmed the whole ride. The car was overtaking another car on Finland Road, reaching speeds of up to 180 kilometres per hour in a 60-kilometre zone. When the driver lost control, he slammed into a power pole, killing Ryan instantly. We were notified by the front-seat passenger's mum. My wife arrived at the scene 10 minutes prior to my arriving, and I was told by my youngest special needs son that Ryan was dead before any officer had seen me to confirm it. The next night the video of the crash was posted on social media and sent to Ryan's friends.

We had no guidance or welfare assistance after that crash for two months. No-one from any agency came to see how we were doing or what sort of father I was—I could have wanted retaliation. No-one checked on us, so for two months we stayed in limbo not knowing and had to do all of the funeral arrangements. As everyone at the funeral said, as we unfortunately decided to have a family and close friends viewing, it was evident at that point how horrendous that crash was as his hips were displaced off his body.

It was two months before the forensic investigator came to meet with us to give us some of Ryan's belongings back, including his phone. We were told to keep quiet and not say much about the crash so as not to jeopardise any evidence around the case. Also, while we were watching the tributes for Ryan on social media—there were some lovely tributes but also some disgusting ones—I had read about his arm being ripped off. That was confirmed by the police officer when he came to see me.

It was six months later that we were contacted by the DPP, and that is when we were finally offered support by VictimConnect and Victim Assist Queensland. So it was six months down the track before we got help. We filled out all of the necessary paperwork for victims of crime and financial assistance, as we were funding our own specialist treatment. They said they would be in contact regarding our submission for assistance. At eight months, the DPP contacted us and set up a court summary meeting. At our first meeting it seemed like the crash had been downplayed by the prosecutor. She said that she was going to go for a two- to four-year detention sentence, whilst the police told us four to six. I will not go too much into that court proceedings. I do have it on here, but I won't speak to that.

CHAIR: No, but please make sure you send it through or give it to the secretariat.

Mr Kimball: All I can say is that our dealings in the court made us feel we were the ones who had done something wrong, even to the point where in court, when the sentence was handed down—I am just trying to find the charge. The charges were aggressive driving causing death, failing to display L-plates, driving unsupervised and using a mobile phone. His sentence on that was an 18-month suspended sentence, released immediately on a three-month conditional release order, no conviction recorded and loss of licence for 18 months.

When the sentence was handed down, we were made to get up first and walk past within an arm's length of the offender and his legal team and then his parents. His father was still punching the air as if he has won a football grand final. As a parent, that is—anyway, that was hard to take. The courtroom was an open court. Even though the driver was 17 at the time, he had turned 18 so it was an open court. Ryan's friends were in the courtroom and they made up 95 per cent of that court. They were actually very bitter and angry that that court did not send a clear message.

We got a phone call—while we were in court we did not have our phones on, but we checked our phones when we went to the RSL club—from the forensic crash investigator. He did not know about the court date to attend and to offer assistance. There was a part in the court proceedings where the judge prompted the prosecutor three times to validate a piece of evidence which she failed to do. If that forensic crash unit officer was there, he could have validated it. That is all I will say about the court.

I really do not want to go on too much. There was an appeal we put through to the Attorney-General. That was denied, and the way I found out about that was via media—before the Attorney-General's office. They contacted us two hours prior to her releasing a media statement and they phoned us before anyone from the department had rung us to tell us about the denial of appeal. That was another kick.

After nearly 12 months, we finally had a meeting with Victim Assist for financial assistance, to fill out the paperwork to apply for assistance with the ongoing medical specialists' fees, only to be told halfway through filling it out that we were ineligible to claim as we were not the actual victim.

I know that you are pushing for changes to youth crime and everything like that, but I would really like to see more focus put on the victims and their families. Out of everything that happened, it is not just us; it is Ryan's friends as well. They are in their senior years of school. They are dropping out. They cannot focus. Some are not even getting their licences. I can give you that.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Kimball: Sorry, I can't continue; I'm too emotional. That is my son Ryan.

CHAIR: He is beautiful.

Mr Kimball: To us he meant everything. I just wish the courts had shown a little bit more empathy towards him.

CHAIR: Thank you, Graeme. I do not like asking, but I do have a couple of members that would like to ask a question. You do not have to.

Mr Kimball: That is fine.

CHAIR: Are you okay with that?

Mr Kimball: Yes. I stopped. I could go on for hours, there is so much I could say.

CHAIR: I know. I wanted to check that that was okay.

Mr Kimball: That is fine, yes.

Mr PURDIE: Thank you, Graeme, for doing that, mate. I want to ask a question, and I know Jonty would like to as well. Can you expand a little bit on your experience through that DPP and court process? I remember at the time there was a lack of communication. You did touch on it, but can you tell us more about how you were made to feel through that process?

Mr Kimball: We felt as though they were overworked, understaffed. The crash was all played down from what the forensic unit reported. They put a lot of time and effort and resources into it. They were deflated when that sentence was handed down. They forgot to mention to us the actual court sentencing date as this was not a trial as such because he pleaded guilty. We found out through a family member. She was submitting her impact statements and she notified us. We had no official paper trail or notice by the DPP of that court date. They forgot to organise a pre-court summary meeting with us. We had phoned them a week out to have a pre-court summary meeting. We rang them and they said, 'Oh, we forgot about that.' We were called in the night before, the eve of court, and were basically told nothing. She said, 'I think.' She said, 'I am going to go for two years, but it looks like there is a big possibility he could walk on a conditional release order.' To us it just felt like there was some deal. It just seemed to—yes. She did not have time to meet with us after the court hearing. We were led out by her clerk. She came to me and said, 'I have another court to be at. I will catch up with you later.' That is we went to the RSL and had lunch and met friends, and then she rang and I denied talking to her. I just was not in the mood to talk.

Ms BUSH: Thank you, Graeme. It is nice to put a face to the name. It is nice to meet you. I am really sorry for what you have been through and I am really sorry that the system did not work for you and it has failed you—I think we would all feel that and probably can say that—and I am sorry that has happened. I am going to ask you some questions because there are some important things that I know you will want us to hear so that no-one else has to feel the way you feel.

Mr Kimball: Exactly.

Ms BUSH: I will lead you a little bit, but if you do not want to be led in those ways, just tell me.

Mr Kimball: That is fine.

Ms BUSH: One of the things I can hear you say is to have a navigator there from the moment it happened, to guide you through that whole system and to give you proactive information before it hits the media, before anyone else finds out. That would have made a difference for you.

Mr Kimball: Exactly. If there is a death involved, someone at the morgue or somewhere. I could not go over to identify my son's body, but my wife did, and I think that is the point where you need an officer to liaise with to get the ball rolling because there are things you do not think of at the time. You are thinking of a funeral; you do not think of these other things. Immediate intervention for that would be good.

Ms BUSH: I also know that the Queensland Homicide Victims' Support Group is unable to offer support to victims where there is a vehicular homicide because of capacity issues. If we could expand that to have a dedicated assistant, whether it is QHVSG or somebody specialised working in that space, do you think that would have made a difference for you?

Mr Kimball: I did talk to VictimConnect and Victim Assist and I told them the story before and they said, 'No, you're fine.'

Ms BUSH: They worked with you?

Mr Kimball: Yes, we used their psychologist, but he was very inexperienced. He broke down several times during our session because he—

Ms BUSH: I will say on the record that I know they are having capacity issues to deal with that, but I think—

Mr Kimball: But even with the financial assistance for our medical bills, they said we would be okay and then halfway through filling it out they said, 'No, you are not eligible,' because we were not the actual victims.

Ms BUSH: Yes, and we have made recommendations on the inquiry into victims that we had prior to this about getting Victim Assist to review the act and to clarify that and to sort that process out. I know when there is a WorkCover incident it also gets very messy, so it needs to be sorted out clearly.

Mr Kimball: If you are funding your own treatment, it gets very expensive. I had to cease work. I was off work for six months, so all of my entitlements ran out.

Ms BUSH: Yes, and loss of earnings.

Mr Kimball: Yes, and we are paying off a mortgage.

Ms BUSH: Yes, all of those things. I know that we have media here, but homicide is like any other grief but you have this overlay of media. I am interested in your views on whether you think there should be greater regulation around the reporting or the timing of when information is released.

Mr Kimball: Yes. Actually, on the way to the scene I heard on the radio that there was a severe crash out at Bli Bli, so I knew it was not good. I had to drive from Kunda Park to Bli Bli and I was shaking all the way there because I just had a gut feeling. That was released nearly straightaway. It is okay for the media to use details, but even then they bugged up his age, so they are going too early. They put him down as 17. They are not having all the facts right first before they even release the information.

Ms BUSH: They are the notes that I had. Is there anything else, Graeme, that you want to say after that?

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Mr Kimball: I just hope that the committee and everyone puts politics aside. This is not a football game. With this crisis, everything is out of control. We are spiralling into a lawless society. I really hope that you can come up with something to stop this, because I do not want to see anyone else go through this.

Mr McDONALD: Well said, Graeme.

CHAIR: Thank you so much, Graeme.

SMITH, Mr Andrew, Private capacity

Mr Smith: Thank you for the opportunity. That is a hard act to follow.

CHAIR: It is all right. I will get you some tissues. Just take your time.

Mr Smith: I was not expecting that. Thank you for the opportunity. I am kind of a new kid on the block, although I will give you a very quick history. I started in juvenile justice in 1991. I am probably still the oldest youth worker in Australia. I am 71 years old. Back in the day, we came across a program out of Turana—the old Turana Boys Home at Parkville for young offenders—that the Americans had been running in Hawaii. It sounds like a long time ago, but the psychiatrist from Turana and I went and had a look at it in Hawaii with Indigenous islanders—very serious gang guys, women and girls—and they had been running these programs then for about five years. We had heard about it, and that was the closest we could see because they were running in 26 cities in the United States.

It was originally called Youth at Risk. We did not like the name as the years went by and they gradually changed it to more positive organisations. Each is a separate organisation, but it is the same program. We currently have it running in New York, London and Belgium. It has been in major cities in the UK. It is still in the States. Nobody knows about it because it does not show up in academia because it is privately funded by philanthropic and local communities. They receive very little government money. The only accountability is to the supporters at the local level. That is changing. It has been changing. I have about eight evaluations from different universities over the years, so I have been gathering this in the last couple of years. We nearly got it into Melbourne in the mid twos, but I think it was ahead of its time and the industry of young offenders and social workers tended to think that we had enough resources for the cohorts—what I call bottom of the cliff, top of the cliff. The overseas people seem to be very good at prevention, although if you look at Hollywood you would think the place is a mess over there.

I was basically a youth worker. I since then have all the qualifications that you would expect of someone who is sitting here, and I am not really comfortable with this sort of public thing—it is not my thing. Over the years I have kept in touch with the people who are still operating in the major gang area. When I was over there, I was first introduced to gang work in San Francisco. I do not know if anyone can remember back to when rap music came about and showed up out of Compton, which is a suburb of South LA. I was there. We were working with youth, but I actually did not know that that was going on. I had no idea. We were just helping.

It is community-based, the same model. If you consider all of the programs and solutions that you have been looking at—and I have not watched every video, by the way—it begs the question: why have we got what we have got if they are all so good and working? I am not being disrespectful, but if you look at each one, to be a little bit dramatic: ‘Gee, we are doing good work. It is great. More money, please. Yes, this is good. Let’s move it to there,’ and they do not know what is the bigger picture.

Our version of the program is called Breakthrough Community Mentoring. If you have a look at all of the information you will be given over this period of time, you will find that certain things are generally agreed upon, including local community, mentoring, long-term mentoring, and some sort of therapeutic residential component—but not boot camp. We had a very interesting experience with that in Queensland. Imagine 25 very seriously damaged youth, from offenders through to abused, in a room with 25 mentors who are matched with another 25 youth professionals from different agencies. They all live within 10 kilometres of each other. We take that whole group out to a camp location which is not tough. We do not give them a hard time and make them jump through mud things like commandos. They have guided discussions in small groups. They practise telling their story and then they will bring that to the larger group in the room. Then we bring that all back to their community. They will support each other fortnightly and then monthly for 12 months. The kids come off the program with three goals. That is the major difference. I have not found another program that does that. We have mentoring, we have ropes courses, we have camps, we have Project Booyah. The last time I counted we had about 400 therapeutic programs in Australia.

For the last four weeks I have been preparing for the youth justice funding round they just closed. I do not know if you are aware of what I am talking about, but I did send an executive summary of the program to your inboxes. I do not know if you have received them or whether it is in spam or whatever. I will do a submission before March. I do not know if you are interested in the submission that I have put in to Youth Justice, but there are a lot of things in there that match what they are looking for. I first presented it to the department a year ago. It just missed out on funding. We have had four meetings since with senior policy advisers. They said that they like it. I will know in two weeks time how much they like it. It is interesting, because it brought up whether we would still go with this

if we do not get that funding, because that would be the first time that a government has kickstarted this program. Normally it is from the ground up, grassroots. The program is designed locally. We have some core what I call engine material that are set pieces and then the kids tell their story. It is voluntary; they come voluntarily. There is a long three-month community development perspective.

A few years ago I did a short feasibility service audit with probation services to see what is on the ground now. Over the years we have gone into West Belfast and looked at gang stuff there, path to healing. We called a southern posse gang from London that had graduated from BMX bikes to Mercedes and Rolls Royce for organised crime. They were locked up in Feltham, which is a maximum security prison. We worked with that small group and they changed. I do have some evaluations from Dartington, which is one of the fairly well respected organisations in the UK. It does not come from a welfare model; it comes from corporate coaching. We know that from youth professionals on the ground, psychologists, whoever is in that community.

When I talked to the department over the last 12 months they asked, 'Where would you put this?' I said, 'Stick a pin in a map at the moment.' They then sent me through a list of funding for hotspots: Ipswich, Sunshine Coast and Townsville. I just got back from there this morning and came straight here. I have been teaching about domestic violence for Lifeline. I had about 20 workers up there. Those two areas—

CHAIR: Because I have a number of speakers still to get through, have you put in a submission or will you be?

Mr Smith: The submission is in. It is a written submission.

CHAIR: To this actual inquiry?

Mr Smith: No, not yet. I will do that when I get home. It will be a very similar document to what has already been put in to Youth Justice. I do not think enough praise is given to Youth Justice for them putting this amount of money in over the last two or three years for new programs and expanding things that we find are working. This is where I name-drop a little bit. I sent a lot of our material to Professor Pat McGorry, who was one of my lecturers at Melbourne uni last year for my Master of Youth Mental Health. I said, 'I want to put an advisory board together.' He looked at all of the material and said, 'Count me in.' Major David Eldridge from the Salvation Army, whom I have known for 25 years, said, 'Finally it might get up,' after that amount of time. We are hoping. It is community capacity building at the top of the cliff. I do not know if there are ever going to be enough youth workers, police. I teach youth workers. They are working with traumatised kids in residential care with no experience.

CHAIR: I very much look forward to receiving your submission.

Mr Smith: That is really as much as I think I can get out. Thank you for your time.

Mr HARPER: Good luck with the program.

Mr Smith: It is going to be an interesting year. Thank you very much.

WILKINS, Mr Brenden, Private capacity

Mr Wilkins: Thank you for having me. I only found out about this yesterday. First off, I want to say: where are all of the people who spoke here today? They all want to come and say their piece but they do not like to listen to what everybody else has to say, so that is a little bit frustrating. The doctors who were here before kind of annoyed me, talking their expertise. Where is your expertise if you are sitting in a university? Fiona knows that I could sit here for hours—

CHAIR: We do not have hours—

Mr Wilkins: I am not going to go for hours. I just want to run through it a little bit.

Mr PURDIE: Brenden, give us a quick snapshot of what you do. Fiona and I have both been to your facility.

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Wilkins: You guys are looking at what we can do in the future to fix this. I am a big believer in PCYC. I have known Greg for a long time. I grew up with the PCYC. I grew up in the western suburbs of Sydney. I think one of the biggest issues we have at the moment with our teenagers is that, when you look at all these new subdivisions that are opening up, there are 24 playgrounds but what is there for teenagers? Nothing. I grew up in Mount Druitt, obviously. Where we grew up was a housing commission area. Then you get the parents who worked hard and then there was a new subdivision that opened up 10 minutes away. Both parents had to work to be able to live there, so kids were left to their own devices. Those kids ended up becoming some of the biggest gangsters you have ever heard of from New South Wales because there was nothing for teenagers to do.

All they are doing up here now is the same thing. If you look at Brightwater, there are heaps of playgrounds and heaps of parks but where is there for teenagers to hang out? On the Sunshine Coast right now we have the PCYC which, as Greg told you today, is now closed. They all leave to come here; it is closed. There is very little going on there. There are two facilities now in this area. One is Leon's. It is open from five to seven. It is a privately paid for gym. He opens up of an afternoon and lets kids go there to do basketball and weights, stuff like that. My gym, Core Strength Fitness, doubles up as a youth centre. The biggest issue is that there is nowhere for teenagers to go. Everyone wants to complain and bang on about how bad these kids are, but no-one wants to do anything about it or give them somewhere to go. They either hang at the bus stop or they will hang at the skate park. They will cause problems at the skate park because there is no supervision.

We have a program which is for only boys at the moment because we do not have funding for young women. I have only been funded for two years. I have been running for 12 years. I funded the majority of it out of my own pocket. We take kids from—it is supposed to be 12 to 21 but we sort of stay away from that—12 to 17, 18. We have 12- to 14-year-olds, and that is called Building Better Men. It is really just about turning them into good young men. The majority of the program is around fitness, self-defence and things like that, which builds confidence. Then we move into a bit of education, and we try and make the education as interesting as possible to suit that cohort of kids because they are not going to go to school. They do not want to go to school.

I have a couple of booklets there. You will see some of our results. We got to the point where we had to run a holiday program because we have kids who will not go to school. They come to us five days a week. We had to put on a holiday program because they wanted to come on the holidays. It got to the point where my staff were going nuts because it is not easy to look after these kids all of the time.

We have about 35 students at the moment. We had nearly 50 at the end of last year but a lot of them moved on to jobs, apprenticeships, things like that. We were lucky enough to get some funding a couple of years ago. That runs out in April, so my 12- to 14-year-olds have to go back to school. The principal is already up my arse: 'We don't want them.' I'm like, 'Well, I can't afford to keep paying staff.' I will not send them back to school. I do tell the schools that I will, but I will not because it is not fair on the kids and it is not fair on the parents.

A lot of the time when government want a submission or a tender put in they want statistics. Statistics are paper and half of it can be [REDACTED], and most people are. I know staff who work at Booyah, and they will tell you themselves that half of the stuff that comes out of that is not correct. If you want proper statistics, talk to the parents and talk to the kids. If you get a happy kid you will get a happy parent and a happy household, and then they function a lot better. I got videos instead. I got parents to come in and asked them questions. I got some students. They were asked questions on the sneaky while they were doing a workout. Then you get an idea of what results are actually happening.

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Talking about education, turning up for an hour and just ticking a box is [REDACTED]. At Arethusa College they tell their kids, 'You're not capable of doing any more than two hours work a day.' We have eight students who left Arethusa College and came to us last year and they're like, 'We can't do any more than two hours.' I'm like, [REDACTED]. You're here from nine until three and you're going to work the whole time you're here.'

CHAIR: Brenden, the language—

Mr Wilkins: Sorry, it is a habit. This topic is big for me.

Mr PURDIE: What are they doing between nine and three?

Mr Wilkins: We pick our students up. We have three buses. We are based in Maroochydore. We have one bus that goes to Caloundra, one goes out to Chancellor and one goes out to Nambour. We pick all of the students up. They all meet back at the gym every morning about nine o'clock. We provide them with some fruit to make sure they have something in their stomach. Then they will go and do 1½ hours of exercise, depending on which group. There are two different programs, obviously. The basic one does 1½ hours of exercise, then they will have a break, then they will do 45 minutes of education, then they will have lunch, then they will do another hour or so of some kind of fitness activity. Then in the afternoon it will be life skills, different types of education. That is for the younger cohort. We try to get about three hours of education out of them a week. We have upped it. We are trying to do 4½ now. Last year we were trying to do three hours, but apparently it was not enough as far as the school was concerned. When they go to school they just kick them out of class anyway, so they do more with us no matter what.

We then have our older group, the 15-plus. They come in of a morning and do the same thing. They will do one workout and then they will go to their classroom. They will be split up into two groups. One group will do their certificates, whether it is foundation skills or a cert II in engineering pathways, and the other group will go into the workshop where they learn hand tools, welding, fabrication, mechanics, carpentry—all basic stuff so they can go out into the workforce somewhere with some kind of skill. They will rotate through that and then there is a mixture of different activities that they get to do such as surf lessons. At Mount Coolum they get teamed up in a group of two or four and then they get a 10- or 20-kilo sandbag and they have to work as a team to get that sandbag from the top and back.

Like I said, these are kids at youth justice and things like that. They are not special needs. Some of them have some learning difficulties. It is more the fact that they just do not fit into the school system, which was me. I know that a lot of people who have sat up here today have been doctors and have degrees and everything else like that. I dropped out of school in grade 10, so I definitely have no credentials. Everyone wants to do research. I hear more about funding for research. The research has already been done.

We had a Youth Connect meeting the other day. All of the local organisations get together once every six weeks. I stopped going last year because I thought it was just a waste of time, but this year we hosted the first one. Out of that group of people I am putting another little subcommittee together and we are going to get together to push government, council and whoever else to provide more PCYC type facilities. They do not have to be a PCYC; they could just be another gym like mine. There are plenty of gyms around. There are plenty of facilities around. They are already there, but with a little bit of extra funding or with some support workers that are properly trained it would cost a lot less. I know there is a gym in Coolum that would 100 per cent do it. I have guys in Brisbane that would do it. I know Mark Evans up in Cooroy is keen to get involved and do stuff like that.

Mr PURDIE: What about surf clubs and footy clubs? Have you engaged those spaces?

Mr Wilkins: Surf clubs, I do not know. We just (indistinct) with the surf club. I do not know, but I think sometimes surf clubs come with a bit of a stigma of you have to have money if you hang around a surf club.

Mr PURDIE: I am not saying to join, but we have a lot of facilities. We have gyms and surf clubs and community clubs that we could access.

Mr Wilkins: We do have lots of facilities, yes. That could be done anywhere, so that is what we are doing at the moment as a group. We are going to find out what facilities are available: what does government own that is sitting idle, what does council have, what facilities are out there and who would be willing to implement something like this into there. Like I said, I think I have had over a thousand students in the 10 or so years. We have only been funded for two and the rest of it came out of the business's pocket, some donations and an RTO that we work with that has helped us quite a lot.

Ms SIMPSON: Brenden, tell us a little bit about some of the outcomes you have had—

CHAIR: Sorry, member for Maroochy, but we are on a very tight time schedule—

Mr Wilkins: No, that is all right. That is fine.

CHAIR:—so I am looking forward to your submission.

Mr Wilkins: I did not know about this until yesterday, so I am happy to send you off whatever. We will get some stuff together.

CHAIR: That would be great. We really appreciate it.

Mr Wilkins: I apologise for the—

CHAIR: No, that is all right. It is just that we do have other people and we are running out of time.

Mr Wilkins: Yes, that is good—no dramas at all.

CHAIR: I have one quick question. I am thinking about one facility that has been sitting there now for three or four years and that is the House with No Steps site.

Mr Wilkins: At Doonan?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Wilkins: I worked—

CHAIR: Okay. No, we will talk online because we do have to—

Mr Wilkins: Yes. T2S took that over—

CHAIR: Sorry, I thought it was going to be a quick one.

Mr Wilkins:—and it was a waste. That place is the space you need. That place is the space to run something and I have a model for it.

CHAIR: That is what I thought, because that is what it was originally set up for.

Mr Wilkins: We even tried the—what is the camp down near the dam?

Mr PURDIE: Baroon Pocket camp?

Mr Wilkins: Baroon Pocket Dam or whatever it is, that place there that shut down. We tried to get that as well and it is just wasted good property.

CHAIR: We will talk.

Mr Wilkins: Yes, cool. I am down for whatever.

CHAIR: Awesome. Brenden, thank you so much and I am sorry—

Mr Wilkins: Sorry for the language.

Mr HARPER: Thanks for being here today, mate. You will be bleeped out on TV tonight.

Mr Wilkins: Yes, no worries.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr McDONALD: Thanks for what you do and your passion, Brenden.

CHAIR: Yes, very passionate.

ROBINS, Ms Elizabeth, Private capacity

CHAIR: Elizabeth, it is good to see you.

Ms Robins: Thank you. We did not have a chance to chat beforehand, so I feel like I have just had a gag order placed on me. I am not too sure what I can and cannot say about the reason I am here.

CHAIR: Yes. I think if you stay in really general terms so that we can get what needs to be remedied without speaking about specifics so that that person cannot be identified—

Ms Robins: Sure.

CHAIR:—and everyone involved. It could be generic, as in the process and the flaws in the experience that you had.

Ms Robins: Okay. I could only try and give you an example of how frustrating it is when you want a little bit of help from the school and from police. There is no mandatory collaboration, so upon a student being assaulted at school the police do not have to be called. If something has happened as bad as sexual assault by another student outside of the school, the police will not call the school. There is no mandatory interaction. That is what I want to change, because it is a duty of care that extends into human rights, into safe places. If you have an offender who is charged with rape and is at school today, how is that okay? That is one student who has been given preference over the safety of hundreds of others, so that is not logical.

The student is not always anything but suspended where there is physical violence that has occurred and the victims are expected to go to school with that bully or that offender. Not only that, we have been in the situation where sexual assault counselling is held in the same building as where the offender is attending. That is a little bit crazy making, and then to be engaged in restorative justice processes and to find out that if we engage there is a chance that Victim Assist do not pay out because you have become engaged and you are not 'a complete victim of crime'. It is at the discretion of the caseworkers. If you have engaged in restorative processes as a victim, it lessens your chances of being so damaged and needing funding in the future for your counselling and services. It is crazy. It is a gap.

I just want to place an onus of disclosure that needs to happen for all victims, and student victims especially. Offenders can be given the right to not engage in restorative justice processing and it can be referred back to the police, but that is not told to the victim. That has not been told to a victim in the last month by the youth justice commission, by the solicitors that act on their behalf, by the officer who has charged—not charged. I cannot go into too much. However, there just does not seem to be any alignment between the schooling, the policing and Victim Assist thereafter.

I just have a question for you guys: at what point is a student safe to go to school and to know that there is not a rapist there? I really need to have peace of mind to know. We have moved at our own expense twice from two schools. Both times we have had involvement with MPs who have really tried to help us. The school was not interested in contacting the police. It may come down to statistical evidence and funding the year before, but student offenders are not really publicised. If when we enrolled in both of these schools it had been a matter of disclosure that there was an offender there, we would not have enrolled. There is no way—an offender with no repercussions at all, not one.

CHAIR: You have sent a submission in?

Ms Robins: Sure.

CHAIR: Wonderful.

Ms Robins: My focus now is to remove content online of students that has been distributed without their permission. There is the CPRU that will forensically oversee, but there are literally 10 people in the whole of Australia to remove content for e-safety, so I am putting forth a submission for a grant to create an agency. I am working alongside one in America, in Oregon—Innocent Lives Foundation. They work with the police and assist victims to have more content removed over time that has been distributed. I find that that is a very shameful part of those crimes when anyone has been distributed as a child, but to know that every day it still might be there—actually, it is until someone is engaged to take that off. I know personally how that feels and I have had to play poker face for my daughter. There is still no service in Australia, other than the 10 persons connected to forensics and child protection, to remove content. There is a lot of e-safety prevention and a lot of funding for educating people but not for removal.

CHAIR: Elizabeth, I really thank you, but you do have that submission in?

Ms Robins: Yes.

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CHAIR: Thank you. We will be in touch. Thank you so much.

Ms Robins: Thanks for listening.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you for your question.

ATKINSON, Mr George, Voice for Victims

CHAIR: George, welcome.

Mr Atkinson: Thank you, Chair. I am part of Voice for Victims. I did not really know I was going to speak today until after you invited me earlier on, Sandy, so I do not have a prepared submission as such.

CHAIR: No. As I said, just say whatever you would like to say.

Mr Atkinson: We are a purely voluntary organisation. We do not receive any funding from anyone. We have received a couple of donations from organisations when we went to get printing done, for example. Officeworks volunteered to do it for us for free because they had been robbed many times by youths. Jayco are in a similar scenario.

Since we have become an organisation we have identified that a lot of victims simply do not feel they have anywhere to go. They have nobody that is acting as a voice for them. They feel that nobody really cares about them and they frequently contact us and ask, 'What can we do?' We straight-up tell them that we are not counsellors and we are not professionals in this field; we are simply volunteers, and we do our very best to put them in touch with people like Victim Assist or White Flower or other professional organisations that do various levels of counselling.

It is unfortunate that we get so much feedback that Victim Assist is failing people, that sometimes they get support and sometimes they do not. The young lady that was present on Wednesday at this hearing who had her car stolen whilst she was at the hearing has been told that it will be 18 months before she is told if she is eligible for assistance. I just have to suggest that this is not how I would like to be treated, and I am sure none of you would like to be treated in this way if you were indeed the victims of crime.

Most victims have a significant set of rights if they are a victim. However, if you care to check what the rights are if the offender is a juvenile, a significant number of your rights just disappear. Even though you may be the victim of an adult crime—take the Kefu family, for example, where they were stabbed and knifed—yesterday in the court case the young offender walked free with no conviction recorded.

To find out what is happening, as was identified by Graeme earlier, is significantly challenging, and it just should not be that way. There needs to be a better focus on the victims. I do appreciate, as so many people have enunciated today, that we have a very serious problem that starts at a young age and it moves through. It would be great to have no victims, but the only way that we can get that is to have no offenders, so fundamentally we are going to need to work through the pipeline of offenders. The earlier we stop them, as many of you have said, the less we will have come out the other end.

One of the things that I fail to understand is why anyone would believe that a juvenile who goes without being addressed is suddenly going to become a model citizen when they turn 18. Personally, I just do not think it is going to happen. I believe all of us have a right to feel safe in our own homes. On a daily basis we get many phone calls or messages through social media from people who just do not know what to do. They cannot find out what to do. It is all too hard. The window of opportunity for some of these people when they deal with Victim Assist is so narrow that they just give up. These statistics are not captured.

I was speaking to the statisticians two days ago about a particular injury. The vehicle that killed Russell Field's son, daughter-in-law and unborn child went on to hit Natalie head-on—she was in attendance on Wednesday by the way—but she is not recorded as a statistic. I spoke to the statisticians and they said she is not recorded. She is a victim of crime but she has great difficulty being recognised. There are some fundamental issues with the way the statistics are gathered, the way people are categorised and the treatment of people. I just find it amazing.

Rather than me prattle on here, if any of you are prepared to ask me questions, I will do my best to answer them. Bear in mind that I, like the rest of my Voice for Victims people, are volunteers who just could not stand idly by and watch what is happening in the general public with the amount of youth crime that is going on. Would anyone like to ask me a question?

CHAIR: Thank you. We have run out of time, but I will make sure there is a question from each side available to ask you.

Mr PURDIE: George, who started Voice for Victims? Was it Ben Cannon? You have come to my attention more recently during this process and I have seen you on TV. Who started it? How did it get started?

Mr Atkinson: A group of people who got overwhelmed with the amount of youth crime in their area got together and held a community meeting. Quite a few people were there that night including Ben Cannon, Angelo Justus and others. We got together and we decided to form a group. Some members of that group have moved on. I have to tell you that, because we do not have any support, it is quite an effort. It is quite a considerable personal cost for the people to maintain the unit. As I mentioned before, we do not have any backing and there is only a limited number of people doing what I would consider to be a very big job.

Ms BUSH: I am not quite sure how to frame this, so I will just talk about it.

Mr Atkinson: Give it your best shot.

Ms BUSH: I will give it my best shot and I am sure we will be fine. I appreciate the role that you and all the volunteers involved in Voice for Victims play. I also appreciate it is an area where there are a lot of moving parts and a lot of different agencies, and the potential for misinformation to be spread and circulated is very real. I am trying to work out how we best get the right information to you, or is there a space perhaps for a funded group to be doing advocacy for victims who are general victims of crime? I am worried because a couple of things you said today are not correct, and that is okay and I will talk to you about that later. However, if that information is passed along, suddenly we have 20 victims who might not be getting the right information. How do we work with that as a government?

Mr Atkinson: I believe that Victim Assist should be such a body—

Ms BUSH: Right, but with a broader—

Mr Atkinson:—but it appears to work for some and not others. The knowledge or the access to that information or even the knowledge of how to access it appears to be flawed. The information is not made available to all people. If you would like to engage with me about what I have said which is wrong—

Ms BUSH: Yes, I will have a chat with you.

Mr Atkinson:—I am happy to accept that engagement. We go out of our way not to advise the people who contact us beyond trying to point out to them what the professional organisations may be. We provide no specific advice other than if they do not feel they want to talk to us, then they should not.

Ms BUSH: Thank you. I will have a chat to you.

CHAIR: I have a quick one to finish on. Going back to the original Brisbane hearing, Ben and Trudy came to represent the group.

Mr Atkinson: I think Keith Hamburger was there as well.

CHAIR: Yes, and Keith, and they put in a full submission. In terms of this second round of submissions, do you know whether they or you are going to put one in before 1 March so that anything they might not have captured in the first submission and also in the hearing—

Mr Atkinson: Sandy, I am not aware that we were going to put in an additional submission.

CHAIR: That is fine, so everything was covered. I am just making sure everything was covered. Also was IMAC introduced since then?

Ms BUSH: Yes, IMAC.

Mr Atkinson: You will note that Voice for Victims has put in a significant submission to IMAC.

CHAIR: Great, excellent.

Mr Atkinson: Many of the things that have been discussed here today as positive proposals are already loosely encapsulated within that submission.

CHAIR: Great. Has something gone to the Victims' Commissioner as well?

Mr Atkinson: I cannot answer that directly. Bear in mind that I am only one of a handful of people doing what we can as best we can for people who tell us they have no other avenues.

CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you so much.

Ms BUSH: Thanks, George. Thank you for everything you do.

CHAIR: We really appreciate you coming and giving some time.

Mr Atkinson: Thank you for your time and thank you for listening. I really hope we can move forward.

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CHAIR: Blessings and thank you for everything you do. Thank you. That now concludes this public hearing. I want to thank everyone who has participated and also those who have been here all day. I really want to thank you. As I said earlier, I really encourage anyone who wants to share their experience or perspective or who was not prepared to do so today at the public hearing to please write a submission. Again, it can be a one-pager just to put your thoughts forward. They are open until 1 March. I want to 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. Please travel safe on the way home, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 2.37 pm.