



YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM SELECT COMMITTEE

Members present:

Ms SL Bolton MP—Chair
Ms JM Bush MP
Mrs LJ Gerber MP
Mr AD Harper MP
Mr JJ McDonald MP
Mr DG Purdie MP
Mr A Tantari MP

Staff present:

Dr A Beem—Committee Secretary
Ms H Radunz—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 7 February 2024

Cairns

WEDNESDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2024

The committee met at 1.04 pm.

CHAIR: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for welcoming us to Cairns. 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. I am the member for Noosa and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose lands, winds and waters we all now share. With me here today are: Jonty Bush, the member for Cooper and the deputy chair; Aaron Harper, the member for Thuringowa; Laura Gerber, the member for Currumbin; Jim McDonald, the member for Lockyer; Dan Purdie, the member for Ninderry; and Adrian Tantari, the member for Hervey Bay.

The purpose of today's proceedings is to assist the committee in its inquiry into youth justice reform in Queensland, with the focus of this hearing on the seven already identified priority areas that the committee has identified 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 the engagement of young people with therapeutic programs and supporting their transition from detention back into the community; reimagining the youth justice infrastructure; and looking at the operation of the Youth Justice Act 1992, including sentencing principles.

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; however, 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.

I would like to restate the bipartisan approach that each member has committed to in the undertaking of this important inquiry. As chair, I remind all members of the committee that questions put to witnesses must be relevant to the inquiry and it is my expectation that these are asked in good faith.

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

Before I welcome our first witnesses, I remind everyone that the committee has reopened submissions. If you have not already done so, you can head to the committee's webpage to find out how you can do that online or you can contact the secretariat here today for assistance.

FINITSIS, Ms Jess, Youth Justice Manager, Youth Empowered Towards Independence

SINCLAIR, Ms Genevieve, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Empowered Towards Independence

CHAIR: Welcome to you both and thank you for joining us. Would you like to make an opening statement before committee members ask you some questions?

Ms Sinclair: Thank you for having us here. I start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land where we meet today and pay my respects to elders past and present. For those of you who are not aware, I am the CEO, and have been for 15 years, of an organisation called Youth Empowered Towards Independence. We are a little locally based NGO. We are funded by both state and federal governments. We employ about 60 staff, half Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. We only deliver a service in Cairns. Primarily, we are a drug and alcohol treatment service but we also undertake, for Youth Justice funded programs, bail support and diversionary programs. We are the only non-government provider of the MACPs, the multiagency collaborative panels—excuse me for all the

acronyms that I am using but I will not get through it otherwise—and also some family support programming. We work in really close partnership with a range of community controlled organisations that we subcontract. We work particularly with the Yarrabah justice group to deliver bail support.

I had made a written submission to the committee. Then I had a holiday and had a better think about things because I think this is one of those areas that requires considerable thought associated with the complexity of the issues that we are trying to address. I am not going to speak to my written submission, which is on the public record anyway, around my broad overarching recommendations or ideas around how we can work with this problem. What I really wanted to talk about is, however and whatever solutions we come up with, which ideally need to be informed collectively from a range of perspectives, how we can operationalise and make things work.

In our community particularly, there are some really obvious issues around victims and community safety that require urgent and immediate address. For organisations like ours that provide direct supports to young people, our aims and intentions are no different to other stakeholders within this space. We all share a common interest in ensuring that the community is safe and, in particular, ensuring that children and young people are engaged in education and training, are in school and that all of us can do the work we need to do and not scramble, being a bit behind the eight ball, chasing our tails with some of the levels and types of offending that is occurring at the moment. I want to preface that we are all here for the same purpose. I think the idea that we all come from differing perspectives is really important to solve the problem.

I want to talk around the nature of the use of watch houses and detention in this context at the moment. I am not going to talk in relation to human rights implications for young people because many people have come before me in this committee process and that is their area of expertise and I do not really want to go down that path. However, I want to acknowledge our concerns as to the human rights of those children in those environments.

What I really want to talk about is that when we develop solutions, programs and interventions, many of which also have been named by others who have presented—the Queensland Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies gave some very good advice in relation to alcohol and drug treatment provision, as well as QATSICPP and the Youth Advocacy Centre in relation to what works in terms of early intervention, family support, on-country programs, diversionary programs. There is a litany of program responses that we know the evidence says works. What I want to talk about is what happens when we rely on things like detention to try to solve a problem.

The experience we have had over the past eight to 10 weeks, at least in Cairns—and, really, it is an extension of problems we have faced for the past couple of years—is that we have effectively overloaded a system that cannot cope. Therefore, what we have is children for very protracted periods in watch houses, in environments that the police cannot manage, the health services cannot manage, Youth Justice cannot manage and we cannot manage. We visit the watch house every day. We have had workers in there for four hours at a time over the past six to eight weeks when the numbers have reached 18 at max. Numbers and numbers of stays of up to two to three weeks have become quite regular. Obviously, that stretches everyone's resources to absolute breaking point.

When we look at options, when we have looked at the strategies that have been put in place over the past two or three years, we see double the amount of young people in detention compared to 12 months ago. We have the toughest youth justice laws of any state. Obviously I cannot speak for police, but police also have acknowledged that we cannot arrest our way out of this. We really need to look at how we drive those numbers down because, at the end of the day, I think the issue strongly comes to how we can staff the solutions that we come up with. Like every other sector, police recruitment and, in particular, retention are massive problems.

The issues that have occurred within the detention system, within Cleveland and the use of 23-hour lockdowns repetitively, is a result of understaffing within that system. The amount of WorkCover claims and turnover of staff within the community, education, health and police sectors are creating an environment where we cannot deliver for the young people who really need it. When we detain and contain children, we cannot detain and contain them forever. They come out and they come back. Small communities such as Cairns, Townsville and Mount Isa really feel the impact when really high risk offenders come out again and there has been no option for rehabilitation. Community members feel that impact. Those kids offend again. It does not matter what programs we put in place if we have damaged children more and more within that system. When we have those damaged children, they come out with those behaviours and we have this rolling cycle of police, health workers and youth justice workers all trying to respond and deal with things.

Aside from all of the other things in my submission and the many good ideas, what we are really pleading for on the ground in terms of whatever solutions are suggested and come up with—there are many; the Atkinson report had a very strong evidence base around it—is to draw on the wisdom of academics and community workers, because fundamentally what is going on is a social problem. It is not just a policing problem.

We need to consider the workforce needs. How can we staff, train, supervise, recruit and retain a workforce to deliver any strategy we come up with? Solutions such as ending detention as a last resort, mandatory sentencing, three strikes or sentencing relocation—I quite like sentencing relocation but we cannot staff it—are very expensive and do not work. Our request is for any containment options to factor those considerations in to ensure that the children who do need to be detained for periods have access to rehabilitation so that when they come out their behaviours are changed and we are bringing back into a community a young person who is not going to be worsened by the experience they have just gone through.

Mrs GERBER: Thank you very much for taking the time to present. I want to unpack a bit more in terms of the staff shortages that you spoke about, particularly including police. What is your observation in relation to police numbers? What effect does that lack of resourcing have? You can expand it as far as talking about youth justice case workers, about staff shortages and about the effect that has on youth crime in the community.

Ms Sinclair: I am obviously not an expert on policing numbers. I can say that it is always an issue of resourcing. When we are using police to police young people and there are operations such as Taskforce Guardian, we are taking police off other jobs. In Cairns, recently we all were really impacted in the sector by Operation Uniform Kalahari, which was an amazing police initiative that targeted eight or nine male sexual offenders against children—50 victims. It has been all through the papers. High numbers of these victims are involved in terms of the Serious Repeat Offender Index in offending against community. We want police resources used to police those drivers of crime—the adults sexually offending against these children who become angry and offend against community members.

In relation to the numbers, it is always a question of how we allocate the precious staffing resources that are there. At the end of the day, change with a young person comes down to the workers and the people they are having contact with. The police do not want children in the watch house any more than anyone does. It is clearly not the right environment. We have children in there for 21 to 29 days—I think we have had 40 days down south. Adults are in there for much shorter periods of time. I noticed that the perpetrators of some of those sexual offences against nine or 10 children were spending two days in the watch house, going up to Lotus Glen and getting three-year sentences.

Mrs GERBER: Talk to us about that. YETI does a lot of work supporting children who are detained in watch houses?

Ms Sinclair: Yes.

Mrs GERBER: Maybe even just focus on the Cairns watch house as an example. You only work with the Cairns watch house; is that right?

Ms Sinclair: Yes.

Mrs GERBER: How long are children being held in Cairns watch house? What is the impact of that on the community? We know that last year the state government changed the law so that children could be held for longer in watch houses. I am interested in your perspective on the impact that has on the child and the community and on what should be done?

Ms Sinclair: I think children, particularly children with disabilities and mental health issues, should not be in watch houses. They are just completely inappropriate environments on all levels.

Mrs GERBER: Where should they be?

Ms Sinclair: In mental health or disability facilities—in therapeutic environments. Some young people need to be contained for periods but in environments with professionals who are trained to be able to rehabilitate and intervene. Along with police, over the past eight weeks we have been in the watch house every day. We have been for the past three or four years. At the moment, because of the sheer numbers—up to 18 children at a time with regular stays of two weeks, up to 21 days—for QPS to manage with the watch house at 200 per cent capacity, it is just breaking people. It is breaking the health workers who are going in. Our staff, unfunded, have been going in four hours a day over the critical period. We need to look at their wellbeing and safety in operating in an environment such as that. We know that children need to be contained, but this is not the right place. We know that is

occurring because the detention system is full as well. That is the reality. We have more children incarcerated than any other state. We do not have the facilities and we do not have the staff—and we will not have the staff—to respond. We can build new detention facilities, but we will not be able to staff them.

Mrs GERBER: When did this start becoming a problem?

CHAIR: Sorry, member for Currumbin; all members need the opportunity to ask questions. Member for Cooper?

Ms BUSH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for coming along. I note that the watch house legislation was passed with bipartisan support, but I think it is fair to say that nobody wants children in watch houses. In your submission and in your comments you have talked about a recommitment to the Atkinson report and how some of those pillars would be useful to help drive down crime. Ultimately, that is what we want to do—get those numbers down. Why is a recommitment to those practices important?

Ms Sinclair: I was involved during the very early stages with the Youth Justice Reference Group and with Bob when the Atkinson report was being developed. There was a strong commitment then to reduce the number of children in custody because that is what the evidence says works; that is what keeps the community safer. The Atkinson report had a really balanced approach that met a whole range of needs. It had a very strong focus on community safety, but it had an equal focus on remand reduction. There are four pillars. We need the focus on community safety. We need the focus on remand reduction at the same time. If we lose that focus on remand reduction—as we have—we end up in the situation we have been in. We strongly would like a recommitment to the Atkinson report and the four pillars, because it was designed collaboratively and I think has a lot of merit.

Mr PURDIE: Returning to Laura's question about the watch houses, you said in your opening address that it has become a more concerning issue but that it has been an issue for a couple of years. I think you said that you have been in the sector for 15 years. When did you start seeing that emerge? When did kids in watch houses start becoming an issue?

Ms Sinclair: Years ago, young people used to go to Cleveland in Townsville. I remember that they would come out and they would bring you their pottery and show you their schoolwork. They were engaged in programs. I do not love detention centres, but at that point there was school and education running, kids were in classes and there were some rehabilitative components of that system. Maybe three or four years ago, when the staffing shortages started to occur in Cleveland, we saw those programs drop off and kids held for very protracted periods—23 hours in isolation for extended periods. Magistrates have talked about it openly. Staffing fell at Cleveland. Young people are together. They are angrier. We send staff down to Cleveland every week and have for four years. As the numbers increase, kids are contained more, they are angrier, they assault staff and staff burn out. It becomes this cycle of a system that is just absolutely pushed to breaking point. My fear around going tougher is that we cannot just pay people more. It is not about funding; it is about the human workers that we need to be able to staff the solution.

Mr PURDIE: Can you remember what year it was or how many years ago that started becoming an issue?

Ms Sinclair: I remember meeting with Michael from the department—it was pre COVID—saying, 'What's happened to school in Cleveland?'

Mr PURDIE: More so the watch houses. I know that you go into watch houses and help the police. When did you start going into watch houses and becoming aware that kids were being held for extended periods?

Ms Sinclair: About five years ago. I think there was a spike with the 17-year-olds change. The numbers were brought back down again until they were manageable. The system became slightly more manageable again, but, in the last two years, the changes to bail laws clearly impacted on numbers. There is just no doubt. I am sorry; that is not a very good answer, is it?

Mr PURDIE: I think it is.

Mr HARPER: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Genevieve, for what you and your staff do at YETI. You are well established, having been there 15 years. I am particularly interested in your drug and alcohol diversionary programs, but we do not have time for that. I am a regional MP down the road in Townsville. Cairns is very similar. We are hearing very clearly from the community that victims, particularly victims of crime, want to feel safe in their community. That was a predecessor to bringing in that breach of bail law and to bringing in the declaration of serious recidivist offenders. I am sure Cairns

that you have a view that violent serious repeat offenders belong in custody. I will get you to answer that in a minute. This is a two-part question. Particularly for violent repeat offenders, where do they belong?

Ms Sinclair: In custody.

Mr HARPER: You talked in your opening statement about post sentence and about coming out of Cleveland. Would you support some kind of a rehab program post sentence or some kind of diversionary sentencing? We are hearing calls in the community for mandatory sentencing, but if it were a first offence—a first car or something—do you think diversionary sentencing might be an option that the committee considers going forward? Where does it scale up to? Does that ratchet up as more crimes happen? What do we do? It is a very challenging situation, isn't it?

Ms Sinclair: It is challenging. I feel a bit confused by the question. I certainly agree with containment and detainment of violent offenders. Absolutely, the community needs to be safe. I do not think it is one or the other. I do not think the community are unsafe and detention is the solution. I fundamentally think that detention and detention solutions make the community less safe. That is what the evidence says as well; it is not just me making it up.

In relation to different sorts of containment and detention, again, I think it fundamentally comes down to this workforce issue and the capacity to staff it. You are taking people from one place to pop them in another place. In relation to alcohol and drug treatment, we do not and should not contain or mandate that, because we want people to voluntarily engage in it. In particular, we want their experience to be good because when they are adults we really want them to be able to access the treatment system again and not remember it as something they were forced to do. There definitely needs to be different sorts of containment options but with the thinking that we have the same staff pool. What we take from there we then move somewhere else at an additional cost. Some of these options are very expensive, so I believe that we need to drive down, at the front end, who does not need to be in there, because there is definite net widening occurring.

There was some evidence to the committee that the use of police diversion clearly needs to increase so that young people are diverted at the earliest point from any engagement in the statutory system. The child protection system has tried very hard to ensure—the less contact a child or family has with the statutory system the better, until they need it, because it is an expensive solution. We want to be diverting as much as possible from the statutory system. Then at the back end, 85 per cent of those young people in Cleveland are on remand; they have not been sentenced. It is an appalling rate compared to any other state. We need to look at the legal fixes that we need. There are children in there who have not seen lawyers for three months, so there are children who could come out earlier to supported environments and free up the system. It is a whole-of-government approach.

More than a whole-of-government approach, you really hope there is a bipartisan approach. We are dealing with the same fundamental issue. We all want the same thing: we all want to be safe and we all want the community to feel safe. What we need to do is rely on the evidence and understand that locking up does not work. It does not keep people safer. It makes it less safe—that has been evidenced over the last two years. This is where we are at. We need to really change that narrative and drive those numbers down so that we do not lose that good workforce that are working really hard, hopefully the police can deal with these perpetrators and stop the young people entering that system, and we can all stay in our jobs and feel like we are contributing and improving community safety and the lives of these children simultaneously. They are not mutually exclusive.

Mr McDONALD: Thanks, Genevieve and Jess, for the work that you do in the community. It is a very great gap that you fill. We have come to the issue of detention, but before I get there I want to stress to you and to the community that we are thinking about this system as a continuum, from early intervention all the way through the different approaches—back to the early stages at school and education and what have you. That is really important for us. Right now we are talking about detention. I think we have to reimagine the detention that we know now. The police deal with offenders. Ninety per cent of the time, first offenders never come to police attention again, so we are talking about a very small cohort. The only choice right now in Queensland is for those kids to go into a police watch house or into a detention facility; do you agree?

Ms Sinclair: I think we have had significant net widening in Queensland. If we were just dealing with the very small number of children who need to be contained and detained, that would be one thing. The system could cope with that. There is obvious evidence of a large-scale net widening in the state, evidenced by the fact that we have more children locked up than any other state. Children in Queensland are no different.

Mr McDONALD: Where do you get those figures from?

Ms Sinclair: I could get them to you, if you want.

Mr McDONALD: That would be great.

Ms Sinclair: We have more children in detention and we have almost doubled the number in detention in the last two years, so we are locking up like no-one else.

Mr McDONALD: On the issue of detention, can you tell us of any experiences of other states or across the world? These sorts of facilities have been in place for decades, and I think Queensland has let down our young people by not investing in these earlier.

Ms Sinclair: I am not a criminologist, but New York and Scotland halved the rates of young people in detention. It did not impact crime rates; it brought crime rates down. There is evidence from criminologists everywhere saying that alternatives to detention are the things that actually make our community safer, so I think that is there. In relation to other states, there are options—they are a little bit controversial—like secure welfare, that are not criminal justice responses to young people with vulnerabilities. I think we need to be careful when we enact those sorts of responses, but I think there is some real value in looking at what New South Wales and Victoria do and learning from those states, recognising the difference here. Ask a criminologist.

Mr TANTARI: I note that in your opening statement you said that there was no lack of programs. What that meant to me is that maybe there needs to be better coordination between programs that are currently there. Are you aware of any programs or interventions that are working well and could be continued or expanded? We have all heard about the value of multiagency teams responding together to address issues. Do the funding arrangements support the community sector to manage that?

Ms Sinclair: I probably should clarify that it is not a lack of programs. The investment of Queensland into things like youth programs and alcohol and drug treatment programs in particular is so below other states. It is a really significant problem. I thank the government for the investment within that space—within the treatment and youth justice space—over the last two or three years. That is happening at the same time and at good levels. There is a lot of work to be done in Victoria. I think one of our partner organisations down there has 280 youth drug and alcohol-specific positions and there are about 80 in the whole of Queensland. That is one agency alone in Victoria. That shows how seriously they take intervention in relation to drug and alcohol treatment.

In relation to programs that are doing well, Jabalbina's On Country program is an amazing program. It is working; it does good work. Those on-country programs, when they are properly resourced and run by providers like Jabalbina, do really good work with young people. We would love a similar type of arrangement to be controlled and run in Yarrabah, for example. Those remote communities—Yarrabah is not remote; it is Queensland's largest Aboriginal community that has almost nothing there for young people at all. There are gaps galore.

Mr TANTARI: Should they be court ordered to attend those programs? How do you feel about that?

Ms Sinclair: We do not do any court ordered work and we engage with every one of those young people on the Serious Repeat Offender Index. We want young people and families to engage voluntarily. It is not just the order. When young people and families engage voluntarily, they are invested in the process and they are building a relationship with the worker. They want to be there and they want change. When we force people to do things sometimes it has this non-desired effect of them going, 'I do not want to do it.'

Our job as workers is to engage those families in our program voluntarily. We are the only non-government agency that coordinates the MACP multiagency panels at the moment in Queensland. Despite the fact that people would like them to operate without consent, we have consent from 98 per cent of the participants on that program because we can get families and young people to engage in the programs if we have the skills. To have the skills to do that, what we need is a workforce that is not burnt out and not struggling. We need the right numbers and to be not overloaded with kids. Then we can deliver programs and we can keep our staff well. Then they have the kinds of resources to be able to work with those young people.

Multiagency approaches to this problem are the only way to deal with it. There is obviously a complex intersection across health, education, justice and family wellbeing. It is an issue that the community controlled sector needs to lead and be involved in. There is no doubt around that. It will require all arms of government and, ideally, bipartisan solutions that everyone agrees on whereby agencies genuinely work together. Often what we see is buck-passing across departments: it is a

youth justice program so education will pull back. That is just natural. That is what goes on. When a system is under stress, we start blaming each other. We have run a coordinated care panel here—for 12 or 13 years—that some of these models have been built around, in some sense. The beauty of that is that it is equal government and non-government. All government agencies can refer to it. It is not a Health panel and it is not a YJ panel; it is a panel that is there for those families and young people to ultimately make the community safe and that ensures we are all accountable for the work we are doing and the community sees the outcomes of that.

CHAIR: I realise that we have run out of time; however, we will have one quick question from each side.

Mrs GERBER: I want to touch on the intervention that is needed to give these kids the help they need. How many of these children in watch houses are getting the mental health treatment and interventions they need? Then in relation to detention centres, are the kids getting the programs and the FASD assessments they need so that when they are released they are not still terrorising the community?

Ms Sinclair: No.

Mrs GERBER: They are not receiving any?

Ms Sinclair: No, they cannot because—

Mrs GERBER: Can you elaborate?

Ms Sinclair: If you are in a detention centre and there are no staff there, the children are in cells for 23 hours. They cannot be released out to see psychologists. You can have all the staff funded in the world, but if you cannot get the child to the appointment then the child does not attend. There are all sorts of improvements that can be made in that system. The ultimate answer is, no, the young people are not getting the health supports and disability supports that they need. That needs to happen—

Mrs GERBER: Is education part of that, too?

Ms Sinclair: Education are there, but we have had many debates about what education looks like. To me, education is a classroom where you go and participate with a teacher. To me, education is not a piece of paper under a door to fill in by yourself.

Mrs GERBER: What is the effect of that on the community? What is the effect of the kids not getting that?

Ms Sinclair: The effect of children being locked down and not having access to education or adequate health intervention is that they come out angrier. But we are in the same bind: if we have more in there than those programs just do not occur. I do not think it is for want of trying; I think it is for lack of staffing in a completely inappropriate environment to conduct those checks. Those checks should be happening well prior to a kid hitting a criminal justice system. Those checks should be happening in primary school. Those checks should be happening for some children at very young ages and, unfortunately, they are not happening there. Many will be eligible for NDIS supports, but trying to get that system responding to those children, and then their workforce issues around that, is a whole other conundrum. Yes, intervene early and, yes, it is a health system and a disability support system response that is required, but when we are just investing in a policing and justice response to something that—you are right—is fundamentally a health issue, it is no wonder we are in the jam that we are in.

Mr HARPER: I have a supplementary question. I will put it in context. Genevieve, yesterday we visited Cleveland. The mix of youth there is significantly over-represented by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids, and has been for a long time. They are from all parts of North and North-West Queensland. You talk about state agency responses. I understand that every state agency has a role to play. Many observers would say that government is not a co-parent, but I think we all have an important role to play in that space.

What about community-led responses? I am aware that at the end of last year the ABC reported that Murradoo Yanner wants to run a youth program up in Carpentaria and create a golf academy for young Aboriginal teenagers. What we heard yesterday was that they come out of detention and immediately reoffend and go back in. In running a program outside of the community such as this one that is proposed—I am not sure if you are aware of it—what role does the community play? We are putting everything back on the state—I understand that we make laws and pass legislation—but what role is there for a community-led response such as this? Do you think that holds merit and that we should be looking at all of these type of programs?

Ms Sinclair: I am obviously not the one to speak on behalf of the community controlled sector, except to say that those in the community controlled sector are the ones that need to lead and be involved and funded to do some of this work. Those programs like Jabalbina are very effective responses, but, again, they need to be resourced and the staffing needs to be available and there. I think we need more engagement and involvement of those sorts of solutions—I think many have said that—but I think there needs to be recognition of workforce capacity, continuity and the types of funding. The level of funding that is required to deliver something remotely looks so vastly different, but the answer is, yes, the community controlled sector needs to be involved more than anyone else. Unfortunately, for a whole range of reasons, those views are often not at the forefront of the programs that are being developed, funded and implemented. Yes, I would have an urgent request for an on-country program in Yarrabah tomorrow.

CHAIR: You raised the importance of there being bipartisan agreement going forward. That is obviously going to be essential, because, as we have heard from many public hearings and submissions, there is some major work to do, including early intervention from birth. Within the seven areas that have been identified so far, one was the need for a long-term strategy—at least 10 years. Do you agree or do you feel that would still not be long enough to undertake what needs to be undertaken?

Ms Sinclair: I think we have a generational problem here in what has occurred. This is not a 10-year strategy. In terms of bipartisan matters, we would love it more than anything because it is the last thing we want used as a political football. When we are trying to deliver a service on the ground and just do our job, we are trying to deliver interventions that work. We are trying to do what we are asked to do, and I am not sure people realise the impact of policy on frontline workers—our capacity to respond and the flow-on effect then for the young people we are trying to help. My request is for as much agreement as possible because swift, kneejerk responses to things, quick changes to things without looking at the impact on the service system as a whole, means we end up in these really kind of dangerous situations that we are in at the moment. That would be our request. We would love this to be thought through, with evidence, and agreed on—we all want the same thing—and then we could get on with it for the next 10 or 20 years and not worry about how a policy change or a sudden reaction tips and changes and impacts on our workforce and I suddenly have to have four workers in the watch house for four hours a day in an environment that probably does not meet psychosocial workplace health and safety standards for workers, let alone children.

CHAIR: I thank you both so much for giving your time and your expertise. There was one question taken on notice with regard to data. I remind you that the response is required by Wednesday, 21 February, if possible. Do you want to clarify, member for Ninderry?

Mr PURDIE: Genevieve, if you cannot get it, it is a question we can ask the library. You are busy doing great work, so we might just make a note that we will not place it on notice; we will chase it up and share it with you.

Ms Sinclair: That would be terrific. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you both, and all the best for 2024.

CAVANAGH-LUSKIN, Ms Sharon, Private capacity

CHAIR: Good afternoon, Sharon. Thank you for your time. I invite you to make an opening statement before answering questions.

Ms Cavanagh-Luskin: Sure. I have a thyroid problem so I am a little bit hard to hear. I am the CEO of the only all-female science company in the country; we are First Nations-led. We hosted the first science festival in the country to be led by First Nations scientists in 2022. My role is to make sure we bring science into the community agenda to start answering serious questions about serious issues. Through that, we have partnered with the Cairns Children's Museum and Space Centre Australia, so we are the STEM pipeline for educating kids in the community and getting them interested in STEM. One of the issues that we wanted to bring to the table is the education component that we, as First Nations countrymen, are also concerned with the issue of crime activity. I have a public health background.

Cairns has the highest population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the country. Cairns also hosts the largest population of students that are sitting extended school, and Cairns also has the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patient population in the country. We sit significantly in a region which is poorly funded. The schools that sit in our region with the large populations do not necessarily produce the best students in Australia for various reasons. The teaching population is not adequately funded. We do not have science teachers in Bamaga. We do not have science teachers or wet and dry laboratories in Yarrabah. We do not have science facilities that adequately support students in our region to have better health outcomes, better work outcomes and better cultural outcomes.

One of the things that we wanted to bring to the table is: how do we start the conversation? A group of grannies and I got together over developing our company to start driving what elders, what community members and what the business sector would like from preschool to primary school to high school to university. Our company is the only company in Australia that has produced six Fulbright scholars, all volunteered. We do that voluntarily, so we know that we are the solution for our own communities.

We have countrymen here, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—people in Wuchopperen, Mookai Rosie, QIFVLS, the ladies who recently spoke—who are doing incredible work with no resources. We do not get any government funding. We do not get any Australian funding. All of our funds come from America. How do we, as a community, get supported? How do we support YETI? How do we support the Aboriginal Legal Service? How do we support those countrymen that are up on country, incarcerated? How do we better support them to become functioning taxpayers? We do not wake up and think, 'Gee, I want to be on welfare today. Let me put my hand up for that.' No countryman aspires to that; we do not. We want to be able to have our children contribute in a meaningful way that is representative of our culture.

We need to be able to place our elders in the centre of those programs, not just as an afterthought but in a way that they are able to articulate science and cultural knowledge and marry those two together. When we are going, we can start looking at showing students and those young people that have been incarcerated that we can take them out on country, that we can show them the turtles, that we can show them irukandji and that we can show them, 'Okay, let's go out to JCU. We can go and look at the irukandji there that is going to deliver health outcomes for cancer patients and that is going to deliver health outcomes for patients with rheumatoid arthritis.' We are part of the solution from STEM in preschool, primary school, high school and tertiary.

It is my job to train 100 engineers in this town and 100 marine biologists to support what we are doing on country, and we want to be able to support our incredible workers who work tirelessly, who volunteer their time, their energy, their money, their food and their caring to support departments and community organisations. They always turn up. I see my sister girl out the back there. She always turns up for meetings. Our mob show up. Yes, we do have a problem, but we are the solution for our own communities, and it is important to engage us in a meaningful way that we can get evidence-based knowledge into our communities—for science to be part of the solution, science to marry that cultural knowledge that our scholarly elders have passed to us, to those children, so they do not end up in front of Magistrate Spencer, that they do not end up in front of Magistrate So-and-so—and that we are able to find and have support for all the programs so that when they are coming out of incarceration they do not know where they are not going to go, that we are working with them six months before they come out, that there is a program, that there is a path forward so we can drive the crime rate down, that we can drive solution and problem-solving.

When we were small growing up, we did not have crime when I went to school. I failed school. My students that went off to be Fulbright scholars failed school. We all failed school. I went to Harvard University, yet I failed school. So it is not the schooling system and it is not the cultural system; it is the way that we engage with students. My teacher, Peter Calahorra, invested in me. That investment of a teacher was important. I come from a really good family, and a lot of our kids come from good families. Sometimes the impact of colonisation and the impact of death in our community every day is a real issue in our community. It is going to cost the state, from a cost-benefit analysis, more money in the long term. We are going to be paying out far more money because we are going to be dealing with not only the criminal aspect but also the health aspect.

Mr McDONALD: Sharon, thank you very much for your presentation. You are very articulate. It was great to hear you giving examples of what you are doing in your community. I have said a couple of times through this inquiry that the best communities in the world are the communities that help themselves, and you are doing a wonderful job of that. How do we replicate you 100 times, Sharon, to see these programs run out?

Ms Cavanagh-Luskin: We need training from preschool. We need STEM from preschool. We need STEM in primary school. We need to be able to offer our students in Kowanyama, Doomadgee, Yarrabah and Cairns the best educational opportunity that is available through training and education and working with industry so it becomes a learned behaviour. We need to make sure our elders are core and centre of those programs, not that they are just an afterthought. It is not about countrymen doing a welcome to country; it is not about that. We need their scientific knowledge, together with the scientists', to be passed on, to transfer that knowledge and have those students understand and be valued.

Ms BUSH: Thank you, Sharon, for coming along. I missed a little bit at the beginning, but you are the First Nations chief scientist for the Harvard School of—

Ms Cavanagh-Luskin: We established the first science company in the country to be led by First Nations women.

Ms BUSH: Understood. Can you say the name of that company?

Ms Cavanagh-Luskin: Illuminate FNQ.

Ms BUSH: Are you working directly with children now or are you working with educators to build capacity? Tell me about the model a little bit.

Ms Cavanagh-Luskin: We are working with two schools, Catholic Education and Trinity Bay High School, and we are working with industry, including AROSE which is the Australian Remote Operations for Space and Earth. We are also working with Space Centre Australia, CQU and JCU.

Ms BUSH: I think what I am hearing you say is the importance of economic opportunity, mentorship and cultural knowledge and connecting that to future jobs and careers in fact. That is so important. In terms of working with children in the youth justice sector, we have heard there is a spectrum of kids, from some who are really low risk, where they might have committed one property offence or be hanging around with kids who are committing property offences, through to the serious repeat offender. Do you see yourself working more at the lower end and making sure that kids have attractive prosocial options?

Ms Cavanagh-Luskin: At the moment we do not have health services within the structure of the school system. There is no opportunity for flagging those students who need to be flagged for FAS. At the moment we have 30 students in the Yakka program in Mount Isa. We cannot even get the specialists to come and facilitate that process because there is a lack of expertise for them to come out.

Ms BUSH: We have heard from some other submitters around the importance of doing work with industry to get employers to shift their ideas and attitudes around employing young people who might be presenting with a disability or who perhaps have had a history of crime. Do you see that as work that needs to be done with employers to create opportunities to take them on?

Ms Cavanagh-Luskin: Absolutely. Particularly for industry, we need to educate them around what model we could be using, particularly if community members need to go for funerals or go on country, and explain to industry the purpose of that. It is so important to have those conduits to talk to those young people—'Look, you can't just run off and leave the job. This is really important. You've got a really good boss. He is very concerned about you. Yes, you can go on country for these days because this is part of your workplace'—and have that education from preschool and through primary Cairns

school, high school and university. It is about encouraging students and prepping them for the workplace and prepping industry. Having events around the community to educate industry about that would be appropriate.

Mrs GERBER: I would like to narrow down a little more on our terms of reference. This committee is tasked with looking at and reviewing the Youth Justice Act and also support for victims of crime. In analysing that, this committee is considering not only effective ways to stop recidivism in the community and protect the community but also early intervention programs and what can be done to better support children in the early intervention space. I think what I am hearing from you is that education has a big part to play in that. I wanted to hear from you a bit more. Is the state government doing enough in the early intervention space, before the child comes in contact with the justice system, and in your experience what more could be done?

Ms Cavanagh-Luskin: We could be doing much more in terms of supporting those students and supporting education workers in those particular fields and be able to track and identify from an early stage, with the FAS testing from an early stage, and then monitor that right through from preschool to primary school and secondary. There are red flags from day one, so it is about looking at those longitudinal studies and looking at programs and studies abroad and seeing what fits.

Mrs GERBER: We understand that. We have heard evidence that sometimes the first time a child gets a psychological assessment for FASD is when they are locked up in Cleveland for stealing their 70th car. If that assessment could have been done at an earlier stage and identified, perhaps in primary school, early intervention may be more effective. What are your thoughts on that?

Ms Cavanagh-Luskin: Yes, absolutely. We do need to have early intervention. We do need to be able to equip our teachers. We need to be able to have health workers and medical specialists within the education system, because we know that that is going to have an impact on their health down the track. Supporting the education team to facilitate that process would be really important.

CHAIR: We have run out of time.

Mr HARPER: I have a question.

CHAIR: Be very quick, member for Thuringowa.

Mr HARPER: Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you, Sharon. Your work is both inspirational and aspirational. Education is key. If we are going to break the cycle of crime, we have to keep kids in education and have them complete their education and go on and be meaningful contributors to society. I am glad that you mentioned Trinity Bay. Trinity Bay has a Clontarf Academy in it. I know that there was one stood up in Weipa recently. They are good. They are keeping kids in education.

CHAIR: Member, do we have a question?

Mr HARPER: I do. I want to put it in context, because in Cleveland yesterday we heard that a lot of those kids are not going to school. It comes back to the family unit. You talk about it being aspirational because you want STEM and everything in primary school. How do we get kids who are not even going to school to school in the very first place, keeping them in education in those early years, to get health assessments? That would be fantastic, but how do we keep them in education? It is concerning to me and the committee when we hear that these kids have a year 2—

CHAIR: Member, please.

Mr HARPER:—ability to read and write. They have not been to school for years.

Ms Cavanagh-Luskin: I think identifying if they are students that have come out and are reoffending. We want to be able to identify them—work with the justice system to identify those students so then we can pair them with programs that are appropriate. We are going to be working with Jennie Gilbert from JCU on the turtle project. Our countrymen understand science; they understand math because we sing songs. If you understand music and singing, it is all mathematical and science. Teaching them and speaking to them in the language that they think, dream and understand in will be able to deliver better outcomes. We will be able to support those programs on country at Yarrabah, in Cairns, that are delivering community-based cultural projects that have meaning. Some of those little countrymen understand, when their elders take them out on country and start talking to them about the scientific knowledge of—you may think it is stratus, nimbus and cumulus clouds but they are not. For us they are all cultural. Our elders sit on those clouds. Having those cultural programs to identify the best place for those participants to engage in is really important.

CHAIR: We have run out of time. I want to thank you so much again for the time you have given and wish you all the very best for your endeavours—very impressive.

CUTHBERT, Mr Shane, Private capacity

CHAIR: Shane, I think you are very familiar with the process. As you have seen, we can run out of time very quickly.

Mr Cuthbert: Sandy, Laura and Jonty are very familiar with my story. We have spoken before. Some of you guys, nice to meet you. My name is Shane. I was a former youth offender. I was, as a child, molested by older cousins. I was severely bullied at school. On one occasion I was thrown to the ground and I compound fractured my arm. I was in hospital for weeks and became addicted to morphine when I was nine years old. What happened to me—obviously that was a lot going on for a child, but I think it is necessary for you guys to sort of understand how people become offenders, and also how they change their lives, as I have done. I took a pocketknife to school to get some revenge on the school bully. I was nine years old. I did not commit a crime so I was not arrested and I was not placed in juvenile detention, but obviously I was experiencing some issues so I was placed into a mental health facility for children—at nine years old. Really, that is how I got into the system and experienced it. I was released from prison the last time in 2018—that is only six years ago. Some of the things I have been able to do in the last six years have been quite remarkable. I mean, I am speaking to you guys today. I never thought that would be possible.

CHAIR: That is fantastic.

Mr Cuthbert: I have come a long way. I have heard people talking today about various things, such as yourselves as well, and so I want to try to direct what I am talking about today to that. I know that you have my submission. I was due to speak at four with Pat O'Shane, but I have been called early. She might not be too happy.

CHAIR: We will still fit her in.

Mr Cuthbert: She is also a magistrate who happened to sentence me when I was a young person. We have come full circle. We are working together to try to solve youth crime from those two different viewpoints, really.

You guys have talked about programs a lot of the time. For me, one of the most important things—the key factor—in whether a program works or does not is relationships. It does not matter if you are playing golf in the Northern Territory and it does not matter if you are fixing cars down there in Townsville; it is the relationships. Where I am today is because of the relationships that I have built. Former MP Rob Pyne, who you know, took me under his wing four years ago. I am running for council now—the first former criminal who has ever done that. That is a credit to the people around me and those relationships that I have built. When you are thinking about these things in terms of programs, courses and things like that, it is about those relationships.

One of the things that is missing and one of the suggestions Pat and I made is that we have lawyers, you guys and anyone that can visit these prisons. We did not really talk about why. The obvious thing is that you guys can go there and see for yourself what is happening with these kids: 'Why haven't they had this; why haven't they had that?' I really want to talk about some of those whys. Let's say you do not have a lawyer that comes to visit you. You are put into what is meant to be a soundproof room, but it is not. You have yelling and screaming in the cell next door. You are on a video link with your lawyer, it is a dodgy connection and that is it. You have 30 minutes. You are talking about your life and, for a young person, you are in custody, you are stressed out, you cannot hear what your lawyer is saying and you do not understand what is going on. Even for little things like that, if you went to these facilities and visited them you could go, 'Hey, maybe we could fix that or change that so that that young person now has better access to legal representation.'

Another thing is that these children are not getting or do not have access to programs whilst on remand. That is a big one. You get a young offender now who may happen to commit a serious crime such as stabbing somebody or assaulting somebody. They are thrown into youth detention for 12 months. Because they are on remand, they are not able to get any help, support, mental health, access to programs and rehabilitative programs and courses. Quite often what happens is that they go to court and the judge says, 'Look, little Jimmy, you've done 12 months. Time served. See you later.' That offender, that young person, has spent 12 months in custody, but they have not addressed those issues because they were on remand. They are being released without the support back into the community. This is still a young offender. One of the things that I think is a really big issue is that they do not have access to that.

We have talked about some issues with staffing and things like that. Maybe it is funding. In prison, let's say, your mental health support really is not counselling, psychologist sessions or group therapy; it is none of that. Really, what mental health is limited to—and I am not sure if it is a funding

or a staffing issue—is that you will have a psychologist come to see you if you threaten self-harm. They will come and do an assessment: ‘Are you at risk of self-harming? If you are, okay, get your clothes off. We are going to stick you in a dress; we are going to put you in a room for three days until you tell us you are not suicidal anymore.’ They are not addressing the issues. They are not talking to you about why you feel that way, what they can do, whether you need medication or whether you need support. We are not addressing the issues. Then what happens is that you get a young person—and I have been in this situation myself. I have lived and breathed it. I know it. I was that kid. You are in this cell for four days and you get to the point where you go, ‘I’m just going to tell them whatever they want to hear so they let me out so I can get back out.’ For the staff as well it is a box-ticking exercise: ‘Oh well, we are off the hook now. He says he is all good. He’s got the all clear. We will put him back in his cell.’ We are seeing young people, unfortunately, recently, losing their life from self-harm or suicide. These are young people who need some help and support that they are not getting. I really tried to think about proactive ways that you guys can get an understanding of what is happening with these people, because people are capable of change, believe it or not. It is having that support there—the right support at the right times.

Another thing I made a point about in my submission is that at my university I am president of the law society and I am treasurer of the Social Innovation Network at Central Queensland University. The university said, ‘Hey, you’ve got this lived experience. You’re amazing with kids.’ I did about three or four years of schooling because, as I said, I was nine years old and then spent nine months in a mental health facility for children. Basically, they tried to put me back into school a couple of times but it did not work, so sitting here with you today with a law degree is incredible. I am mature aged, done all that, worked my arse off. I am now sitting here trying to help and make sure that people do not follow the same path I was on and work with these kids. The university said, ‘You’d be great to start visiting schools and talking to these kids, getting them interested in education, thinking about life after education.’ They offer scholarships and things like that to Indigenous kids and kids who come from disadvantaged backgrounds where they struggle at school, inspiring them to want to do something. I could not do it because I could not get a blue card. I applied for a blue card at the time. It took 2½ years for the blue card to be denied. It was based on my criminal history, but it was a special denial. I have no violent offences and I have no special offences, but the commissioner or deputy commissioner made a special recommendation that I should not get a blue card. I am challenging that in court at the moment.

Here I am someone who is in a position now, having turned my life around, to relate to the kids, and the kids love me. I can talk the lingo. I can walk the walk. I have done it. I can go, ‘Hey, I get where you’re coming from. I know it’s fun to sort of “f you” police and all of that.’ I wore a clown costume to court. I was not ramming police cars, but it is the same mentality. It is trying to take the power back—the helpless kid who was molested, abused and bullied trying to get some of that power and control back. I am still doing it now, but I am getting a law degree and I am trying to do it in a way that I can contribute to society positively. I would like to do that for kids as well and that is the path that I am on, so that is one thing.

In New South Wales there is an excellent program called Confit. They take prisoners who are in prison now, mentor them and turn them into gym instructors, basically. They started out privately offering gym sessions to private paying people. They have government grants down there in New South Wales. The New South Wales government has let these criminals—adult criminals who are on parole; they have been released from prison—into youth detention centres to mentor the kids, to go and do education, training and gym sessions with the kids. They are offering that program in youth detention, so here are these older guys that are like, ‘Hey, I’ve done a bit of time. I’m where you’re at. Maybe we can turn your life around,’ and these older guys are getting purpose in their life. They have a job, they are getting paid and they have some positive direction: they are getting a degree from UNSW in physical education or something like that. Then when the kids are released they are going back and teaming up with the same kids to do the follow-up. So it is not a, ‘Hey, you did a program here and then now you’re released and then there’s some other program,’ or vice versa; it is a continuation, so you have that transition with programs where you are able to build the relationship with the children in the prison and then when they are released and back in the community you maintain that relationship and you keep it going. I can tell you that that is the key. It was for me, anyway, and a lot of other people.

I spoke at length in my submission where I named some others that are doing incredible stuff in that space—former criminals, guys that have spent a lot of time in custody. One of them is John Killick, a good friend of mine who broke out of Silverwater jail in a helicopter—very famous—and other guys who have spent 26 years in prison. Now they are working to help people who have suffered institutional abuse and doing great things. As I said, people are capable of change and they need to

be supported in that change. I am getting doors shut and closed on me. People do not want to associate with me because of that history, so some of that stigma needs to be changed. I am challenging that with my run for council, because if elected I will be the first formerly incarcerated politician in Australia. That is a huge thing, because we are breaking down those barriers and the stigma to say, 'You can turn your life around as well. You can make changes,' and that is really what I am all about now as I have dedicated the rest of my life to helping others. My life was not great. There were things that I did that I regret. I am very sorry for that, but I am trying to do what I can to give back and make sure that you guys leave here today and go, 'Hey, maybe we've got some positive solutions or insights there—things that we can actually do—to make some change in this space.'

CHAIR: Before I hand over for questions, I just want to say that you are truly inspirational and I am just so glad that you are here today.

Mr Cuthbert: Thank you.

Mrs GERBER: Thanks so much, Shane, for being here today. I think I first met you in 2021 when you presented to the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee in relation to the amendments to the Youth Justice Act and then again last year when we did the victims of crime tour. You came and told your story so that we could be better informed in relation to how we can support victims of crime. This committee is now tasked with support for victims of crime. I know that you have spoken a lot about youths and early intervention, but I want to pick up on victims of crime because I know that you have a great deal of experience in that area.

Mr Cuthbert: Yes.

Mrs GERBER: Could you talk to the committee about the support that is needed for victims of crime, what is happening right now and any gaps in the system? I know that you would probably just be regurgitating what you said last year, but the committee needs to hear it again because it has not happened yet.

Mr Cuthbert: Something that I said last year that was taken to be quite controversial was that victims when not adequately supported can become perpetrators. We see that in the youth justice space. We see that in the domestic violence space. It is the battered wife who one day has had enough and maybe takes care of the husband, so to speak. It is the young person who has been raped, molested, tortured and abused at home who is out on the streets at night because it is unsafe to go home. These are people who are victims first off who need to have adequate support as a victim such as mental health support, drug and alcohol support—anything, really—

Mrs GERBER: So intensive case management, you think?

Mr Cuthbert: Yes, early on. Yes, not everybody who has something bad happen to them becomes an offender—everybody is different—but there are a great number who do. I have been to prison. I can tell you that probably 90-plus per cent of men in prison have been molested, raped, tortured, abused as a child. Now we are seeing these young offenders, and a lot of them come from horrific backgrounds. They are victims who need some support.

Mr TANTARI: Thank you for telling us your story. For me that was just illuminating—it really was—and congratulations on turning your life around. I think you are an inspiration to a lot of people. The committee has heard through evidence elsewhere that it is often difficult to get young people to engage with programs that are designed to help them. In your experience, do you have any ideas about how you get them to engage? You spoke about relationships as a part of that, but we are finding trouble with them engaging with the programs that we have.

Mr Cuthbert: There are a couple of things I would like to say to that. Recently the PCYC got a whole bunch of funding. A lot of these kids do not want to go and hang out with the police. The police are the enemy. Unfortunately, that is just how it is for them at this time. The police arrested their dad and took dad away to prison or took their brother away—things like that. Again, it comes back to those relationships—trying to reach the kids when they are younger to get them into that sort of thing. Really, it is about early intervention—building those relationships earlier, because it becomes much more difficult to build that relationship later on.

Say you have a 12-year-old kid. Just building a relationship with their case officer at Youth Justice is a huge hurdle, because that case officer is there for three months or six months and then their case goes to somebody else. It gets passed around a desk. The kids get sick of it because next time—15 or 20 caseworkers down the line—this kid is sitting there and this lovely lady is saying, 'Hey, I really want to help you, little Jimmy, and let's get you on the right track,' and they are like, 'Stuff you. You're just like the long list of other people who gave up on me and threw me in the bin and the too-hard basket.'

One of my other suggestions I did not make in the submission—sorry—was about looking into anyone who is in that capacity as Youth Justice, Child Safety or things like and why those relationships are so short and to see whether we can extend them, so a case-by-case basis. If you have kids who are working really well and love their officer, that is gold. You have a kid now who is probably going to turn their life around. If you keep saying, 'Go over here, go over there, go everywhere,' they just get to the point where they go, 'I've had enough. I don't trust you people.' It is happening a lot now, especially because, yes, there are a lot of Indigenous kids. It is even worse where you have these white adults telling them, 'I'm going to look after you and I'm going to care for you and I'm going to do this.' The kids think, 'No, you're not. You're just saying the same thing the last person said and then they were out the door three weeks later.'

When I talk about building relationships, we need to build sincere relationships where the relationship is the focus. I am part way through a psych degree as well. We know that when you are working with a client as a psychologist it is all about that rapport building and the relationship and trusting that person you are working with. The kids can tell. They have seen bullshit, so to speak. They know who is telling the truth and who is not. They know who is just there because they are getting paid. They also know who answers their phone after-hours, who is there on the weekend and who is picking up from the watch house, and with the Indigenous kids they call them 'aunty' because they have that respect.

I have friends whose cars have been stolen and the kids have found out on Facebook it is aunty's car. They have called aunty and said, 'Sorry, Aunty. I took your car. I'll bring it back.' These kids are capable of respect, but it has to be earned and you have to build those relationships long term, if possible. If there is something you guys can do in the systems to build those relationships and also about that transition, so you build it whilst in prison and then when you are out—because at the moment they are meeting a whole bunch of people while they are in Cleveland. They are given a key, told 'You're free to go,' and then they are back in the community. Those relationships that they have built are gone. They have to go back to the community to build new relationships with someone else and vice versa, and it gets more difficult every time, to the point where you get 17-year-olds who go, 'I don't want a bar of you. I don't want to talk to you.' You have no hope of trying to build a positive relationship at that point.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you very much, Shane, for your presentation and well done on your achievements so far. Good luck with the studies. We have heard a lot about the issues around detention and what have you and we know that a very high proportion—90-plus per cent—of those at that end will reoffend. Talking about your issue of relationships—and we heard from some witnesses only yesterday about plastic relationships with government departments versus authentic relationships—can you just talk us through potential solutions from the earlier end of school life and the journey that might have helped you stay out of that system?

Mr Cuthbert: Yes. It is difficult for me reflecting on my own life because I have only just been able to, in the last couple of years, figure it out for myself. As I said, six years ago I was sitting in a prison cell and now I am sitting before you today. As a kid, you do not understand what you need; you cannot articulate it. I only told my mum two years ago that I was molested by my older cousins. That stuff that happens takes a lot of time for you to try and deal with it, so it is very hard because the kids are not going to tell you what they need. You are going to find out 10, 15 or 20 years later and at that point they have gone through the system, there have been victims, people have been hurt, cars have been stolen. We want to try and prevent that, which is a difficult task because you cannot sit down with a kid and say, 'Hey, why are you doing this?' because they are not going to tell you. They probably do not even know themselves, as I didn't. I did not know. I was acting out. I still do not really know why. Things were happening to me. The morphine addiction did not help. There were all of these things that I did not deal with, but I needed that support—maybe mental health at a young age, drug and alcohol support at a young age.

I did not know what being addicted to a drug was. I was in the Westmead Children's Hospital. I was coming down. They were trying to wean me off the morphine. I nearly lost my arm, so that is how severe the thing was, and I was in hospital for quite a long time. When they were weaning me off I did not know what suicide or depression were either, but I felt like I did not want to live anymore. I was in a hospital bed where basically if I was awake I was vomiting. I had people come to see me. I was hallucinating. I imagined that my dad was there. My dad was not there. My dad was in prison at the time. I told myself that I would never be that person. He was a severe drink-driver and ended up spending a lot of time in prison for that. I have been caught drink-driving four times. I have done it a lot more than that, I can tell you in all honesty and transparency. I do not drink-drive anymore. I have changed my life, but here I was as a kid saying, 'I will never be that person,' yet I still became that person.

I had a single mum and did not really know what she was doing. I could have used some more support. A lot of others are in families where they do not have that support. They do not have mum and dad or the family unit to go, 'Hey, something's wrong with Billy. He's been acting up this week,' or 'He's doing this or he's doing that.' It is about getting back to that really early intervention, which means, yes, case-by-case case management. Who can we put in there at an early time? Is it Child Safety? Is it Youth Justice? It depends on the circumstances, but get them in there. If they were trauma informed that would be great and know the kids that they are working with. Many of them do now because they work in that space, so yes.

Ms BUSH: Hi, Shane. It is lovely to see you again. We have had a lot of conversations and I have always enjoyed them. Laura and I have had many interactions with you. Thank you for again coming along and sharing your knowledge with us. I was interested in your response to the member for Hervey Bay around respect and that young people can quite clearly know where respect is formed and where it is not. When Bob Atkinson reported to our committee, he talked about the importance of public confidence in community capacity to support people. I want to ask you about something that is a bit uncomfortable, which is media narratives and social media narratives, particularly around young people who are committing crimes. This is notwithstanding the wonderful intentions of people who create pages to share information and to bolster community confidence. What I have observed and what people have shared with us is that sometimes those pages disintegrate into conversations that are unhelpful, where young people are called dogs, animals, thugs, the worst of the worst. What does that do to a young person who is committing crimes and how does that impact on more crime?

Mr Cuthbert: My answer probably has a couple of layers to it. I have experienced media attention as an adult and a child. I go back to when I was a child. I was a nine-year-old child jumping on a trampoline with my brother. *A Current Affair* rocked up to do a story about Australia's most out-of-control child. The producer of the show was telling me to push my little brother off the trampoline and I was. My mum was standing there. The producer was there. They filmed that. They asked me to get on the roof of the house and throw some tiles off. I did it. I thought it was cool. I thought, 'Hey, I'm going to be on TV tonight.' It was marketed to me like it was a positive thing. There were adults around me who should not have been promoting that stuff because, from a young age, I had been portrayed in the media a lot over the years and even recently: I am still a monster and evil and all of this stuff that the media says. I am not, but it is what it is.

As a child, I did not know how to process it. I was very young at the time. It actually damaged me because it made me play into that role. Instead of not being like that, I thought, 'Here you go. That is what they want me to do. This is who I am anyway.' I see it with young people all the time now. If you tell them that they are a criminal every day, they will continue being a criminal. It is like the police. If the police have an attitude towards them that they are bad or something like that, they will go, 'Look, I'll show you how bad I can be.' I did it. I have done it in the watch house. I have done it in prison. The kids are ramming police cars because they are saying, 'Hey, I will play into that.' We have to reverse that.

We cannot control the media, obviously, but it does not help. I know that kids now are doing things because they think it is cool. I was the same. I feel so terrible today about my little brother. He is 30 now, but at the time he was about four or five years old and I was pushing him off a trampoline on *A Current Affair*, playing into that bias and doing what they told me. I know that that is wrong and I feel horrible about that now. I wish things were different for me in my childhood.

The media does play a role—a huge role—in some of this stuff and the narrative and the Facebook posts. I know that if I was one of those kids and I got on a Facebook post and I saw someone saying, 'Look at this little kid. He's just gone and done that'—blah, blah, blah, writing something negative—then I would want to know where your address was because I would want to come there at night and do something to your house or your car or something like that. That is just me being honest. I hate to say it, but I have lived and breathed it and done it. The kids are the same. We are really creating a mountain out of a molehill. We are sort of encouraging that behaviour. I know we are not, but we are.

CHAIR: We are running out of time, but I have a couple of quick questions, especially because you have studied law now and with everything you have been through. Through the hearings we have heard things like magistrates need more power and more options when they sentence young people. We have heard that parts of the Youth Justice Act 1992 should be amended. People have asked whether options currently available to the courts are adequate. Because you know the system and you have a law degree, what can you tell us, in addition to what is in your submission, about what is happening right now? I am sure you have heard a lot of the debate and seen a lot of the things going on in chamber and on television. What can you tell us about that?

Mr Cuthbert: I hate to say it, but taking away detention as a last resort is the last thing we need to be doing.

CHAIR: Can you clarify why?

Mr Cuthbert: I do not know if you have spoken to my friend Deb Kilroy yet. She probably has a lot to say on this. She is completely against prisons. I am too. They are not great places. In saying that, yes, there are rapists and murderers. I have met them. I have been in cells with them. I was raped by one, actually—a murderer who was in for the manslaughter of his six-month-old child. I know them well. I know that there are evil people out there who do need to be locked up. I do not agree with Deb that everyone should just be released and have a fun time, but for the most part it does not help.

Actually, just before with YETI, someone was asking a question similar to this around sentencing or mandatory sentencing to rehabs and things like that. We have that for adults. Pat O'Shane, who is not here to talk, set up the Drug Court of New South Wales. It is all in our submission. She was the first magistrate to do that. They do great stuff in New South Wales.

If you are an offender and you have a drug or alcohol issue then you can ask to be sentenced to a rehab. You go there for six months. You do your time there so you are addressing your issues at the same time that you are doing your time instead of going to prison, where I can tell you there are plenty of drugs. It is even worse in there because people are getting bashed and stabbed for the drugs and the drugs are very dodgy in there. There are people with serious medical issues because they have had something that has been mixed with floor cleaner or detergent and things like that. It is incredibly disgusting but it does happen.

Mr HARPER: Shane, you said that they have the option to divert to rehab. Is that for youth as well?

Mr Cuthbert: As far as I know, no. I heard you ask the question before and I thought that is actually a really great idea. If you want to start talking about that sort of thing, give these people the options, because at the moment it is bail and you are free to go and you are back with your friends and you are committing crimes again. 'You beauty! I'm out!' Where do you go? Back to your friends. I think we should start looking more at some of the things we can do outside of prison—programs. We have Youth Justice and things like that. What are they doing? I do not think they are doing enough. I think they need more funding to hold a kid's hand. I will give you an example of that.

A child now is released from Cleveland and maybe he is given 10 bucks. Youth Justice calls him up and says, 'You've got an appointment tomorrow.' The next day comes. Little Billy did not make the appointment. Why? Because he did not have money for the bus or something else happened. 'Okay, well, you've breached.' The police are then looking around for little Billy for a week, wasting resources to go and bring him back before a court because he has breached that order. Why does Youth Justice not have the funding to go pick up little Billy in a van? 'Hey, we're taking you to school today. We'll hang around. I will be here when you need to be picked up. You have a psychologist appointment this afternoon. I'll take you there.' That is addressing their needs and making sure they are getting where they need to go, not just letting them run wild and free. I think that would make a huge difference because there is accountability and they will be there. That is Youth Justice.

I have experienced the adult side and it is the same thing. You have a bunch of guys—probably 80 per cent of the jails for adults are full of people on dirty urine tests. Their paroles are breached. If you have a dirty urine test then you are back to jail. Why aren't they going to rehab and addressing their issues?

CHAIR: Shane, the greatest problem we have is that we have run out of time. I am sure we all have many other questions. Do you have a problem if we send them all through to you by email?

Mr Cuthbert: No worries. Send them through. I look forward to it.

CHAIR: Thank you so much. We really appreciate your time. I wish you all the very best. Your story is truly inspirational.

HARBROW, Mr Marc, Harbrow Mentoring

CHAIR: Marc, my apologies for the delay. We are running a little over schedule. We have a very eager committee and members always want to ask lots of questions. You would have seen the format. Of course, if you would like more questions then you can make a shorter opening. Otherwise, you can tell us anything you like.

Mr Harbrow: Thank you for having me here today to share what I know and my experiences. That is only what I will share. Before I start to give my evidence, I would like to acknowledge the Yidinji people; my people, the Yirrganydji people; the Kuku Yalanji people to the north; the Djabugay people; and the Gunggandji people. My name is Marc Harbrow. I am a local to Cairns. I was born here. Mum is a Yirrganydji/Kuku Yalanji lady. My father is a non-Indigenous man from little Maroopna next to Shepparton, in Victoria. My other culture is AFL, I like to tell people.

I have some notes and I have kept them very short. If you have any questions, please fire them at me. My focus today is on 10 years from now, which is in your first priority list. I believe the answer of today and of those seven priorities that you are looking for is in the first 10-year plan. That will snowball to the rest of the six that are on your list. We can talk about the programs that we need now and that we needed yesterday, but not many are talking about 10 years from now. We are going to have the same problems that we are experiencing today. We are going to have them tomorrow, we are going to have them next week and we are going to have them next year. Today my focus is on those kids who are, let's say, seven, eight or nine years old now and what we want them not to be in 10 years from now, which is in your first list.

I am here today to share experiences I have had. It is not so much hands-on experience, as Shane has shared. Mine I have learned completely from kids and their families from here to Cape York, Vanuatu, PNG, the Torres Strait Islands and out west to Doomadgee. I worked for the AFL for eight years under Rick Hanlon with AFL Cape York. That is where I did my trade. I call it my apprenticeship in the youth sector. I was inspired by their use of a football to address important issues such as health and physical education and just being a general good person and having fun. That inspired me to learn more. I worked for PCYC Queensland for three years. In my last year with AFL, I started Harbrow Mentoring as a side gig, doing school holiday programs up the cape. That was in 2011. As of four years ago, Harbrow Mentoring has been full-time.

As I worked for PCYC Queensland for three years, I started learning about the networks and all the funding and who's who out there. After three years with PCYC I got super inspired to have a go at starting my own business called Harbrow Mentoring. I quickly discovered that it is very easy for all of us to look past the fundamentals of a child's development and their basic needs. I sit in a lot of meetings—government, council and company to company—and there are big, bright ideas but we forget about the fundamentals of connecting with a kid, building trust with that kid and building a relationship with that kid. This will be mirrored in many speeches today. Beyond that is mentoring that kid and having tailored mentorship around that kid.

At Harbrow Mentoring we have five key priority areas. Those five key priority areas are: creating connections, relationship building, mentoring, tailored mentoring and then long-time mentoring. That is when you start engaging. They may be 17, 18 or 19 now and maybe they did not go to school when they were in grade 11 and 12, but you are exposing them to other employment opportunities, work experience or apprenticeships and traineeships.

When I talk about creating connections, it is those outreach programs—going to where the kids are. If they are in parks and they are congregating and hanging out, we take sports gear there and activate them. That is where we start to get to know who we are dealing with. Outreach programs—grassroots programs where you go to the kids—are gold for us, because that starts a journey for the kids we work with. I have six case studies to connect what I am talking about, to summarise and give evidence to the seven key areas you are focusing on today.

With our five key areas of focus, we also have five key cohort areas that help design and tailor the programs that we create to deliver to the cohort we are working with. When we see a kid we look at whether they are: engaged or at risk of disengagement; at school and at risk of not going to school; completely disengaged; at risk of being in contact with the youth justice system; or in contact with the youth justice system. No matter what program we tailor, it all comes back to our five key priority areas: the connection, the relationship building and the mentoring. Everything that we do is based around those fundamentals and we keep it simple. I did some coaching of juniors and seniors in my time through AFL and the No. 1 thing is to keep it simple. It is very easy to complicate sports—keep it simple.

I made a note for myself of what is missing, which is a very important question. Probably three-quarters of the reason we are here today is because of what is missing. In our eyes, the 10-year strategy is missing. I believe the answer is in the actual wording of your No. 1 priority—that is, to engage all government agencies and companies that are in this space in the first place. I know that particularly in Cairns there is some form of that—people meet, talk and share information—but it is obviously not working, because there are a number of companies that are out there that have no idea that they exist. They work directly with these young people and their families and have all the info that you need on that particular child but are unaware of sharing information that could help bolster another organisation because they are working with them, too. There is a disconnect there.

Again, I believe that the answer lies within the first priority—that is, a 10-year strategy plan. That is well needed, because we are talking about the kids who are seven or eight now. What do we want them not to be in 10 years from now, and how do we do that? In terms of the ‘how’, what is missing, as mentioned already, is a truly orchestrated, well-managed, collaborative approach on all levels—government, councils and companies that have been around for donkey’s years to a company that starts tomorrow. In Cairns in particular, there are companies that have only been in existence for the past three, four or five years and that are doing wonderful work. There are big companies in Cairns that are doing wonderful work. Again, the disconnection in the communication lines between those companies does not maximise our connection with the kids and the families, because we are all in silos. We are all doing our own work. There are some organisations that are worried about the organisation down the road and what they are doing. Sometimes we forget about the fundamentals—that is, what are the kids doing and how is it impacting their family?

Mr McDONALD: Thank you, Marc, for the work that you do. You would have heard me say earlier that it takes a village, or that the best communities in the world are those that help themselves, so thank you for the work that you do. You should be very proud. How is Harbrow Mentoring funded? The notes I have here from the QCOSS submission referred to your Fire program. Can you take us through that? Obviously we want to create another 100 of you. How do we do that?

Mr Harbrow: Harbrow Mentoring started as a sole trader. In January last year we created a not-for-profit. Before that, we were 10 different little contracts here and there. We are still doing that today, but being a not-for-profit now allows us to start applying for government grants. We are quite proud of what we have built without any government money in the first place. We subcontract to big organisations. Now we are in a position where we can start applying for grants, funding and so on as well as maintain the contracts that we have, but this is also the problem. I do not like to talk about our own company because there are other companies in the same position. I do not want 10 or 11 funding streams and different contracts. We want to focus on what we do well and not worry about the money. We want our workers to do what they do best: connect with the young people and do their job—that is it.

Mr McDONALD: Is that sustainable?

Mr Harbrow: No, definitely not.

Mr McDONALD: I like the comment that Genevieve made earlier, that you can sell an idea to the public but you cannot operationalise it. Tell us, from your experience, how we can make your company and others more successful. It says here that there are 1,920 young kids that you have engaged with since 2022. That is pretty tremendous.

Mr Harbrow: That was from the pilot period and that was done within six months. In the current Fire Project that we are funded for right now, from May to May, we have 2,828 who are directly engaged. There are 1,620 males and 1,208 females. Of that number, there are 2,118 Indigenous. We have come into contact with 182 who are multicultural. This is within a certain footprint, within Earville to Edmonton. There are 506 non-Indigenous. Out of the 2,828 we have directly engaged, we have transported 225 young people to safer environments—to other programs that are happening or to home when they are out at night.

To highlight what we do, how we do it and what is missing, I will relate some of the case studies that I mentioned at the start. We are still in contact with and mentor a young person called Graham Fourmile. He is now 19 years old. When Graham was 14 he was on a fast track to the youth justice system. He had disengaged from Trinity Bay High School. He was dipping in and participating in social sports that we were operating at the time, but he stayed close enough that we noticed he was actually reaching out for help. Thankfully, we identified that. Now young Graham Fourmile has had some job interviews that he has sweated bullets over. He has tried to get a job at a local KFC. He lives in Edmonton and he has a partner. He is far from being in contact with the youth justice system now. Were we funded for that? No, definitely not, but we knew that we had to do it, because if we did not do it there was a good chance he could have been in the system.

Mr Harbrow: There are two on at one time and we have five in total who roll through those Thursday, Friday and Saturday night rosters.

Mr HARPER: Thanks for the work you do. It is clear that trying to break the cycle of that younger cohort you were talking about is your priority area, and we heard some great success about the midnight basketball program and safer streets work you are doing. What do we do with repeat offenders who are coming out? That is the problem area that we are dealing with. What are your suggestions there in trying to break that cycle that exists?

Mr Harbrow: It is about one-on-one work. We cannot expect them to go to an existing program where there are 30 other kids. They are not comfortable. Especially if they have just come out of the juvenile justice system, they are not just going to rock up to an outreach program where kids have been doing it for the past 10 weeks. It is about purely one-on-one work with them. We are talking about the kids who are repeat offenders who are in and out of the centre.

We try to engage them in structured programs, but they are not ready for structured programs. There is a whole step before we can get them to a boxing program. It is one-on-one social chats. Shane has already highlighted the relationships part. Relationships take a long time to build. Then when you have a program that constantly has a new face every time, which has been said, it is very hard for the kid to develop trust. They are not looking at the organisation; they are looking at the individual.

It comes down to one-on-one work. If we do the numbers, you will probably all say that is a lot of youth mentors. Unfortunately it is, and that is where we are at. The only way we are going to see a decrease 10 years from now is through one-on-one mentoring with those high-risk kids, because they will not be comfortable participating in already existing programs.

Mr HARPER: We will get Shane onto it; he can have the first hundred! I think he can deal with it.

Mr McDONALD: Thanks again for what you do. Can you talk to us about the experience with the Cairns Safer Streets project and some of the kids you have come across and helped?

Mr Harbrow: I was a part of designing those five programs. Is Mick de Brenni still the minister?

Mr McDONALD: Yes, but not for that.

Mr Harbrow: It went from a \$5,000 approach to a million dollars over three years. Cairns Safer Streets were challenged to design programs: 'How are we going to spend that?' I was a part of developing the Spayc+Place programs that happened in parks and then a leadership development program, which was Spayc Cadets. Then there was a cultural program and a Spayc+, which is recreational—fishing and walking through the bush et cetera.

That happened over three years and so the relationships built up. The data was flowing, but there were 20 other service providers who were doing the contracts as well. Then the conversation started happening: 'Okay. We are doing all this great work with these kids, but where are they going? Now they are 16 and 17, we need a second phase. What are we truly connecting them into and engaging them in?' You can go from just occupying a kid's time to nothing very quickly. Those programs are highly beneficial to the Cairns community. They are the grassroots of those five priority areas that I have mentioned.

CHAIR: I realise we are out of time. This question was partly answered. You said that you are doing some work with the current cohort of serious repeat offenders.

Mr Harbrow: No.

CHAIR: Not at all?

Mr Harbrow: No.

CHAIR: I understand you are saying that it takes a long time to build relationships, but at the same time we have communities that are actually being put at risk by the behaviours of this cohort. Can you offer any insight in terms of how you believe any space you are working in could make a difference to them whilst making communities safer?

Mr Harbrow: I think it is about investing in those organisations that are already trying to have a crack at that cohort. Our strength area and our focus area is trying to ensure that the kids we are targeting do not become those kids.

CHAIR: Yes, I understand that.

Mr Harbrow: That is part of that mentoring. You have organisations that are probably in this room now that are maybe speaking the same language—and everything comes down to money—in terms of funding, resources and all those sorts of things. There needs to be a huge review of what has been happening to date and what it looks like. I know—and this is not having a crack at any organisation—people are employed to write reports. You can write a report and make it look like a million dollars, but how do we measure in terms of physically seeing the outcomes?

Mr McDONALD: ‘What does success look like?’

Mr Harbrow: Yes. How do you measure the day-to-day relationship you have with a child? Right now for the Fire Project we report on data. My most important reporting is the good news stories about the connection we have with the kids. I know that data is important, but how do we measure all of the things you cannot report on? For that cohort we are talking about high focus. Unfortunately, a lot of them are far gone. They are in a spot where they have been programmed, they have experienced so much trauma and everything they have gone through as a child and now some of them are ruthless. It takes high focus to have some sort of impact. They are going to take longer than the kids we directly engage with on a 95 per cent scale.

CHAIR: Do you believe that needs to be—and you would have heard this earlier—a constrained situation so that they are not able to reoffend? So in relation to that process of coming out of detention, there is a transition through a space that is secure until they have had enough time. We have also heard that detention can be very short and the change needed takes much longer than the period of detention.

Mr Harbrow: As mentioned, let’s focus on the organisations that are having a go at that right now—that cohort—and review them. Go in and say, ‘What are you missing? What are the tools you need to make your job easier and better for that child and their family?’ A high focus needs to be on the next lot who are coming through. That is my answer: this crew continue with whoever is working with them right now and invest in what they need. However, let’s not forget about 10 years from now. Will we be looking at a decrease or an increase, or are we just going to have another meeting about what we do today?

CHAIR: I am sure we do not all want to be here in 10 years. Thank you so much for everything you do. We have run out of time. We did not have any questions on notice. We wish you all the very best for the balance of the year.

Proceedings suspended from 3.08 pm to 3.33 pm.

JOSE, Ms Semara, Co-founder and Executive of Opportunities, Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good

NONA, Ms Merrissa, Chief Executive Officer, Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good

ROSENDALE, Mr Daniel, Business Manager, Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good

CHAIR: Good afternoon everyone. I welcome representatives from Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good. Feel free to make an opening statement after which there will be some questions from the committee.

Ms Nona: My name is Merrissa Nona. I am a Gudjula Kuku Yalanji aunty and Darnley Island descendant. I have been raised here in Cairns all my life. I am the CEO and co-founder of DIYDG. With me is Semara, who is also a co-founder and one of our leaders, and Daniel—at 18 years old—was another co-founder of our organisation. We formed our organisation as young people in 2016 after a mass murder occurred in our community where eight young people lost their lives.

Our organisation has two different stories in its establishment. One is from crisis and the other is from leadership. Our leadership story begins in high school where all of us were participants in the Indigenous Leaders of Tomorrow program. As part of that process, we had opportunities to connect in community and do a whole range of different things that built our leadership skills. I was one of the first participants of an Indigenous leadership program in school that saw the progression of the next generation through this process. I know from my own journey that I struggled with education. I struggled to be at school. My social life was more of a priority and on many occasions could have led me into serious trouble.

Something that grounded me obviously was the connection back to my community leaders, my mentors and my elders as part of that leadership process. The three of us, and a lot of our founding members, are fortunate to come from strong leaders within our families who hold prominent roles within our community and who contribute and continue to contribute to our community. We are very fortunate and know that we have privilege as young people because of our lineage. In terms of our leadership journey, Semara had the opportunity at the time of stepping up, facilitating and leading this program within schools within the Indigenous education department. I was employed by Anglicare and rose to a management role within the organisation as part of that process. I worked with young people with volatile substance misuse and I also managed a general youth support service at Anglicare.

Our two worlds were on two different spectrums—leadership and crisis intervention. We knew that a lot of young people were impacted socially and emotionally by this massacre. You did not have to have a connection or relationship to feel the depression associated with having a connection. When this happens we know that it leads to more suicides, more self-harming and more antisocial behaviour. As young people part of the community we thought, 'What are the gaps?' From my employment with Anglicare, I had the opportunity of supporting one of the surviving siblings who was extremely traumatised by the incident. I walked him through his journey, which was extremely intensive. It was his choice to see me as part of that process of healing.

We saw all the funded organisations, all the large companies and everyone in senior executive leadership really trying to decide how the response should dwindle down to the ground. Our response as a youth volunteer non-incorporated group of young people who just wanted to give and do good saw the gaps. We walked Murray Street. We knocked on the doors. We ran a little survey. We said, 'What is going on in your community? What do you feel is missing? What are the activities missing?' From that, our group developed a list of what we wanted to achieve. Holding the position I did—very low level within the recovery process—I said that our little group of volunteers has done this body of work and we have found out what the community wants. We doorknocked the MMM area properly. We had an army of 20 to 30 young people and literally surveyed everyone and collated the information: 'What are the things that you want for your healing journey?' We put this to the departments.

I had the privilege of sitting on different coordination panels, because obviously I did case management, but never at that higher strategic level where the government funding distribution occurred. At that level I was able to say, 'Our little volunteer group, which has no money, would like to do this.' We painted the Manoora community hall, reopened it and helped to support its activation. We initiated and hosted the first three-on-three basketball event. We hosted a 'sharing your culture day' which saw about 500 people from that community bring down dishes of food from their own cultures and share them with everybody else. We activated that space through pure connection.

Our connections come from community because we are from this community. We understand and live and breathe Murray Street. We know what it looks like and we know what high-density housing feels like—what small two-bedroom apartments with nine people living in them does to your mental health and wellbeing. We knew that we had to activate spaces.

We had an international organisation say, 'Here is \$5,000 for your efforts.' We auspiced it through another company. That company took an auspicing fee from the \$5,000. From then on, we thought as part of self-determination that that was just ridiculous. Yes, I understand you have to manage the contract, but it is only five grand. We said, 'What does it mean for our little company to incorporate?' Daniel was 18, I was 25 and everyone else was in between. We incorporated with 20-something members on our board and activated in 2016.

In 2020 we were in a very fortunate position. We got sick and tired of government, legislation, red tape and a few other different things that you know are not actually red tape but come down to the operational space and prevent activation in community. We resigned from our organisations. Semara was with Education Queensland. Our other co-founder Stacey Ketchell was with another organisation in a remote community. I left Anglicare. We had had enough. We could not do what was truly needed to be done, which is exactly what Marc spoke about—building intensive relationships with our families and community to support them along that healing journey.

We recognise that we are not the organisation to do everything, but we are an organisation of relationships with our community. We understand the nuances of how we interconnect. We understand the diversity of the cultures that are here—not just multicultural but the diverse multicultural within our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Some days, the weaving of those and trying to navigate those is so intricate. Trying to understand that is complex for even those of us who are very privileged to be able to be strong in our identity, but we all come from loss. We have lost our language, we have lost an understanding of our connections and we have lost an understanding of our practices because of some of the history that has been imposed on us.

The things we do to connect with young people and connect with our community allows us to build a sense of resilience for our own character and validates our connection to culture and community. It validates our relationship with all levels of our community, no matter where you come from, because we know and acknowledge history. We know and acknowledge our elders. To the best of our knowledge, we follow cultural and community practices.

Our organisation is committed to reinvesting into grassroots. When we talk about strategy and how we do it as an organisation, we think about one mass investment in overheads. Yes, we acknowledge we are a very small overhead team, but what we know is that the second we grow too big we are going to lose touch with the people. We get on the floor and we deliver, so we are constantly reminded what the need is for the people in our community and we do not want to lose that as part of the cultural identity of our organisation.

Semara and I—especially me—are getting old. With that, I lose touch with the reality of current trending and needs and everything that influences. When we think about young people and where the disparity is and what the issues are, for me, the service providers that I am watching are not reactive enough. They are not at a click of the button to be able to respond to the needs. There is a whole lot of mapping and way too complex navigation for something to happen. When we think about a young person and their need for instant gratification, if they are at the point of change and we think about the theory of change and they want to make an effort, if it is not instant or if they cannot get instant gratification, we know they relapse: 'What is the point? I can't get it done.' We found that some of the gaps within the current service system are simply that. You may have multiple agencies, but what agency is flexible enough to be able to respond in that crisis?

We have 11 different ideas in our products. We refer to our organisation as a family, a family tree. Yes, some of us are related, but what we know is that our community is interconnected. If you think about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, we are all related and interconnected or we have relationships or we know somebody who knows somebody who babysat that person. It is something that is just inherent in what we are and it is in our DNA and in our body. To deny it because it is a corporately recognised practice is not doing us a cultural justice, if we are trying to reframe what organisational practice and culture could look like working side by side.

We acknowledge our elders. We are very privileged to have local traditional owner membership from all diverse connections around this region and as far up to the Torres Strait, which is really exciting for us. That gives us permission. When we follow our protocols in acknowledging them, they have reinvested in us so they know what we are capable of in our leadership. They trust us.

CHAIR: Merrissa, that is another inspirational story. Your journey has been amazing for all of you. We will go to some questions now because we have an eager crew here.

Mrs GERBER: Thank you for the amazing work you are doing in this community. We have heard a lot about relationships and the importance of that grassroots relationship—not a plastic relationship, but a true and meaningful relationship. It sounds like your journey started through you just doing intensive case management and an intensive relationship with that young person that really could have ended up tragic for them. What I want to understand more—and it is a bit of dichotomy with what you just said in that you do not want to grow—is how we change a system that is not based on those relationships. How do we try to embed that in a system, particularly for those high-risk kids? The child you are talking about was most certainly going to end up on a path that would have been absolutely tragic. How do we—and when I say ‘we’ I am talking about Youth Justice, Education, Health—make that work in a system for intensive case management so there is a true and lasting relationship for that child?

Ms Nona: One of the things that I believe needs to happen is we need to be heard, first and foremost. I have been a part of Cairns YJ and have a really tight relationship with them. I am very much connected to a lot of the caseworkers. You put your idea for healing forward and it is rejected. You put your idea for relationships forward and it is denied. From my personal experience, I found that the system is not receiving the potential we can offer or does not value the fact that relationships are core.

Mrs GERBER: Can you unpack that a bit more for me? When you say ‘the system’, do you mean youth justice? When you have a young person who actually has a case officer—

Ms Nona: The system is not just youth justice. It is the child protection system, it is the youth justice system, it is the NGO multiconnection system. They are fabulous ideas and, trust me, I love the idea of the multiagency panel. I think in theory it has potential. I think what is an issue is that the number of TSIROI kids we have is so significant. It is Education saying, ‘Are you here? Are you doing something?’ and then it is a tick and it is done. It is the tick-and-flick responses that are disheartening. Yes, Education are here and, yes, he is enrolled but he is not attending and there is suspension after suspension. We have not had medical assessments. There is no diagnosis of NDIS. In terms of NDIS and medical, to try and get medical responses and have assessments for these young people, it is like pulling teeth. It is too expensive and it is way too hard to navigate.

I love the initiative of the MACP and the CCYP approaches. The players who need to be in there are just not as active as they should be and/or their systems are not flexible enough to meet the instant needs of the child who may be at a point of change. At the point of change—that 72-hour window; we try to do this investment with the 72-hour responses—there is potential. I totally see the intervention being quite intense and valid, but that preplanning before exit is not coordinated. It is far from coordinated. It is like, ‘Oh my God, they are coming out. We don’t know so let’s do the plan right now.’ That for me is the hurtful thing. You have such a massive financial investment in a 72-hour identified response and we are still waiting a long time. The plan may be developed but other stakeholders are involved. Are the families brought along on that journey? What environment are they returning to? Have we done the groundwork while they were away? If we are not doing the groundwork while we have the time, what is the point? You are only going to put them back in the environment they were in that they wanted to leave.

Mrs GERBER: How much of an impact does the housing crisis have on the children you are dealing with and on that situation you have just described?

Ms Nona: The young people we work with for sure at the moment are displaced. Finally, our organisation feels and knows what it is like to be displaced because we have lost our own building. Having to go from house to house to house has been so disheartening and morally devaluing as an organisation. I can only imagine what it feels like as a young person with a family having to share someone else’s space consistently because they do not have that space themselves. In terms of the housing market, I personally know what it is like to find a house. I have been racially profiled when I have rocked up to properties, assuming that I am not able to afford them. As someone who is of seniority in my organisation, I can definitely afford to pay rent but I struggled at one point to find a home. I can only imagine what it is like when you are already displaced and feeling a sense of grief and loss from everything you have.

Ms BUSH: Thank you for coming. The member for Currumbin has picked up on some of my questions so I might go in a different direction. Merrissa, I was the chief executive officer of the Queensland homicide support group and I remember very well the incident you are talking about. You being here today and speaking of that has reminded me that, when something terrible happens, that

has an impact not just on the victim and the victim's family but on the whole community and the family and loved ones of the offender and they are sometimes connected to that. Can you reflect at all on the importance of what communities need to recover? Part of our task is looking at a victim response and recognising that the community has been touched. How important is it for communities to be supported to come back, to be built up and to heal and recover collectively?

Ms Nona: We are doing community recovery at the moment for the Wujal community. We were one of the first responders. They have reached out to us to help because we have that capacity to do so. The thing that needs to happen is that there needs to be space where our community can gather, first and foremost. It is really hard to find safe spaces for our community to plan out what our responses should be as a community and family unit. We do not have dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community gathering spaces. Our community hubs are tiny. They are not built for our types of family. My own immediate family cannot fit in the community hub. The PCYC is very challenging and too commercial.

We do not even have a community hub or dedicated community space that is purpose-built the way we need to be able to gather—which is, when we gather we have to eat, so there are some standards to this facility that need to happen first and foremost. Once we actually gather—and we plan without influence from government or promise of money, promise of things and promise of doing—we can then decide what we want first and come to government and come to support agencies with what we want to see happen.

For me, when we had our community hub and it was activated, that was the best thing for the families to have our space activated. They got to gather, they got to plan and then they got to go out and ask what they needed because then it was not a scattered approach. For us to be able to be together, yes, we talk about overcrowding and overcrowding is an issue, but culturally we also come together naturally. This is the other thing that we have to understand about our people. I may own a five-bedroom home but I have 10 people in it and it is normal for that to happen. How do we then get the understanding of the real estates and other companies, especially the department of housing? If we are displaced from our remote communities and we are coming down for medical reasons, a lot of the time we have nowhere else to go so we are either on the streets or overcrowding houses of other families. That is just a thing.

Mr McDONALD: Thanks again for being here. I appreciate the work you are doing in this space on behalf of your community. I would like to understand what you are doing and where your funding is coming from. Have you had any success in getting others from your community to help mentor and work with the troubled youth?

Ms Nona: Absolutely. I brought a tribe with me here today. Our organisation understands the fundamentals of core strong governance. One of the best things we did during COVID was not focus on delivery. Yes, we have started delivering child protection and we were doing a lot of respite supports. I converted a lot of our young people who were a part of our organisation into youth workers. I got them their cert IVs, got them accredited, did CCI, got them training and put them out to respite during COVID because we had lost a lot of that body of employment in our space.

The way we build money is through our fee-for-service models. We deliver NDIS and child protection but we also do leadership. We facilitate leadership in community and across the country, with Semara being a part of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani team and facilitating that down in Canberra with Aunty June. We have one funded program through the state government at the moment, which is Level Up. It is our alternative learning program for 10- to 17-year-olds funded through YJ. It is the most difficult contract we have because it is dictated to us by the referrals from Youth Justice. The case management is dependent on Youth Justice. When we stepped up and started doing more than just education and learning, we got put back in our boxes and we were told, 'No, you're just education, learning and outreach.' However, if you look at our reporting tool, there are two toggles for education and the rest is about focusing on everything else.

We are really blessed in our organisation. We have got connections to education. Our mother is long term in the industry, 35 years. We have been brought up in that body of work with founding framework developers like Uncle Ernie, so we know what is and what should be the best way for curriculum for those disengaged. The hardest thing is complying with YJ expectations. Everything else is fee for service for our organisation or philanthropically invested.

Mr McDONALD: The things coming from YJ, are they consent based? To enter your program do people have to consent?

Ms Nona: Absolutely.

Mr McDONALD: I understand if a young person does not consent to be a part of it you are likely to get very poor outcomes. I fully understand that. But I have heard from professionals who have said, 'No, they should be compelled to do it. We will then use our tools to take days or weeks to get consent with compulsion being a backstop.' Have you had any experience in that space or what do you think of that idea?

Ms Nona: I definitely believe that some young people are compelled because they definitely are not prepared for education. It is disheartening that some of these young people do not have core stable environments. Is it our responsibility? We were doing more, we thought we wanted to do more, we stepped up within our budget—the smallest budget known to man. Is it worth it? No, it is not worth doing the extra body of work, which is disheartening for us because the quality is not there. We cannot do the extra work that is needed to be done. We do not have that capacity in the budget. Yes, they are compelled, yes, we have had the wrong referrals, and, yes, there has been a lot of young people who have not been suited to it and it is disheartening.

Mr TANTARI: In your opening statement you mentioned you were incorporated in 2016; is that correct? Obviously your organisation started before then. Around what year was that?

Ms Jose: Since 2013 we have been a collective.

Mr TANTARI: It has been in existence for about 10 or 11 years.

Ms Jose: Since I was 21.

Mr TANTARI: We are not going to talk about age, but I want to raise current trends. Obviously one of the priority areas of this committee is to strengthen public confidence in the youth justice system. I want to talk in particular around the impacts of social media. There has been a lot of vilification of Indigenous people regarding some of the issues that have occurred recently. Have you found in the time that you have been in existence a growing trend within social media and media to skew the perception of your culture and Indigenous people generally and what do you think the impacts are in regards behavioural issues today?

Ms Nona: Our organisation is a strong believer in and supported the Yes23 campaign. We were fortunate enough to be able to support young people. In that we copped a lot of racism. We copped a lot of abuse. We had people attacking our building and threatening our young people. We try to teach, through our leadership, resilience around this sort of thing. We should not have to. Everyone should have a choice. We were not vilifying no voters. Part of our messaging for our young people was that everyone is entitled to have their own opinion—whether you are voting yes or no you treat people with respect. So absolutely it is definitely a trigger for a lot of our team and continues to be at my age a trauma trigger. We brought people as young as 15 on that journey. I could only imagine, if we were not there consistently posting all of that experience, what it would be like because they read everything about them that was not true. We watched and read the media that portrayed things that were just completely skewed. If they asked us, I wonder if that would be different. If we had the confidence to speak, I wonder if that would influence others, but it was too scary for us during that period.

Ms Jose: Can I also add though that that feeling and the observations within media existed well and truly prior to the referendum campaign. To be honest, that is why we are called Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good because what we also set out to do as an organisation is challenge the perspective of our community around First Nations young people. We are all painted as young criminals, as delinquents, as young people who drink and will abuse their families. That is not who we are. We know we come from strong legacies, we know we come from strength and resilience and that is not anywhere in the media. It is not widely celebrated. It is not the first thought that pops into people's head when they see a young black person on the side of the street. That is the challenge. For us as an organisation we needed to promote and identify that there are amazing young people in our community who are doing the work to change the community perspective. The problem is that that investment in that prosocial, in the positive, in the celebration of young Indigenous leaders is not there.

Mr TANTARI: Can I complete the question by saying do you support further regulation of social media in this area?

Ms Nona: I think there just needs to be a balance of influence in it. I think we have to combat it by figuring out how we celebrate positivity in youth. Youth needs to be celebrated. Yes, our culture is improving and the recognition of our culture is definitely increasing, depending on whatever your influence tracking thing is, but I think we just have to improve what Indigenous youth look like. I do not see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people working in cafes unless they are in a

training program where someone gets to tick a box. I do not see them working in retail. I do not see them employed at Cairns Central or Stockland or Smithfield. For me I go, 'At what point do we empower the young person to give them opportunity,' and that is what we are doing. The leadership products that we are producing are that stepping stone when you are ready to take that leap from your past into something positive because what is missing once ICM have done all the intensive work and everyone has done all their business—what happens when they are doing well? Nothing.

Ms Jose: Can I also share that there is a young gentleman who has been a part of our cohort since our establishment, Wally Gila, he is a social media influencer. He promotes himself. He has 100,000 followers. He is a proud advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, teaching and learning. He is a perfect example for us. He was actually part of one of the government's initiatives a couple of years ago that looked specifically at social media and as part of his application he talks specifically about the mental health impacts on him as a young Indigenous man and a young Indigenous man on social media and how, even if it is not specifically directed at him, the volume of what he is seeing online affects his mental health and wellbeing. I know that that was a part of the initiative from the previous minister for youth.

Mr TANTARI: What is his tag?

Ms Jose: Urrawol.

CHAIR: I realise we have run out of time and I do know that there are more questions. Is there any possibility that if we were to write to you our questions you would be able to respond? I have a few. I am mindful of those waiting. Thank you so much. Again, like Shane, it is really inspiring. I think it takes that whole message that we constantly hear, it does take a village, but it also takes those in the village to start the process. Thank you so much and I wish you all the best for 2024 and we will see you online with some questions.

CUTHBERT, Mr Shane, Private capacity

O'SHANE, Ms Pat AM, Private capacity

Ms O'Shane: Sorry, I am late. My daughters lost their brother yesterday and I am still getting over it. I am a bit tearful.

CHAIR: Pat, I am so sorry. Our condolences. We do have your submission. Would you prefer that we not ask you any questions as we do have your submission?

Ms O'Shane: No. What are we doing?

Mr Cuthbert: I have already spoken, but would you like to speak? I know it is hard because you do not know what I have said. They have our submission. Did you want to speak or answer questions?

CHAIR: We have read your submission.

Ms O'Shane: I cannot hear you. I am profoundly deaf and I do not have my hearing aids in this afternoon. We had a death in the family and we have had a very bad time of it in the last couple of days so excuse me if I am a bit tearful.

CHAIR: I totally understand. If we were to ask some questions, Shane, could you convey them to Pat? What we could do at a later time is a video call when Pat feels well enough. She does not have to do this.

Mr Cuthbert: Do you feel well enough to speak today? Are you okay to answer questions?

Ms O'Shane: Yes, I am okay to answer questions.

Mr Cuthbert: Would you prefer to answer questions or make a statement first? Would you like to talk about your experiences?

Ms O'Shane: Shane and I put together a submission and I understand that this is the committee that received that submission.

CHAIR: Correct.

Ms O'Shane: I was a lawyer for a long time and I am accustomed to answering questions, putting together submissions and so forth, but we had a death in the family and I am still tearful over it.

CHAIR: Shane, maybe we could write questions and send them through.

Ms O'Shane: I take it that all of you have received it and you might have some questions to ask.

CHAIR: We will go straight into some questions and, Shane, if you could pass on the questions.

Mr Cuthbert: They are going to go straight into questions.

Ms O'Shane: Okay.

Mr McDONALD: Pat, thank you so very much for being here. Your submission refers to supporting the child through detention or different therapeutic programs. Would you like to talk to us about your experience or examples that you would recommend?

Ms O'Shane: I am happy to just chat, if that is what you really want. Having been a lawyer for a long time I am accustomed to getting all the questions and batting them back. We did actually make a submission some months ago, didn't we?

Mr Cuthbert: Yes. The member for Lockyer here was asking if you would like to talk about some of the programs that you put in place around supporting the children that you came into contact with through your experience.

Mr McDONALD: In the drug courts.

Mr Cuthbert: The drug courts.

Ms O'Shane: Yes. Actually, Shane might be better to speak to you about the programs that I put into place when I was actually sitting on the bench and he came before me. Did he tell you that story?

Mr McDONALD: He did, yes.

Ms O'Shane: He told me that his mother was bowled over, as he was. I think I was probably as bowled over as they all were. I studied psychology of course. I was a teacher long before I was a lawyer and I used to implement programs in the classroom, because you know what kids can be like. From primary school really all the way through to university, they can be real tearaways. He was one. In fact, I told his mother he was one and he will tell you that I told his mother.

Mr Cuthbert: Yes, she was not very happy.

Ms O'Shane: What did you say to your mother or what did you say when I first told you, 'This is what you're going to do'?

Mr Cuthbert: Yes, she got quite the dressing-down from Pat, yes.

Ms O'Shane: Because by the time I saw Shane I was a fully-fledged lawyer and I would put a lot of them on bonds and so forth. I had them doing particular programs with people who had better qualifications than I in getting kids away from the streets and so forth. Shane was one and he can tell you the rest of that story.

Mr McDONALD: I think he has.

Mr Cuthbert: It is all in the submission. Pat is obviously referring to her programs that she implemented where she would place them on a bond, which was a bit similar, I guess, to the way maybe a bail would work but your condition was you would have to go and see the psychologist. She would say, 'I want to get a report from the psychologist that tells me what your issues are'—and correct me if I am wrong, Pat—'and those sorts of things. Let's come back to court and then let's get you on a physical health program. I want a report from the GP.' So you were effectively sentencing by way of a bond of putting this young person on these various programs to come back. The idea was after you have come back three or four times you had successfully completed all of the programs and Pat could say, 'Well done. You're on your way. Good luck.'

Ms O'Shane: 'Good luck, now get going.' Has he told you about it at all so far?

CHAIR: Yes. We have another question for you from the member for Cooper.

Ms BUSH: Thanks, Pat, for coming.

Ms O'Shane: Because I actually was a teacher originally, I had studied psychology and I used to look at these young tearaways and think to myself, 'There's a better way of doing things with them,' and I had believed that anyway when I was even a primary school teacher. In fact, just across the road was where it was located, except that it was pulled down. It was condemned. I used to take my classroom from Yarrabah and Bessie Point, just across the bay, for lessons down to the Esplanade. You can just take a stroll down there. You probably did this morning. I used to take them down at lunchtime because that is when the tide went out and first of all I had them growing vegetable gardens and flower gardens. They could have their choice. At that time the school was condemned and I took along a few stools and some books for kids to read. They had the opportunity to read whatever books they wanted to read and take them home, and it was like picking up gold nuggets. That is what I did as a young teacher for a very long time.

I taught years of the kids from across the bay. In fact, I taught them right through to high school and a couple of those young ones went on to, for instance, work in the UNO. I would have them growing gardens—flowers if they liked, vegetables if they liked—and we were in this school just across the road which should have been pulled down ages before. I could see what the kids that I was teaching were able to do when I let them get out. In fact, just down at the bottom of the steps you could have your choice of growing vegetables or growing flowers—whatever you liked—and it made a difference to them and it made a difference to them to be able to take their books home. In the good old days, if you remember, we had the Little Golden Books and I would allow them to take home their Little Golden Books. As I say, for them it was like picking up nuggets.

CHAIR: Do we have time for another question, Shane? Can you translate another question please?

Mr Cuthbert: Yes. They are going to ask another question, if that is okay.

CHAIR: Yes, from the member for Cooper so that they have had a chance.

Ms O'Shane: Yes. I am profoundly deaf, but I left my hearing aids at home today because the family is still very distressed from yesterday.

CHAIR: That is all right. Shane will tell you.

Ms BUSH: Thanks, Pat. I am just after Pat's views on training. The submission talks about training for legal staff and the judiciary and I just want to know what training she thinks is important. Sorry, I feel like I am going through you, Shane, but if you can ask.

Mr Cuthbert: Yes. So remember in our submission we made a suggestion that members of the judiciary, lawyers and legal professionals should visit the prisons, get an idea of what is going on there and do some additional training. That was our suggestion, so the member for Cooper is just asking if you could talk more about maybe what that would look like or what suggestions you would like to make to the judiciary and legal people.

Ms O'Shane: I was making those suggestions as a judicial officer. I visited the jails all the time because I had seen them as the kids, as I am telling you, from across the bay. I became a lecturer at the University of New South Wales and I implemented a whole lot of programs through not just the university but also through the prisons, and it is not hard. We know all about Neddy Smith of course. I actually dealt with him once—not once, actually; I dealt with him. When I first dealt with him I was told that his mother lived opposite where Sydney's Central railway station is and she threw him into the gutter, so that was his start in life. You can imagine that if a kid is given a start like that, he or she—usually he—is not going to go anywhere very fast, and he did not, did he? When I was teaching in primary school at Cairns North—it is now a medical centre—it was the same sort of thing—run around the yard, get them active and also grow gardens in the schoolyard. If you look at it now you would not think it was such a huge place as it was, but we had a huge spread where we could have kids actually growing gardens. That makes a difference to any child, especially those who are disadvantaged, and in those days they were disadvantaged.

I remember the troop ships going past. I still remember troop carriers going past the house I lived in and I was only a very young child and they were stationed off the Coral Sea, so I have a fair bit of history of taking notice of what goes on in the world and how things can be dealt with. What I cannot tolerate very much is that people came along and said to somebody like Shane, 'You're a little tearaway. You're a little horror. Get out there and do something with yourself.' Of course, I sent him to a child psychologist to start with. I have always looked at things from a different perspective, not only because I indeed have a different perspective but in fact I am Indigenous. I would have teachers actually calling me names. My father used to get rabid. He was not Indigenous. He was a red-hot Irishman. I kid you not, he was.

CHAIR: How wonderful.

Mr Cuthbert: If I could add something on the question for Jonty, I am now a part of the legal profession. I am a member of a lot of the law societies and things like that. I am president of my uni law society. As I think psychologists and many other professionals do, you get your CPD points every year that are compulsory to maintain registration in that you are still continuing to learn. For me for a lot of it I have been getting CPD points from going to boozy lunches where we might have a guest speaker on Mental Health Day and things like that. You have a lunch and you sit around drinking, but it is not really getting your hands dirty. One of our suggestions was about getting into the prisons and things like that for your CPD points so it is related to the work that you are undertaking. Pat, I think the former premier of New South Wales Neville Wran asked you to head up the first land rights legislation in the country at the time. Pat was working for the then premier and as part of that she actually visited—was it every prison and every youth detention centre in the country?

Ms O'Shane: That is right, yes.

Mr Cuthbert: By the time she became a magistrate, she really had that insight into how these places were run. That is a suggestion that we thought maybe the current lawyers and things like that could learn from and could benefit from.

Ms BUSH: Fabulous suggestion. Thank you.

CHAIR: We have run out of time but I want to thank you. Pass on to Pat our deep gratitude but also condolences from the whole committee.

Ms O'Shane: Are you asking me a question? I cannot hear.

CHAIR: I am sending it through Shane.

Mr Cuthbert: They are out of time, but they are very thankful and grateful for you coming and speaking today.

CHAIR: We pass on our condolences. We wish you all the best.

Ms O'Shane: If you are thinking about sending young tearaways to the bush, just can that idea. It is not a good one.

CHAIR: We are now open to the floor and I have a list of speakers. We have a lot to get through. We have about five minutes each. I will be calling each person out. If there is time within that five minutes the committee will be able to get a couple of questions in. I call the first witnesses.

AUSTIN, Mr Raymond, Private capacity

BORG, Ms Joanne, Private capacity

CHAIR: Good afternoon. You are very welcome. I am sure you have seen how we operate. There is about five minutes for each speaker. It depends whether you want us to ask you any questions. You can either take the whole five minutes and we run out of the time, or give us an opportunity to ask a couple of questions.

Ms Borg: That is a little bit disappointing because this is actually the first time we have had our voices heard.

CHAIR: Okay then we will try to squeeze more time in.

Ms Borg: We have never had the opportunity to be heard before.

CHAIR: We will definitely squeeze extra time in for you.

Ms Borg: I did write a submission. It is on the website but it does not have my name to it because there is quite a lot of personal detail in there. I am happy for the forum to remain open and not closed. I think I am in a comfortable space. This is my husband, Raymond Austin.

CHAIR: Hello Raymond. Welcome.

Ms Borg: I will start by reading my submission and I will expand upon it as well.

CHAIR: Because most members have read your submission, would you like to expand on it? The secretariat has reminded me if you do read it out, it will then be online with your name. Maybe you would like to expand on it if you want the submission to remain anonymous. Because we have Hansard here, once you read it out, it becomes public.

Ms Borg: I might read the major points of my submission and not too much detail. Then you can go off and read it in more detail.

Mrs GERBER: We have your submission. Take it however you want and honestly only say that which you are comfortable with being identified personally.

Ms Borg: Yes. I think it is a very important time for truth-telling, hence why my husband and I have taken the time to appear today and come and share our stories. Basically, I am an Aboriginal woman. I have 37 years experience of working in the child protection system in both Victoria and Queensland, in particular in this region in Queensland. I have operated at a level of direct practice. I have also developed statewide programs. I currently do social research. I run consultations for governments. I have developed policies in Victoria. I have worked for the child safety commission in Victoria and most recently I was the regional practice leader for Child Safety here in Far North Queensland.

My background is my mother was a member of the stolen generation. Bless her, she has passed away now, but my voice here today is through her and my ancestors. Starting off and being culturally appropriate, I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians and elders, ancestors and community members of the land we meet on today here in Gimuy, in Cairns. I also wish to acknowledge my ancestors who gave me the strength and cultural authority to speak today. I also wish to acknowledge all people present here—all of you and all of the people here who are attending this hearing—and encourage truth-telling on our journey to address this really serious issue that brings us all together. Special thanks to both yourself, Sandy, and Laura who have actively sought me out, called me and encouraged me to attend the hearing.

I note the many responses to the hearing and submissions to date and respectfully submit my concern at the lack of victims of crime responses within some of those responses within the hearings. I have read through the department of youth justice's and child safety's responses. It is very underwhelming in terms of the truth-telling that needs to be told around other areas, which I will now unpack.

I would like to expand on my submission. I was just about to say I am attending on behalf of us. My husband is a social and emotional wellbeing worker who works with the Wujal Wujal community. He is present, so we are really lucky that he is also here today and able to support me.

I implore the government and this committee to respectfully listen deeply. What I am talking about here is dadirri, which is an Aboriginal word that means to be quiet, still, have awareness, because that is crucial to the way forward if we are to understand and address the alarming issue of high rates of overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youths in Queensland's criminal justice system.

In relation to IMAC, I just want to highlight to you that the way that has been formed is really disappointing. As victims of youth crime, we had very high hopes that there would be adequate representation on that committee of, firstly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Given the overrepresentation of young people in the justice system we would have expected to see a lot more representation of that on the committee including people like myself and my husband, who have the lived experience, the professional experience and we continue to live the experience of our nieces and nephews running amok within this community today. They are some of these serious offenders who some of the people have been talking about.

Our niece was involved in a car accident a couple of years ago where a young boy who was in resi care was killed up the road from here in Pease Street. Our niece was in that car. Since that time—that is two years ago—we have never been at the table as her family members to have input into her youth justice or her child protection planning.

Back to IMAC, I have expressed my concern to Minister D'Ath. I phoned her office before Christmas with my concerns about the way the committee was formed. Do you think I have had a response up to today? Not one.

CHAIR: Just one moment. The committee here today is focusing on those seven priority areas and I am worried we are getting out of scope in relation to your contact with the minister. We are trying to pull some solutions out. As I said, we are very short on time.

Ms Borg: With respect, before we have solutions we need to actually hear and understand deeply what the issues are. I do not believe that I have read anything that even starts to touch on the reality of what is happening here today. As I said, our nieces and nephews, who are the ones running amok today, are some of those kids. We know; we live it every single day as aunties and uncles trying to respond to their behaviours and trying as the most well-functioning members of that family to be heard.

CHAIR: That is what we are here for. We will read the submission, but the supplement is to help us at the moment just to understand what you see needs to be addressed at the moment.

Ms Borg: One of the things that needs to be addressed is having the right people sitting at the table within this reform process. I think it is really important that we stop with the privilege disconnect, putting organisations on high pedestals and only hearing the voices of those who are privileged and in positions of power to come to the table and be heard. That needs to stop if we are to seriously address what is actually happening in practice with this issue. Here especially in this region my husband and I are key stakeholders in this process. We have never been invited by any government department, any organisation—sorry, there is not a local member that is sitting at the moment that has invited us to the table, either. I have sought meetings with Michael and so forth.

I want to bring in the National Agreement on the Closing the Gap policy—

CHAIR: Again, with all due respect, it is outside the scope of our current inquiry. I know what you are saying and we have to take—

Mrs GERBER: Incarceration rates. Point of order, Chair. Indigenous incarceration rates are part of the national scheme for closing the gap and part of what we are tasked with looking for solutions to.

CHAIR: Yes, if it is in relation to incarceration rates.

Ms Borg: It is outcome 11. Addressing the socio-economic factors and outcome 11 that relates directly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people committing crime, the Productivity Commission report of June 2023 refers to the priority reforms. In terms of the formal partnerships and shared decision-making in each state that is meant to be happening, where is it happening? How is it happening? Again, privilege is at the table. There needs to be representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members like my husband and me with the lived experience and as victims and survivors of youth crime, who have in-depth professional experience of the systems at play and live every day with the experience of family members committing crime. We have unique perspectives but are not included.

I turn to data cleansing. In relation to all of the data that has been put forward to the hearing to date, I am here to question that. I am absolutely here to question that in my past professional capacity as the regional practice leader for Child Safety. One of the biggest projects that I did was I looked at all of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were listed as child protection clients within the region and the data that exists for those. The way identity is collected is absolutely inaccurate and culturally inaccurate and disrespectful. The systems only allow for 'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander' or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'. That tells you absolutely nothing about Cairns

that child or that child's family. For example, my husband is from Badu and Mabuiag islands in the Torres Strait. What does that mean? I am a Biripi woman who was raised in the Melbourne community and have moved up here to Far North Queensland. What does that mean for me? It is about unpacking culturally all of the levels of who a child is, who a young person is and who their family members are.

This is the biggest flaw and mistake that the system continues to carry on today, so there needs to be a huge data cleansing of both the child protection and youth justice systems across Queensland, let alone Australia. Children and young people need to be correctly identified if we are to start making assessments of their family situations and their situations going forward. Not only around their needs, but also around planning to address their behaviours because culturally what might be a response for an Aboriginal child from a traditional owner group here in Cairns is not necessarily an appropriate cultural response for a Torres Strait Islander boy from Badu. My husband is an ex-employee of the On Country Program that has been referred to today as wonderful. I question the outcomes of that program, I question the referrals to that program and I question the cultural appropriateness of that program.

Mr McDONALD: Which program?

Ms Borg: The Jabalbina On Country Program. With all due respect to Jabalbina—this is not an attack on them—it is a direct criticism of government's failure in planning and setting up that program which is culturally disrespectful to the young people who are being referred and taken on country here and there willy-nilly to any country at times when they are not from that country. That is not a cultural response.

I have over 37 years of working in child protection in Victoria and Queensland. From my experience as a senior member within the Public Service and NGO organisations, I question the data that is collected and disseminated. True Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity needs to be understood and recorded. This informs cultural practice and how to assess and respond to children, young people and families. The biggest issue that I want to raise from my submission is around the lack of trauma-informed responses, specifically intergenerational trauma. I submit that until we adopt an approach that has trauma at the front, middle, centre and end of our responses, we will miss the mark. Stop wasting our taxpayers' money.

We need to stop it, because everything that has been spoken about today all relates back to trauma—everything—and intergenerational trauma. We are here as lived examples of the intergenerational trauma and so are the nieces and nephews who are the serious offenders. Their parents were part of the child protection system here 20 years ago. I was asked to do an investigation into the deaths of the Murray Street children eight years ago. That was pretty much my first piece of work as the regional practice leader. I am sad to say here today that blind Freddy could have predicted that was going to happen, and I did say that in my findings to the region and to child protection.

CHAIR: Joanne, would you be happy to provide a copy of what you are reading from to the committee?

Ms Borg: Yes.

CHAIR: Maybe we could organise a Zoom session with you—I understand we have a lot of people waiting—then, we could dedicate some time without having time pressure on us. Is there anything else which you can then provide to us? The secretariat will contact you to see when we could do a Zoom session, maybe next week or the week after, as part of this.

Ms Borg: Yes. I only have one more point.

The issue around policy versus legislation, versus services, versus practice and justice reinvestment. I know from experience that these are competing in regards to the intent, the impact and the implementation of them all. The intention of stakeholders in regards to implementing policy, legislation, programs and services competes with the 'how' in practice unless you understand and are aware of how privilege gets in the way of the reality of the everyday lived experience of the children and young people who are committing the crimes. Cultural capability to implement the cultural practice—there is a huge issue around that within all of the current responses and, I fear, all of the future responses.

CHAIR: Joanne, thank you. It has been valuable. I am sure the committee will have a lot of questions around not only your original submission but also the one that you have made now.

Ms Borg: Thank you. Sorry, there is a lot of anger in my voice.

CHAIR: It is passion, and thank you Raymond.

Mr McDONALD: I wonder if Joanne would be happy, once we have read your submission, to send some questions to you for clarification, as well as the Zoom session.

CHAIR: Is that alright?

Ms Borg: Sure.

CHAIR: Thank you so much, Joanne.

Mr McDONALD: That was very courageous.

Ms Borg: Thank you.

TAYLOR, Mr Paul, Private capacity

CHAIR: Good afternoon.

Mr Taylor: Good afternoon, Chair, and members of the committee. I firstly thank you for the opportunity to speak this afternoon. I have made a written submission and I have had the pleasure of listening to previous presenters before me. I have had a look at what Mayor Jenny Hill has provided to the committee as well as Mayor Tom Gilmore from Mareeba. I have also had a look at the submission that LGAQ has done, so rather than rehash what is in here, I thought I would hone in on some key highlights.

I have had an over 45-year policing career. Of that, probably 15 to 18 years was in executive roles. My role was the deputy commissioner for regional Queensland. Basically, regional Queensland exists outside the south-east corner and borders to both South Australia and the Northern Territory. I had the only international border in Australia from a policing perspective. I worked up in PNG around capacity building and on those issues which impacted particularly the northern end of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands. I was involved in capacity building in the Solomon Islands. So I am well and truly versed in regards to these issues, not only from a Queensland perspective, but I have also had activities in the Northern Territory because of the border there and the influence of family movements, in particular, between the Northern Territory and Mount Isa. I was a director of PCYC Queensland and I have also been the director of a not-for-profit, access housing. I was the chair of the Regional Managers Coordination Network for many years which brings together all those at a director level from within the regions across all government areas and across governments.

I was responsible for the establishment of Safer Streets and similar in Townsville, and I championed both of those for a period of time. When that was first created in Cairns, there was a lot of goodwill towards it. There is a level of frustration when you look at these systems. Typically people view youth crime through either a singular or a dual lens, so they look through a policing prism or a youth justice prism. My view is that it is an ecosystem. It is very broad, and it includes a lot more than the departments that have been mentioned here—Housing, Health; the list goes on. To me, the policing situation, relying on policing—I agree predominantly with most of the people who have been here—police cannot arrest their way out of this activity. Having said that, there are some individuals whom, I have no doubt, for the safety of the community, need to be in custody. That is a sad fact. In some cases, having observed activities they have gone through, spending \$1 million on some of those individuals is not going to change their direction one iota.

There have been many good programs that I have seen over the years from my roles in leading South-East Queensland policing activities—the Gold Coast and Logan—and Townsville and Cairns. Sadly, some of those programs have never eventuated or never been delivered because there is not a cohort of people to participate. At no stage has there been the will of individuals to commit and ideally you should have people who self-refer and recognise the benefits, but we are talking about individuals who do not make good decisions in their life. That is why typically they are in the position that they are in. So all these programs and investments, which is public money most of the time, need to be a value proposition. The frustrating thing, looking across the sectors, is that trying to work out value from program to program is very difficult. I would recommend to the committee that they look at what does success look like in that sector, and how do you measure that? That measurement should be right across the sector. Like any other industry, you should make sure that the public money that is being spent delivers an outcome which people in the community recognise.

There have been some very good programs. In my recent role, prior to when I left, I did manage the youth justice funds for policing activity. A lot of the activities that people have talked about today were funded by myself through that program—through government money of course—but I recognise the value of those. One of those programs is the Johnathan Thurston Academy. I see some of those people here today. We invest a lot of money in that but I wanted to make sure that—apart from the name—the program actually delivered. I invested money outside of that program through my office to have it assessed. It needs to be assessed independently and rigorously around academic evaluation. We did that to make sure that it is a good program. If it is, we want to invest more in it. My point with a lot of the other programs is that if you do not have mandated attendance, you will not achieve the outcome. There needs to be a coordinator at each location to recognise what programs are available in each location, and they need to be triaged against the individual that is before the court. There needs to be advice given to the magistrate as to what the best course is.

I had 14 of the 17 Indigenous discrete Indigenous communities within my command and built relationships right across the board. Fundamentally, nearly everyone who has come up here has recognised the value of relationships when working with a young person. They are just as important

when you are working across government. Whilst I said it was an ecosystem, I can tell you that the policy frameworks and how they operate from one agency to another is extremely frustrating. For example, some people have talked about family environments. I, too, reckon we should be looking at the whole environment, not just the individual who has perpetrated the criminal activity. It is often the case that you will find younger siblings who have no adult role model, so they role model off the older sibling. In trying to get other agencies involved in the diversion of that person—they do not fit the policy framework because they are not criminally responsible until they are 10 years of age—I have had arguments with people within government around a statistical number. Because they are under eight, they are not criminal activities but they are victims of each crime. Whilst people might not be criminally responsible under 10, they are criminal activities and they should be referred to move them out of criminal activities.

There are a range of things that I have seen across the community. I am a strong believer that government should be an enabler. It is interesting the number of times people say 'a village raises a child'. My firsthand experience has been that whenever I talk about children in Indigenous communities, frequently the response I hear is 'that is the government's problem'. We have created that. When I say 'we' collectively—governments for the last 20, 30 or 40 years. There needs to be a shift; there needs to be empowerment at a local level. Kids that are from Aurukun should be managed within Aurukun, or on programs that are embedded in Aurukun. The government should support and enable that to occur. By moving kids around, whether it be through watch houses—Cleveland or wherever—all you are doing is congregating a group of people who learn and share off each other.

There are some frustrations in regards to development and education. I have never been to a school yet in any small remote community where there are not plenty of seats vacant, so there is a lot of capacity around education. I have never seen a teacher that is not enthusiastic to teach kids. In some of those communities, the furthest house away is probably six blocks. There needs to be a recognition that there is a strong nexus between a lack of education and noneducation. I have met numerous kids who are over 18 years of age and have never set foot in a classroom and numerous kids who do not have a birth certificate because at birth the nurse or the medical staff provided a form to someone who was illiterate and they never filled it in. There are huge problems there. Unless it is looked at as an ecosystem, you will have police sitting at the bottom of a waterfall trying to stop the water from coming down. We need to work at the other end. There is a capacity there around education. With things like bail, it frustrates me when I see a school-aged child given bail and they do not go to school. They are not enrolled in school. They are not engaged in school. Why cannot bail be conditioned around school attendance?

CHAIR: I am sorry, Paul, but I am mindful of the time. A lot of this would be in your submission?

Mr Taylor: Yes, some of it. I suppose a critical point is about managing in the community that they are from. I also see the issues around health and lack of fresh fruit and vegetables. I have not been to a community yet where there is not a capacity there to undertake those types of activities. It is simple things like engaging kids in market gardens and teaching them the skills. Not only are they learning a level of discipline and accountability and a regimented routine; they are actually providing sustenance for their community to increase health. That is my submission.

CHAIR: We are going to go to one question from each side. As I said, I am mindful that we have a lot of people who want to speak.

Mr PURDIE: Paul, I appreciate you have spent your adult life dedicated to law and order and more recently have been a champion for North Queensland as an assistant commissioner and a deputy commissioner. We are really lucky to have you present to us. We have talked to a lot of serving police and they are strictly bound, as you would know, by the procedures. They cannot be critical of the government or the service. Perhaps we can contact you later to have further discussions or ask you questions in writing. There has been talk today about how the courts are to blame and not necessarily the police or the laws. I realise your experience is quite current as you left not that long ago. What do police need on the ground in Townsville, where you also have had experience, and in Cairns to help better protect the community?

Mr Taylor: I think they need to be supported at every opportunity. It is a tipping point at the moment where you have kids in stolen cars driving around targeting police and they believe that that is an activity they should be engaged in. You can have a look at the policy in New South Wales. The history of Queensland policy being a restricted policy was as a result of coronial inquiries—

Mr PURDIE: Are you talking about the pursuit policy?

Mr Taylor: Yes—that was probably over 20 years ago. That has never been revisited. Coroners make decisions at a point in time, but that does not mean that in five or 10 years time those decisions should not be reviewed and reflect what the current status is because times change in the Cairns

whole operating environment. It would be like me trying to operate as an operational police officer when I walked the beat in '77. A lot has changed. My big tip is constant review of any policy settings that were set in a particular time and may not meet the current standards.

On technology, I was to go with the union to Canberra to look at how technology plays out around immobilisers and those types of things. There is a capacity there for industry to adapt with incoming vehicles, new vehicles, so that they are a lot smarter. We did a lot of work and I did run the program around tyre deflation devices. We worked with industry to look at how we better use technology so you take away the risk of the operator throwing them out. There is lots to do.

The other interesting thing for me, the frustrating thing for me, has been that over the years I have worked with different local governments and some have been very complimentary and worked and cooperated with police, but others see that there is no role in that for them whatsoever. Fundamentally, my view of public safety is that it lays at each and every level of government. Obviously, the federal government has the responsibility of borders and everything like that, but council own most of the assets. Most of the people who have been before you promoting programs operate, potentially, out of council bricks and mortar on council land. There is a role for council to play.

Council does not even know what crime is going on because they do not even have an advisory committee where police inform them so that they can be a genuine partner. To her credit, the paper that Jenny Hill put up was quite forthright. It was good to see that she has shown leadership. She is echoing the message of what the community think.

Mr PURDIE: You are an ex-police officer and she is a mayor. Do you support what she was calling for about removing detention as a last resort?

Mr Taylor: Detention as a last resort needs to be taken away because it does limit the magistrates and it does not consider the local environment. I have stood in media conferences with the families of juveniles who have perished because of criminal activity. They were given bail. Sometimes the argument from the defence does not look at the safety of the individual and the duty of care. As sad as it might sound, sometimes those kids are safer in a watch house or in custody than roaming the street because they are involved in extreme things. We see 10- and 11-year-old kids who are flat out seeing over the steering wheel racing cars at 150 or 160 kilometres. Sometimes custody is a safer place for the child let alone the victim.

The other thing is that the tipping point at the moment is not in favour of the victims. There needs to be a tipping point in favour of victims. It has been too far the other way.

Mr HARPER: Thank you, Paul, for being here. You and I have worked together, in fact, on Strong Communities, which you championed down there. I remember we had a conversation in 2015 about de-siloing the agencies. That is a credit to the work that you did in your former role, including with Safer Streets up here. I want to clarify your answer about the removal of youth detention as a last resort. I could not quite hear what the member just asked. Did you say it should be—

Mr Taylor: Yes, it should be because, in my experience, what happens is most magistrates refer to that as the first point of call and then it limits their options after that. Even with the GPS trial—and I am a strong believer in the use of technology in a lot of these things—much the same as some of the other programs that I think would have been great programs, there is a failure to commit individuals to that activity. These kids are not good at making choices. If particularly the men in this room think back to when we were that young, I reckon we would not have made too many good choices either. I think that they are not in a position to make that choice. They need direction and they need responsibility and accountability.

Mr HARPER: As a starting point, thank you for your clarification on that. I will ask the same question that I asked Mayor Hill. For transparency, I understand you are running for council as an Independent member up here.

Mr Taylor: Yes.

Mr HARPER: Can you confirm there is no youth crime action committee up here at council level?

Mr Taylor: No, there is no community safety committee established in the council.

Mr HARPER: Do you believe that all levels of government have a role to play?

Mr Taylor: Of course they do.

Mr HARPER: My question is in regards to the removal of youth detention as a last resort. You will know legislative changes on breach of bail and the serious declaration of recidivist offenders for the courts to increase sentencing were passed last year. The question I asked Mayor Hill and the

question that I will ask you, Paul, is: should we start at those who have been declared serious recidivist offenders by the courts? Where do we start and where do we stop? The reason I ask where we stop is because if you applied it to everyone, the kid who steals a bike versus a serious violent recidivist offender who has been declared—

Mrs GERBER: Point of order, Chair.

Mr McDONALD: No-one is going to jail for stealing a bike. We are talking about kids who have stolen 70 cars.

Mr HARPER: I do not know why you are blowing up.

Mr McDONALD: Detention as a last resort does not mean detention at the start. That is just ridiculous.

Mr PURDIE: It is not mandatory detention.

CHAIR: Everyone, please.

Mr HARPER: I was trying to put it in context.

Mr McDONALD: It is good to see that you are supporting it then.

Mr HARPER: I am sorry, I was trying to put it in context.

CHAIR: I know, but maybe not use a bike.

Mr HARPER: That was not what I—

Mr McDONALD: Steal a car.

Mr HARPER: What I was asking is: if those are declared by the courts a serious risk to the community and a serious recidivist offender, is that the starting point where that removal of youth detention should be—

Mr PURDIE: Point of order, Chair.

CHAIR: Hang on.

Mr PURDIE: He does not understand the legislation.

Mr McDONALD: You have to be sentenced for an offence.

Mr HARPER: I am not arguing that. I am asking his opinion.

Mr PURDIE: To be given that classification you have be sentenced to a term of imprisonment so how can detention be a last resort when you have already gone to prison?

CHAIR: It is not a point of order. You are chewing up time. Move on. Please answer the question.

Mrs GERBER: My point of order is that he is misleading the witness. He is asking a question that is inherently wrong.

CHAIR: He is just asking a question.

Mr McDONALD: It is hypothetical and not possible.

CHAIR: At least let the witness—not a witness, a guest.

Mr McDONALD: He does not need protection.

CHAIR: That is right. Could you just answer? You can say, 'I don't have to answer it.'

Mr Taylor: Certainly that is a point at the start, to get to that sort of position. The other thing to clarify is that a child might be in custody in Cleveland or in Brisbane and not have been found guilty of the offence that they are in for. The fact of the matter is that they are in there because of other offences. It is extremely frustrating when you try to access those areas to provide programs and when you get told, 'But the child hasn't done anything' yet they are in custody. Sometimes they sit there for six months. There are activities that could have been going on from day 1. I hope you look at the differential between those who are sentenced and those who are not sentenced and are in custody, because to me it is no different.

CHAIR: Because we are out of time and I have lots of questions, do you have a problem if, as a committee, we send some questions through to you?

Mr Taylor: That is fine.

CHAIR: That would assist enormously.

Mr Taylor: The only other thing I want to say is that I think Cairns is a prime location for council to get involved, particularly when LGAQ has said that there is a role for council to play. This could be a trial to show what impact council can have in regards to community safety and crime prevention through activities. I put that on the table for consideration.

CHAIR: Thank you, Paul, for your time. We really appreciate it. I am sorry it has been brief but we look forward to sending you through some questions, especially regarding your submission. I now call forward Aaron McLeod.

MCLEOD, Mr Aaron, Private capacity

Mr McLeod: Thank you very much. It has been a wonderful wait. I have been able to learn all of this from all of these wonderful people we have in Cairns. It is a blessing to be here last or maybe second or third last.

My name is Aaron McLeod. I am a volunteer in the Cairns community. I am the current president of the Crime and Justice Action Group. We are a non-incorporated association currently but we are being tapped on the shoulder quite often in recent years—I suppose the last 12 months—to go to the next level and be more actively engaged in the stakeholder network. We are a bit reluctant to go down that path. The DIYDG and the lovely Indigenous ladies who gave wonderful testimony gave you some real insight as to the reluctance that they have also of engaging too high and becoming too large as an organisation. They do not want to get consumed by the politics, I suppose, that exists at that higher level. I feel the same and our group do as well.

Firstly, because of limited time, I might put to you that our group has actually conducted a petition in the Cairns community. All of these are physically signed documents with addresses from 2,123 residents of Cairns, mostly in the Edmonton area. That petition asks for the government not to build a detention centre in that location. It also suggests that the CJAG policy that we have had for four years is to encourage a youth rehabilitation and restorative academy in more of a remote location. Of course, the vision for that is focused on the serious recidivist offender problem in particular. We encourage early intervention and early prevention—in other words, the parenting and family side of the services. We are very grateful to all of the service providers we have seen here today. We encourage them all to keep doing a great job.

Certainly, there is a strong opinion in the Cairns community that because of the way in which Cairns is built—it is basically a strip city hemmed in between the mountains and the Coral Sea where there is a long stretch of country in between—having a detention centre in this area would be very problematic. Recently, we have seen reductions in crime in Cairns because of the specific aspects of the strengthening community safety legislation that were put into place regarding, of course, strengthening the penalty for breach of bail offences but also enabling the presumption for arrest for police. The Youth Justice Act before that, unfortunately, created a presumption against arrest. It actually had a presumption for an alternative to arrest. Thankfully, with the Strengthening Community Safety Bill it has now been put back to where it should be for police to do their job.

We have seen some good results there from a stolen car perspective, but in Townsville unfortunately that has not been the case because Townsville, of course, is a significant hub for detention inputs and output and the additional services that are required from Youth Justice in that area. Detention centres are very problematic. It is a choke point and we do not want to have one in the centre of our town. That petition says that very loudly. It has 2,123 physical signatures. I am happy to table that to someone who is game enough to put it as a motion on the floor of parliament, otherwise we will send it to the Clerk of the parliament and they can do that.

Mr McDONALD: Send it to the Clerk.

CHAIR: No. We can't process a petition.

Mr McDONALD: We can help you with the process.

Mr McLeod: Thank you for that. I have a couple of broad ideas. As I said earlier, we focus on the early prevention factors. Our individual group is focused on parents and families, and we also focus of course on victims of crime. It is unfortunate that, out of all of the evidence today, no-one has acknowledged the sad, tragic death of Mrs White, the grandmother in Brisbane, just the other day—stabbed to death by a youth offender on bail. That offence was committed in front of her six-year-old granddaughter. This is the victim of crime story. The most horrific offence that could occur is of course the loss of life; therefore, we would support absolutely the government having at least \$150,000 in compensation for those who lose a family member. It needs to be delivered within a two-week period. Certainly, at least a significant amount of that money needs to be provided immediately to the family when they are trauma engaged, when they are completely overwhelmed—not two years down the track as you go through the process of applying for victim's assistance. We want \$150,000. There has been some discussion around the \$120,000 threshold—and then there are different categories that have been considered. The \$150,000 needs to be the top threshold.

CHAIR: With the new Victims' Commissioner and also the Independent Ministerial Advisory Council, you have sent through submissions both to the new commissioner and also—

Mr McLeod: As a regional organisation, we have been working with Ben Cannon and with the victims of crime initiative there. I was at the original protest and we are part of that process.

CHAIR: So they had representatives sitting on that, yes?

Mr McLeod: We are at a distance but we are—

CHAIR: I just wanted to make sure that the connection was there.

Mr McLeod: I just thought that I would bring that up. The reason I wanted to bring it up here specifically is because of the tolerance system that is applied within the system. The governance structures that we see in corporations and of course in government these days are agency focused, evidence-based—all these terminologies. We do not really have public safety as an absolute. Public safety is not really what the public think is public safety and what you probably understand to be public safety. It is actually a tolerance limit basically that you determine based on your appropriations in the legislation and policy. Of course, Voice for Victims has suggested that a zero-tolerance policy needs to be in place for use. Working in the Public Service for 22 years, I know that risk and risk management is the fundamental definition of what is safe or unsafe because of the appetite that you determine. This concept of safety in the community has actually been a pervasive negative by and large, because it is completely disabling people to think for themselves.

I understand why that is, but what needs to be dealt with here is that zero-tolerance framework—and I agree with Paul Taylor's position absolutely and am very grateful that he is here. Detention as a last resort, for example, needs to be removed. We need to make sure that within the law, at least from a human rights point of view, the authorities have all of the instruments to ensure that community safety is the No. 1 priority. It should not just be a priority that changes up and down the priority list; it needs to be absolute just as justice is absolute and freedom is absolute. Human rights should be absolute. We know that that is not the case because we have a parliament that can decide what you want to do. By and large, we very much support zero tolerance as a principle. It is for that reason, speaking into the risk management bean counter industry as what the tolerances might be from your point of view. That is very important. I am conscious of time and I do not want to waste your time as there may be other speakers—

CHAIR: Yes, we still have two to go and I am sure committee members would like to ask questions.

Mr McLeod: I will broadly make this point in regards to the recent developments within the youth justice framework and particularly the community corrections framework. In terms of this public safety idea I mentioned just a second ago regarding tolerance, public safety is actually a disabling term. It is disempowering. In terms of the entire apparatus of government, by and large—and I understand that it used to be under the corrections commissioner's portfolio—public safety was actually part of corrections. It seems quite bizarre to me that we have a priority to protect the prisoner as a mechanism of protecting the public. It does not make sense for that framework that we now see in the multiagency cooperation panel framework, which I understand is necessary because the police particularly need some cooperation and help to do their work, to be embedding another agency and corporate model that hides this real public safety initiative with a tolerance framework we see based around risk appetite. It is problematic for the community to be able to be empowered to solve our problems ourselves.

To conclude on that point, I refer to what a lot of the speakers we have heard today have said, particularly the DIYDG crew—and Shane talked about it—that relationships, for example, are so critical. Trust in community is so critical. If you adopt a philosophy based around a corporate model such as that from which risk management is at the heart, you have to be able to intensify the sensitivities as part of your analysis first. In terms of sensitivities and context—and I hear Aaron talking about how context and framing information is great for us to understand—that system is disabling humanity. It is disabling relationships and trust in the community. Please, if you could, try and refer not to safety related matters you see as being an absolute for the public to think it is just a tagline. We need to design some of this soft stuff more so into the boardrooms and the corporate philosophies of our systems, particularly where the government is building private-public relationships or partnerships. Government has become too corporatised and too distant. Bureaucratic dissidence is an absolute problem in community. We would like you to be empathetic to that, if you do not mind. I see it on a regular basis and I see the damage that is going on.

The last thing I will say—and I will use an analogy here and do not want to offend anybody—is that what we had with the fundamental suffering and pain that occurred to our Indigenous brothers and sisters over many years occurred because colonisation was so damaging. The technology that enabled that to occur was of course navigation—Cook, Bligh et cetera—but what is going on today is a similar form of stolen generation in our community because of a form of imperialism driven by social media and big technology. We need to make sure that that has to be the sensitivity factor that you

build into your analysis from a risk point of view. From the survey that we have done—and there are 2,100 there but there are 409 people with whom we actually conducted analysis and for whom there is a report that was tabled at a previous committee meeting—we know that there is so much trauma going on in the community that 30 per cent of people do not even call the police. We have an underclass of people in our community who are living in another generation of poverty because the system is not sensitive enough to understand trust and relationships; instead, you put risk first and safety first.

CHAIR: Aaron, I am really mindful of the time.

Mr McLeod: Thank you very much.

Mr McDONALD: We have heard a lot that if there is support in the community or in the family then those kids have a lot better opportunities. We just heard Paul talk about having programs back in the community and what have you. Do you have any experience or any examples of where that sort of support has been able to turn kids around?

Mr McLeod: Certainly, in my own case as a young 14- or 15-year-old kid playing up, my family were very supportive. I am one of six in a family and I had a stable mum and dad. I am very fortunate. We advocate, of course, that mums and dads stay in the home as often as possible and that they should be supported by and large to stay together as a united force to look after their children. I was blessed to have parents who did that for me when I went off the rails. One day I tried to steal a tinny down here at the Marlin Marina jetty—it was quite unsuccessful—with a couple of mates. The owner of the boat found out about it and clobbered us over the head with the oar.

Mr McDONALD: Consequences for action!

Mr McLeod: That is a personal story. What we are doing at CJAG—and we have wonderful volunteers including social workers, counsellors and people who really are interested in trying to support parents and families—is developing two programs at the moment. It is called the Before we were Parents program—that is an intensive parenting program. We are getting that done voluntarily—and it is a bit of a slow road—but it is in demand because we are slowly talking about that now. We have a demand from industry and from government to put that on the table, to apply for grants and so on. We would prefer not to do that. In that program the PPP, for example, is defined. That is obviously the most formidable program that is available for parents. I understand that that has already been defined as an intervention within the framework anyway. This is really engaging with trusted individuals such as we see here in our Indigenous communities particularly, because that is where the highest need is, and really having them as trusted persons to be able to make sure that that relationship is started. Then we can simply be involved as a voluntary organisation with those professional counsellors and social workers to support parents with this particular program that we are seeking to build now. We are completely community based. We are not interested in politics actually, to tell you the truth, but that is the way we function. To answer that question, we are working on that.

Ms BUSH: Thanks Aaron, lovely to see you again. We see you up here whenever we visit Cairns. It is fantastic to have your support. Thanks for making the effort and staying all day. I love to hear you talk about strengthening the victims sector. As you know, that is something very close to my heart, so we are talking off the same page. You have established a Facebook group that provides support and information to all types of victims—over 20,000 people—concerning personal and property crime. This is a bit of a two-part question. First, given that role, are you familiar with the Charter of Victims' Rights which was developed by victims and which obligates government and non-government agencies to work within a framework that gives fair and dignified treatment to victims?

Mr McLeod: Yes.

Ms BUSH: Would you have a problem with a recommendation from this committee that obligates social media pages specifically set up to offer support to victims also having obligations to work within that charter so that victims have a consistent, fair and dignified experience and that the whole sector is working in a informed, cohesive way.

Mr McLeod: I think so. I think it is worthwhile exploring that idea, and there needs to be something done. The thing that came to mind as I was thinking about this a bit earlier is that I would really encourage the Attorney-General of Queensland to follow the attorneys-general of the United States who have taken a lawsuit against Meta because of the destruction they have caused to youth and to children. There is an absolute case there at the moment for Queensland to try and jump on the back of that, and that will really put Meta and these other social media companies on notice to be

able to deal with that issue in a practical, real way. It is a self-regulation then, is it not, for them to deal with it? If you do it through human rights and change the charter, it will probably end up similar to what we are finding from the victims of crime who are going through Queensland police. We love Queensland police, but they are under so much resourcing pressure and there are so many challenges for officers in charge in particular in Cairns because of the demand for their services that they just do not have the time to deal with victims. They refer you off to someone.

The Charter of Victims' Rights is not even considered appropriately by frontline police when it really is supposed to matter. That is not being derogatory to police, but I think there is a systemic problem. Again, going too large and being too corporate is really problematic. I think Queensland police are struggling in that space to really respect victims and the dignity of victims and their right to know just what is going on. That is a big issue within the victim community. Money is one thing, but the other thing is that they just get locked out of information. They cannot heal and they cannot recover because the information and data is protected within different silos of government. In the housing element, what is going on? They are actually being evicted from houses, Jonty. They are being evicted from houses, even though they are the victim of crime, because it is safe for the victim to be moved into an emergency housing situation.

Ms BUSH: Yes, I am aware of that.

Mr McLeod: But the offender who is next door, also in housing, retains their housing. The victim gets displaced.

Ms BUSH: That is great. Thank you. I appreciate that.

CHAIR: We are running out of time. Thank you so much for everything you do. Good job.

CONTI, Ms Perri, Private capacity

CHAIR: I now invite Perri Conti. I think you have seen how—

Ms Conti: Yes, I am kind of different to what others have been talking about off and on today. I have done this before. Emma Lovell, Angus Beaumont, Robert Brown, Scott Cabrie, Jennifer Board, our latest victim Vyleen White, and many more—these people are victims of a broken justice system. How has it come to this? We keep hearing we have the toughest laws in the country, but I beg to differ. Queensland has the highest youth repeat offender rate of any other state or territory in the nation. More than 60 per cent of youth offenders went on to reoffend upon release. Alarming, 93 per cent of 10- to 17-year-olds released from Queensland youth detention centres committed other offences in as little as four days, not 12 months, as reported. We have more than 472 repeat offenders. In 2019-2020, repeat offenders were at 58.6 per cent. Now in 2024, we are at 90 per cent, but the government insists that crime is on the decline. Some 52,742 kids between the ages of 10 and 17 are doing crime, the highest rate in 10 years.

We are being kept hostage by young, out-of-control kids. Who is to blame for this? We all are—parents, the government, Child Safety and all the stakeholders. Egos and profits are prioritised over care. The stakeholders gladly take the free government money with no accountability for KPIs and outcomes.

Let's define 'last resort'. What is it? The non-offending children have rights as well. They have the right to feel safe in their homes. Why don't we? They have the right not to have their homes violated, the right to expect justice when this happens, and the right to innocence and a sense of safety. They cannot even ride their bike or scooter without them being bashed and their bike or scooter taken. There are thousands of child victims of this youth crime epidemic who have seen their families traumatised and have gone on to discover the court and the government did not care about them or their trauma. The offenders were not subject to any form of real punishment.

The government brought in breach of bail after pressure from the public. Breach of bail does not exist as kids are still committing breach after breach. We would suggest that when a young person is facing court for a violent offence, having breached bail for a previous violent offence, there is palpable lack of remorse there and young children cannot be trusted in the community. The community is entitled to expect protection. When we assess someone as an unacceptable risk of harming others, we have reached the last resort. When do we reach the last resort?

What is 'gold star intervention' that we keep hearing from the LNP? Isn't early intervention helping your child reach important milestones, building their confidence in their own abilities and teaching them the skills they need to thrive both at home and in school? We give children and their families the skills, support and confidence they need to face development challenges and thrive. What do we do with kids who are doing crime now? Is it too late for early intervention for them? That's right; we put them in the too-hard basket and keep locking them up.

We all know children are a product of their parents. We are a product of our upbringing. For many of us, this means we develop values, beliefs, ethics, the importance of work and money management from our parents. What do we do if a child does not have this? If we go back in time, there are many kids who are the product of the \$5,000 baby bonus generation. How much does it really cost to raise a child? On average, it costs \$12,000 per year. When you have underprivileged, uneducated families, \$5,000 is a lot of money. No thought goes to the cost of bringing up a child.

Why are these kids committing crime? What drives them and who is to blame? The answers to these questions are varied and complex. It is not okay to believe that it is too hard and we cannot change the situation. Many of these young people are escaping trauma and a dysfunctional home environment as they repeatedly witness domestic violence, family violence and are subject to abuse themselves. We all know this happens.

Residential care is another thorn in my side. These kids are set up to fail. What happens in resi-care houses? They are kicked out between 9 am and 4 pm. We are talking about kids as young as 10 years old. They are given no lunch which leads to them stealing food from shops. The kids do not have access to medical or dental services, nor mental health assessments. The kids are not made to go to school or TAFE or get an education. They steal from the local shops. They go out at night and break and enter and steal cars. There is a huge chroming problem, as well as kids as young as 11 using ice. These kids are being schooled in crime and destroying rental properties with the cost to the taxpayers. Separation of siblings creates huge problems. Mismatched kids and carers creates boredom and crime. There are cases of kids leaving resi-care houses to stay with responsible adults

that they feel safe with, but Child Safety do not allow them to do this as it is considered to be a breach of their conditions and they can be removed and sent to the detention centre. Where is the logic in that? If the child is happy and is staying out of trouble because they are having a caring, responsible adult in their lives, I do not see why Child Safety feel the need to remove them. This is a never-ending cycle. We need a better system for these kids. We need to increase foster care payments. We need foster care, not resi-care.

Nepotism in Child Safety and Youth Justice is rampant and needs a complete overhaul. There needs to be an overhaul of the Youth Justice Act which was written over 30 years ago and is out of date. Society has changed dramatically. We already have a long list of offences; we do not need to add to them. They are just trying to make it more complex when it just needs to be simple.

To quote the words of Minister Leanne Linard, 'No child is to go without food.' This is what she told me. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The department of child safety are not issuing food vouchers as they claim. We have children stealing food from supermarkets because they are hungry. I cannot understand that in today's society we have children not being able to access food. Why are these vouchers not being issued when the kids continue to go hungry? I have witnessed this. I have been to Child Safety to get these food vouchers.

Almost every day we see the same children before the courts. One needs to start asking the hard questions why. We have so many organisations in Cairns offering support for these young juveniles, but the methods being used for these services are failing the children. When we have a child released from Cleveland and a youth worker assigned to the child to supervise them for however many supervised hours and they charge out—

Mr McDONALD: Seventy-two.

Ms Conti: Well, I know a case where we got two hours and it was charged out at \$350 an hour; that is a fact. Kids are being released from detention and arriving at Cairns airport, but are not being picked up. The point is we are wasting so much money without any good results. The only way to move forward is to have an open public inquiry into child services or we will never be able to solve this pandemic and go back to the way our society used to be.

In my opinion, the hundreds of millions of dollars of funding have been completely wasted. We have lined the pockets of NGOs, CEOs and resi-care providers. They have inflicted misery upon the kids and the tens of thousands of Cairns residents who are the victims of the crime wave. I have evidence of successful programs that receive little funding or have been defunded. It is so frustrating when we see programs in place that have turned these kids around. Can you explain why the department is hell-bent on destroying successful outcomes? Why can children not be children anymore? Why are they losing their innocence at the hands of the people who are supposed to nurture them and guide them through life? We have grown criminal adults in our community that are using children for their own financial gain, and it is the children that are ending up before the courts. I am not saying this is happening to all kids, but it is to the most vulnerable.

I would like to read out to you the story of one of my boys. I take the hard kids that nobody wants, and I try to help them. I can say his name now because he has just turned 18. Rocky's story: a teen offender, born into the care of the state, has given a heartbreaking insight into a statewide youth crime crisis admitting he does not care whether he lives or dies. A teen offender born into the care of the state and first locked up at the age of 10 claims to have stolen more than 300 cars in a revealing heartbreaking, firsthand insight into the citywide youth crime wave. Born to a neglectful mother and an incarcerated father and being subjected to horrific domestic violence, drug use, rampant alcohol abuse spurred state intervention. However, having the government as a guardian has proven to be a double-edged sword. The 17-year-old—he is 18 now—Torres Strait Islander teen was made a ward of the state from an early age. Following a seven-year tour of Queensland's youth correctional facilities, he is now back in Cairns, housed within the residential care system, placed in a resi home at a property with two girls aged 12. After being released from Cleveland youth detention centre, he said he dumped his bag there on the first night and rarely returned. He said youth workers occasionally tried to track him down, but he was largely left to roam the streets.

The scars on his face and the track marks on his arm tell a story of abuse, hardship and disadvantage in a young life he describes as being a war. The subject of Child Safety orders since birth, the ice-ravaged 17-year-old never learnt to read or write.

Rocky's first contact with the juvenile justice system was at the age of 10. When hungry he was forced to steal from shops just to survive. Graduating from shoplifting to car theft, he had trouble clearly stating why he stole so many vehicles, but gave a nod to material gain and the thrill of the chase. In the past seven years, he has been locked up in Brisbane and Townsville youth detention centres 15 times. He states—

You get used to it. Cleveland helps me a lot in some ways. You sit back, reflect about what you did and why you did it and think about not doing it again. I didn't grow up with a dad. I didn't grow up with discipline. My mum belted me, but it was not much of a discipline. But if my dad was in my life, I would have been stricter.

He claimed it was common to be locked down 22 hours a day for extended periods. It was normal for phone calls and outside visits to be cancelled in a practice known as 'night mode. That happened to me four weeks ago when I made an appointment to see one of these boys in Townsville detention centre and I was flagged by Child Safety. So imagine how he feels. All that hard work I did gaining his confidence and trying to help him, of the 70 repeat offenders that nobody wants to help. Imagine how he feels now; that I did not care?

Mr McDONALD: Which is not true.

Ms Conti: He said he felt trapped in a cycle and he had limited power to get free from crime, but he did indicate ties with mates on the street needed to be severed to make any progress towards life away from crime. You know Rocky's story. Forty-one days ago Rocky ended up in the big house, as we call it, Lotus. He is 18 years old.

A former child safety regional practice leader said that given Rocky had been in the care of government departments since birth, the state had to shoulder some responsibility for the boy's life of crime and immeasurable harm inflicted on the Cairns community. Child Safety is a terrible parent and often they are more neglectful than their birth parents. How do we fix this? This is what we are asking for: rural educational learning centres where we have schooling, vocational training, preparation for employment based on the Missouri program with a 12-month minimum stay, drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre for kids, mental health assessments, medical checks, hearing and eye tests, court appointed guardians, safe places for all kids to live while at school, maybe boarding schools attached to public schools, a safe place for young working kids to live and feel safe without their belongings being constantly stolen, in-home family support programs, mentoring in schools one-on-one and a better foster care system so we can abolish residential care houses. We need a classroom where these kids can get caught up in school and then integrated into mainstream classes.

I asked the kids, 'What do you want?', and they said they want a safe place where their parents cannot visit. They want to go to school. They want to have a good life and contribute to society. I do not think that is too much to ask. I am aware that 10 per cent of these kids will go on to be lifelong criminals. Remote will never work as it is not cost effective. We only have to look at Cleveland Youth Detention Centre; they cannot get staff, so how the hell are we going to get them to go remote?

Since I last stood before some of you, I have set up a not-for-profit called Changing Young Lives Foundation. I opened a share house for young working kids living on the streets and I am in the process of setting up a 24/7 youth hub, all without government funding, because I am passionate about trying to help these kids out of a life of crime. No-one can deny that our community has been affected by youth crime, and I have personally been a victim. There is no single solution that will address this problem and keep our community safe, but there is one way we can try to help. Since I became a victim of crime I have engaged with members of parliament, police, community members and other victims. I have spoken with offenders. I will not make excuses for offenders, but the fact is that many of them have been let down. Without doubt some offenders commit crime for the status of a thrill or just because they can. There is a group of offenders who become involved in crime because of their situation. The longer term solution is changes to the law and how the services that are meant to support these people operate, but we also need action in the short term.

When I am speaking with offenders I know there is a group who genuinely want to get better. Instead of ignoring the chance to make our community safer, I am taking action in setting up a 24/7 youth hub for these kids. First and foremost, all kids will be mentally assessed so we know their weaknesses and their strengths. Tradespersons have already expressed an interest in helping us and they will be passing on their skills and work ethics to these young people we will work with. We will teach them to cook. We will deliver meals to the homeless so they get the feeling of self-pride knowing that they did something good. We will teach them how to set budgets and other skills that you and I take for granted that will help them into independent living. By teaching these young people basic skills and using services of employment agencies, we aim to get them into the workplace. Education is vital. We have some kids who cannot read or write, so we will focus on their education. We will have educational programs. We approached the council—

CHAIR: My apologies. I am wondering—

Ms Conti: I am almost finished.

CHAIR: Sorry. I did not mean to interrupt. I know some will be concerned about how far we are running over time.

Mr McDONALD: We want to hear your story.

Ms Conti: We want to approach council to give us abandoned cars so these kids can do up these cars, we get them roadworthy and then they present them to a person who had their car stolen and was not insured. Then they can see what they did and how it impacted that person's life. We know that our programs will not be attractive to some offenders who commit crime for the status or the thrill, but we know we can make a difference.

In order to make our program a reality, I have asked community for their support. Other business owners have offered good services and their time as mentors. Every little bit helps. We know we cannot completely solve the crime issue that is affecting our community, but we also know that our program will make a difference. We are not saying that we will perform miracles, but with help from others, we hope we can make a difference.

CHAIR: Can I say thank you. Again—and I think I said it earlier—it takes a village, but it takes those within the village to actually—

Ms Conti: But you have to have the passion. If you do not have the passion you are wasting your time.

CHAIR: That is right. If any of us have any questions can we possibly email them through to you?

Ms Conti: Yes.

CHAIR: I am mindful that we have run so far over time. I am sure people have places to be.

Ms Conti: I will leave these for you.

CHAIR: Yes, if you could just table that, that would be wonderful. This now concludes this public hearing. I want to send thanks to everyone who has participated today and also those who have sat and just listened. I think it has just been brilliant as always. We have heard from so many people.

I encourage anyone who has not done a submission to please do so. If you want to share not only your perspective from what you have heard but also your own experiences with the committee, please do so via a written submission. That is on the committee's website. Submissions are currently open until 1 March. If there are any concerns or difficulties just ring.

I want to say thank you to our Hansard reporter Bonnie and also to our secretariat who have very long days and sometimes have the difficulties of technology to deal with and also the difficulties they encounter with us.

A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I do not believe we had any questions on notice. I wish everyone well for the balance of 2024. As a committee, we hope to have our interim report out by the end of March. Once that is out, it will be on the website. Thank you so much, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 5.55 pm.