



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 TO EXAMINE ONGOING REFORMS TO THE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM AND SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Friday, 9 February 2024

Mount Isa

FRIDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2024

The committee met at 10.34 am.

CHAIR: I now 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 share. I would like to acknowledge the Kalkadoon people, whose land is where we are meeting right now.

With me here today are: Jonty Bush MP, member for Cooper and deputy chair; Aaron Harper MP, member for Thuringowa; Laura Gerber MP, member for Currumbin; Jim McDonald MP, member for Lockyer; Dan Purdie MP, member for Ninderry; and Adrian Tantari MP, member for Hervey Bay. I would also like to acknowledge the member for Traeger, Robbie Katter MP—he is not here yet but he will be—who will appear today as a witness.

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

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I 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 direction 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 also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I now ask everyone to please turn off their mobile phones or to put them on silent mode.

Before I welcome our first witnesses, I remind everyone that the committee has reopened submissions via the committee's webpage. If you have any difficulties, please reach out to the secretariat during the course of the day.

HANKIN, Ms Dolly, DV Officer and Local Elder, North West Queensland Indigenous Catholic Social Services

KHAN, Mr Faisal, Chief Executive Officer, North West Queensland Indigenous Catholic Social Services

LOWCOCK, Father Mick, Chair, North West Queensland Indigenous Catholic Social Services

McNAMARA, Ms Joelene, Youth Hub Coordinator, North West Queensland Indigenous Catholic Social Services

CHAIR: Welcome to you all. I invite you to make an opening statement, after which committee members would like to ask some questions.

Father Lowcock: Thank you very much, and thanks for coming to Mount Isa. I am sure that everyone here appreciates the fact that we have a voice. I would also like to, as you have done, acknowledge the Kalkadoon people on the land on which we gather today. We have some points under the seven priority areas. In terms of the 10-year strategy, our first thought is that a 10-year strategy is a long time when you look at what has happened with COVID and with social media change. Our submission is that it should be revised every three to five years. It should at least be built into the strategy that it needs to be revised every three to five years. There are immediate issues that we face and there are long-term issues that we face. The immediate issues, of course, are what people experience day-to-day. In the long-term it is about how we deal with families, for example? An example of a long-term issue is the Costello baby bonus, which some people say was a contributing factor to what we have today—15 years ago, why people were given \$6,000 or whatever it was at the time and what people have done with that and then the results of that.

The Australian Institute of Criminology has a report from the Northern Territory and Western Australia about through-care of Indigenous people in prison. In my mind, the whole question of through-care and Indigenous people in prison needs a whole lot of thought. I will come to some of those issues later. Victoria, as you probably know, has a 10-year plan. I presume the committee has looked at some of those matters from other states.

The second priority area is how to instigate earlier assessment, intervention and prevention strategies that support children and their families to access health, education, housing and other services. An example is a kid not going to school. We have a family who had not sent their children for a long time. It is generational. There are grandchildren in the house not going to school. Last year I wrote to the Minister for Housing and sent a copy of that to the Minister for Education. I said, 'Is it possible for you to transfer the people from one house to another house closer to a school to show the importance of sending children to school?' Housing inform me that they cannot do anything. Is it possible to do something in terms of trying to get the value to family that education is important? It seems to me that Housing and Education need to be working together to say, 'What can we do for families to raise that issue and to make it more viable?'

As you probably saw, two days ago there was an announcement regarding gambling issues. Obviously, Mount Isa tops the state. One of the prime examples I can give the committee is that everywhere gambling is open until 4 am. Because Centrelink money comes in between 1 am and 2 am, some children will be outside a pub waiting to get the card to get some money out while their parents are gambling. If we could reduce gambling to at least midnight—there might be a by-product for government, but certainly for the community there would be better services offered to us.

The admission by families that they are a failure causes shame and pushes families further down, when people are already in poverty. If you get a house from Housing, technically all you get is a stove. What are you going to put in that house when you get it? If you are on Centrelink, there is not much chance. Your first priority may well be a TV, because that is going to entertain you or the family. Then you maybe get a fridge and some beds. Then cleaning gear and all those things become a lower priority. In poverty, we need to explore all of that as a source of what is happening in terms of people's lives and the little that they have available to them.

We run a men's group and a women's group in connection with Murri Court. At the men's group one night a fellow said, 'I became a father this week.' Everyone gave him a clap, and then he said, 'What does a father do? I've never had a man live in the house.' We are dealing with a lot of issues that are generational and there is not a simple way of saying, 'What can we do?' I will go to some of these other points later.

The third priority area is reimagining youth justice infrastructure—case management by those involved, with more information available for people working with each person. I will give an example. A couple of years ago a magistrate ordered a mental health assessment of a young fellow in youth court. I asked the courthouse whether he could get a copy. I asked ATSILS and I asked Youth Justice. None of us could get a copy of it. I said, 'I'm going to go down, because I know it is probably going to be proven that he is not capable of entering a plea.' I went down and his carer said to me, 'Come over here, Father Mick.' I said, 'What's up?' She said, 'We're ashamed of what these boys are doing, but that lady at the hospital has written something about my boy and I can't even get a copy of it.' To me, it is about the sharing of information. I do not need to know the details of mental health, but I need to know whether we are dealing with FASD, what spectrum they are on and what are some of the ways, because they require a different approach. To some people you do not ask the question straight-out; you say, 'Tonight I'd like to talk about this.' Classrooms today are geared to offer different

sorts of solutions for the way people are in the classroom. To me, the sharing of information between agencies becomes vitally important. I am not talking about all of the information. Some of that will come a bit later, too.

In terms of children and young people's engagement with positive programs, particularly for those held on remand or released, it is that same question of medication and health issues. If there is no sharing of significant information, it is very difficult to deal with families and it is very difficult to deal with the individual themselves. I think the whole strategy needs to build into it the way in which we overcome the Privacy Act to enable us to get information to those involved in working with each individual person.

A couple of years ago I advocated with the state government to give people a number from birth. People wanted to give them a number when they started school. I said, 'No, it needs to be from birth,' because from nought to four we do all this assessment—for example, we run a child and family centre—and we have all of this information, but when they start kindy a new lot of assessment starts. Then when they start prep there is another lot of assessment that starts. By the time these people are in the system—say they are in grade 4 or 5 and they are playing up—then there is another lot of assessment done. There is no way in which information is transferred from one assessment to the other, so people are assessed out and they are sick of it. They know how to play the game. They know how to respond to what is being asked of them. I know that being given a number is an issue and there are privacy concerns, but I think we need to look at it from the point of view of passing on information.

It costs half a million dollars, it says, to keep a child in youth detention. If that is the fact then we are wasting our time having youth detention, because we are just cycling them through. It is the same with jail. I will give an example. Since domestic violence and strangulation have become an offence, there are hundreds of men from Mount Isa in jails. It used to be Stuart, then it was Lotus Glen and then it was Capricornia. Now we have people in the south-east corner. When you are dealing with fatherless families, that is another whole thing. I have asked Bob Gee from Youth Justice if they can give some thought to these kids who are playing up and look at their situation with regard to fatherless families. If you google 'fatherless families'—there is plenty of information there—it tells you that the same thing will be reproduced. Children on remand and being released are going back to a situation that will probably just cause the whole situation to reoccur. Some families we are working with say that they struggle because if the child plays up they go to a resi because they can do what they like and there are no times working with families. Did you want to comment?

Ms McNamara: We have a crisis accommodation called 'bed of rest'. It is an overnight facility where we have beds for children who are in crisis and it is unsafe for them to return home. What we have found is that lately a lot of young people, particularly females, who are wanting to wander the streets for their own purposes—not wanting to go home, not wanting to follow the rules and so on—are accessing our bed of rest because they have had a fight with mum because mum has said, 'No, you are coming home at 10 o'clock. That is your curfew.' Then we have issues with young people wanting to access our service overnight. We are also having issues with parents coming to us saying, 'You are rewarding our child by giving them a bed for the night because they don't want to follow our rules at home.'

A lot of those young people are hanging around with the other young people within the child safety service, the residence. It is the same pattern of behaviour with those kids. They are hoping that by doing these things eventually they can—it is sad to say—end up in the child safety system, in a resi where they can just do whatever they want and there are no rules. We have found that with two young people in particular in the last four months. We have been trying to divert them back to home. That is an example of not using the facility for the correct purpose.

Father Lowcock: In terms of transition back into the community, do you want to talk about the education program linking with the detention centre?

Ms McNamara: In terms of bringing young people back into the community, I think we need to start working with the families as soon as that young person goes into detention. I know that a lot of work happens a month or so before they come out of detention, but I think it really needs to start at the beginning with the family that is still at home.

Another thing Father Mick mentioned was the lack of communication. We have young people who come from Cleveland to use our bed of rest while they are waiting for flights to go to community. We get no information. We do not even talk to Cleveland; all of our referrals come through Youth Justice. We have no information. We do not know if they have medical conditions. We have to really quiz to see if there are any alerts or anything that we need to be aware of.

It is hard for those young people coming out and transitioning back into community, because they are coming back into a situation they left six months earlier. They walk back in the door and everything is still the same. The family then struggles, because they have had a bit of a reprieve from this young person who may have been difficult. They have been away for six months, but the family has not had any support whilst that young person has been away to improve the situation, to attend counselling or to attend family counselling with that young person via Zoom whilst they are in detention. I think it is important to think not only about the young people we are dealing with but also about the family as a whole. There is no point in sending a young person to detention: they go away, they do whatever they do and they come back into the community, and everything is still the same as when they left. Young people have said, 'I would rather just go back'—and that is what happens.

Father Lowcock: There is a need for gradual entry. Norway or Sweden has a gradual entry. It is the same with the adults. I would love to have the men coming out of jail a month beforehand—organise their mental health plan, organise their Centrelink and organise where they are going to stay. By way of example, one fellow went back to jail at Christmastime because he gave his brother presents to give to his previous partner for the kids. That is indirect contact, so it is a breach of the DV act. There are all of these things which need to be explained in great detail. They need to ask before they do anything. Do you know what I am trying to say?

The whole situation is so complex, and we are dealing with people who are pretty basic. I will give you an example. We use the old traffic light system—red, yellow and green—to try to teach them what feelings are about. A fellow came one day and said, 'I've got feelings. Father Mick.' I said, 'Fantastic. What is it?' He said, 'I feel suicidal.' I said, 'That's even greater, because you've named it and you've shared it. That's what feelings are all about.' Getting people, in that individual way, to acknowledge and start to understand what is happening inside them is a real issue. While programs might be offered at this level, basically we are dealing with people at a very different level.

Two things have happened recently. To apply for a DV program we had to have a psychologist as part of the program. I personally think that is a waste of time. We have a psychologist with the company, but we do not have to have psychology with a program. The other one will come back to me.

The fifth point was about the current operation of the Youth Justice Act sentencing principles. We have just lost a fantastic magistrate. He is a Northern Irishman. He would do welcome to country and then he would also say, 'I come from Northern Ireland. I, too, have had my culture and my language taken away by the British government. I, too, come from a people who are known for alcoholism. I, too, come from a people who are known for drug addiction. I understand a little about what you are going through.' It was a great introduction. Then in Murri Court when he was sentencing a guy one day he said, 'Son, do you realise that the night you and your wife were in a domestic is the night your child stole a car?' Trying to get these connections between what is happening in family and what is happening in youth is really important. It is really hard when you are dealing with police, Youth Justice and a number of other agencies to get all of these connections together.

It is said that 50 men a year murder 50 men in Queensland. It is said that 24 women a year are murdered by men in Queensland. What that says to me is that twice as many men than women are murdered by men. What it says to me is that we have a problem with anger in men. While all of the programs for domestic violence are for families and women, nothing much is really done for the whole question of men. Men have lost their identity in society; men have lost so much of their whole role. We should be dealing with the basic problem. You go to court: 'You are guilty and you are free. You are 100 per cent guilty'—even though it might be 80 per cent or 60 per cent—'so you have to do the programs, but you do not have to do anything.' It is really hard, when you are dealing with those situations in families, to get people to try and look at how you change your life.

We are dealing with a lot of complex issues about how you understand what is going on in the community. The magistrate said, 'What we need for these young people is a connection.' You can look at some of his directions, which he has published. What people need is a connection in life. They need at least one person they can make a connection with. He said, 'That's the problem. They are going from agency to agency. There is no connection, and in the end we end up with a whole lot of issues.' I agree with him. There is a sense in which you have to ask how you make a connection with some of these people, because someone is doing the bail program, someone is doing another program and someone is doing something else, and in the end there is no real coordination amongst it.

Ms Hankin: We find it very difficult because there is no sharing of information between the service providers and we cannot work together to reach that common goal.

CHAIR: Father Mick, I realise that you have made a submission, but I also realise that we are running out of time to give the committee an opportunity to ask you some questions. Would you be able to provide what you are reading from to the committee?

Father Lowcock: Sure.

CHAIR: Is there anything else before we start some questions, because I know that everyone is eager?

Father Lowcock: There are two other things. In terms of youth, there is funding by the department of communities, the department of youth justice and the National Indigenous Australians Agency. There does not seem to be a lot of coordination. When I asked Youth Justice about the Communities program, they did not know. One thing is about coordination from the government's point of view. At least now both departments—state and federal—are in the National Indigenous Australians Agency here in Mount Isa, so hopefully there is going to be more coordination. I think restorative justice just takes too long. It is almost six months. By the time we get there, that child has done three or four other things. It is a cumbersome process. Unless it is done immediately, to me it is a waste of time.

You are probably familiar with the Charter of Victims' Rights. That means that police should be contacting victims, but that rarely happens. It is worse now because we also have Policelink, so you have to go by either email or phone and you cannot talk to anyone locally. By the time it all comes through, it is all over. I had a fellow go to jail for six months and then plead not guilty and they dismissed the charges. I was trying to say to the police, 'If you went straightaway, this would not have happened.' There is no way in which you can access police anymore. I know that it is a state system and I know that we are not going to change it, but I want it reported here that this is the issue. If there is street fighting, family disputes—all sorts of things—you have to put it in an email. Who has email half the time in a lot of these families in poverty that we are dealing with?

CHAIR: Thank you, Father Mick.

Mr McDONALD: Thanks, Father Mick and team, for being here. We really appreciate it. Thank you for the work you do for the community. You mentioned the sharing of information. Have you thought about when that might occur, if we were to make a recommendation? Obviously there are the privacy issues that you mentioned. If Child Safety is caring for a child then the state or Child Safety is like the parent. If I am a parent giving my child to somebody else, I am sharing information. Have you thought about child safety orders or youth justice orders?

Father Lowcock: I can give you an example. We are funded under Youth Justice but a different branch to the Youth Justice in Mount Isa, so Mount Isa does not know what we do. Even within departments it is not simple to share information, if that makes sense. I know what you are saying. I think we used to have a thing called 'community connect', where a lot of the government agencies were together. I think it was a wonderful start to approach this. Then it seemed to have been taken up. It appears to me that now it is all the heads of agencies or departments, so the boss of Education is in Townsville or someone in Health or whatever, and they do it at that level. I am sure they would not know what is happening. They will have some idea of what is happening, but I do not think they know the intricacies of what is happening at the local level. There does not seem to have been any consultation with the local level.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you for your presentation. It was very extensive. In terms of crime increasing, what can be done now? You mentioned it being not 10 years. What do you believe we could do right now for Mount Isa?

Father Lowcock: Produce an alternative to detention. It is a waste of time sending them to jail or to youth detention. It is a waste of money. Half a million dollars a year is a waste of money. If you gave me two million bucks for four kids, I am sure we could do something better than send them to detention.

Ms BUSH: Thanks, Father Mick and team. I know that my colleagues will pick up on your last comment so I will leave it to them to explore with you. Father Mick, it is lovely to see you again. I have been out here several times on different inquiries and for different reasons. You are right: there have been a number of start-stop programs that have looked at that multidisciplinary, multiagency, information-sharing proactive response. What has been the barrier? I am concerned that if we as the committee make that same recommendation, we might be back here in 10 years having this same conversation. How do we create a model that sticks for 10 and 20 years? I know that you have the capacity here in town to do it.

Father Lowcock: I think locally we need to do it. It needs to be driven locally. My personal opinion is that it probably needs to be not just in the hands of government department people; it needs to be more in the hands of the community, with government department people.

Ms BUSH: And opening up the information sharing and reciprocity and some funding. As a committee, we hear that the funding model does not always work. Agencies are having to apply for particular grants and retrofit their applications and service delivery into that, so more flexibility in the funding?

Father Lowcock: There is another example that I thought of before. In terms of release from prison, they have released a tender for all of the prisons or you can apply for one particular prison. We have guys in all of these prisons. This is to help them reintegrate into society. Sometimes we do not get anything, just a phone call from Qantas in Cairns to say, 'This fellow has missed his plane. We're happy to put him on a plane to Brisbane and back to Mount Isa. Would someone meet him?' People know—Brother Marty and people we know and so would Dolly—who to ring. To me, reintegration needs more. Literally, I picked up a young fellow off the plane one day and dropped him at his house. He said, 'I'm not going in there. They're gambling and drinking still.' I said, 'You have to. You can walk back to the hub but under what I understand is my contract you have to be delivered here. Then you can come of your own free will.' The whole reintegration just needs a fresh look. I think it needs a huge reorganisation. I think a lot of it, because they are so far away, needs to happen here.

Mr PURDIE: Thanks for what you do, as Jim said. In relation to Youth Justice, what do the staff do here practically? I know that you said there are different funding models. We are hearing across the board that there are all these gaps in the system, the government departments are not communicating and the police are left to pick up the pieces of all of the departments. What do you find on the ground that Youth Justice actually does?

Father Lowcock: Youth Justice in one sense are very good to deal with.

Mr PURDIE: Why are you getting a call from Qantas to say someone has been released and is flying back from Cleveland and then you get them and drop them home? Why isn't Youth Justice coordinating all of that?

Father Lowcock: Sorry, that was an adult issue. On the other hand, dealing with young people and trying to get information is difficult. Sometimes they do not have it as well, as I understand it.

Mr PURDIE: Do you think a department such as Youth Justice could take more responsibility in an overarching portfolio to make sure the kids' needs are being addressed by all of the departments? Would that be beneficial, as opposed to all these different silos in the community and the police having to pick up the pieces?

Father Lowcock: If a child is coming back, we need to be meeting with Youth Justice and talking with them about the issues and what we are doing together.

Mr PURDIE: And working out a plan.

Father Lowcock: Yes.

Mr HARPER: Thank you, Father Mick, for your passion in this area. We know that you work hard in this community, trying to tackle the situation. You said that you want an alternative to detention. Do you support diversionary type sentencing or putting the kids back into their communities? Right now Cleveland has a mix of kids. It is a melting pot from all over north-west and Far North Queensland, from all communities. Is there the capability? Do you have an idea of where you could potentially contain kids? I do not know if you want to use the word 'detain'. If they are post sentence and are on some kind of a rehab program, could you do something out here that is community-led?

Father Lowcock: I think the community would love to be able to try to design something. It is not necessarily something in Mount Isa itself. For example, Urandangi had a school that was flooded and the pub has gone, so basically there is no-one living in Urandangi. You have a school and a residence there. I have spoken to Education about the possibility of doing something there, as an example, with the existing infrastructure. I know that in a couple of years time that the Lady Loretta Mine will close and there is a lot of infrastructure there that may be able to be used. There are possibilities around. The new magistrate has only been here a month or so, but I know that the previous magistrate would love opportunities to do something rather than just sentence people to Townsville or wherever.

Mr HARPER: I agree.

Mrs GERBER: Thank you, Father Mick, and all of you for the work that you are doing and the support you are providing to this community. I want to ask you about the way Youth Justice does the mapping of children and their needs. I understand that there is an issue with information sharing. We have also heard from organisations in other communities that the process Youth Justice goes through to identify the issues of a young person is not detailed enough and is not sufficient for the organisation to be able to provide that young person with the care and the assessment that they might need to help that young person as well as that young person's family. I am interested in your experience in relation to that. I am happy to elaborate further if you need me to.

Ms McNamara: I would say that is true. We have a pretty simplistic referral form that we request be filled out. That outlines basic needs such as whether they are wanting to get back into education, whether there is DV in the family and those sorts of things. I think a problem is where a case worker at Youth Justice and we need to refer. Let's refer them here. I had a referral come through yesterday but there was absolutely no information so I had to email back and say, 'What do you want us to do with this child? What are we actually doing? Is it education? Do they need help with counselling?' It is those sorts of things. I am not sure they even know sometimes. I have heard also that, even for Youth Justice and kids coming out of detention, there is no communication between what has happened in detention even with Youth Justice, let alone with us, and we are picking up this child and taking them home or doing what we are doing after hours.

Mrs GERBER: The details.

Ms McNamara: The details and, like Father Mick said, the assessments. A lot of kids are assessed while they are in Cleveland. No-one can get that information. Not even Youth Justice can get that information. How do you help a family? How do you help a child when they have been away for six months and they have done whatever they have done? It is like a big state secret. No-one can access that information. It makes it difficult.

Mr TANTARI: Father, when you first started your address you made a quick comment about the 10-year plan and how you believe that that strategy may actually be a little bit too long and maybe we will need a five-year review. In that statement you also talked about social media change. With regard to social media and media itself, do you think that is impacting or creating the environment that we have or some of the environment that we have now? What is your opinion on that?

Father Lowcock: Well and truly. I will give you an example. Two girls are fighting. Someone goes out and takes a photo or a video of the other one's aunty's grave. She sends it to the person she is fighting with and says, 'We're going to dig up your aunty.'

Ms Hankin: Disrespecting the dead. The children these days have no respect at all because of social media. They have adopted a lot from what they see. They copy and follow. How they address each other or hurt one another is to bring up the dead: 'We're going to dig up your aunty or your mum' or whatnot. That goes viral on social media and then the whole community gets very upset and angry. That is where family feuds come in. We are always called to family feuds as mediators to settle and defuse the situation. It does not always work.

Mr TANTARI: So it is inciting the issues?

Father Lowcock: Yes. It is not just between the two; it becomes a community issue. You probably saw last rodeo where one family went and belted up another family's house. Someone from that family then ran over two people and one was killed. The fellow who did that went and hung himself. Of course, I have not mentioned the whole question about the Northern Territory. It is another big issue that we should be talking about. The fellow who was killed was from the Northern Territory. The mother of the fellow who hung himself was from the Northern Territory. Before they can bury him, she has to go over and face the other mother and all these sorts of cultural things have to go on. There is a lot involved in it all. It is not just the simple facts that we hear. What underlies it all is pretty difficult.

CHAIR: I realise that we have run out of time. I want to ask a quick question.

Father Lowcock: Do you want a quick answer!

CHAIR: I am happy for you to take it on notice or maybe, if you prefer, I can write and we can ask some more questions, because you are invaluable to this inquiry and our understanding of some things. In our other hearings and from submissions we have heard about the cycling that is happening with young people going into detention, cycling out and going back in. On the point of transition out, there does need to be a training and education facility for job creation. It really needs to be that longer time so they can develop the rehabilitation needed. The one thing we have heard, though, that can be an issue is staffing, access to supports and the professional services needed including psychiatrists et cetera. Can you give us some insight into Mount Isa and staffing?

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Father Lowcock: I think what you are saying is very true. Mount Isa is full of first-year teachers, first-year police, first-year psychologists, first-year principals, social workers and whatever. After a while, they get a job somewhere else. Partly, what we lack is the experience of people. That is one issue that we face in our community.

I think attracting people here is another issue. Different departments, for example, have different incentives for people. Some departments could probably tell you what works for them. For example, we have been working closely with the ambulance lately. We have had some fairly good success in that whole area. Dolly and I had a meeting the other day with the ambulance people because they are trying to move into that whole area and they have little understanding of the whole cultural issues and so on. To me, it is not just getting people here but getting people fresh who then, by the time they leave, say, three years later, probably have started to understand some of the cultural issues and some of the other issues.

Before Christmas, there were literally 200 people living in the riverbed here, mainly from the Northern Territory. It is that whole question of alcohol laws. Do not think about borders. If you are thinking about a 10-year plan, you should be talking about the Northern Territory and the top of the Kimberley. It should be a whole approach, because that is what we are dealing with. We are not dealing with Queensland; we are dealing with the Northern Territory and sometimes with the Kimberley. When they introduced alcohol laws—

CHAIR: Yes, and the cash card and so on.

Father Lowcock: Yes, all of that. It went back to the local communities to decide. Alice Springs got rid of it. Tennant Creek kept it. Then Alice Springs, of course, had all of the problems that you saw in the media so they have put it back in. People come here. The pokies are open until 4 am. You get off your card. You can buy unlimited grog. You can work it out with Centrelink so you are Monday, you are Tuesday, you are Wednesday, you are Thursday so they have unlimited access to alcohol. There is a lot of issues because we do not work with other states very well. We are really looking after the health issues of all of those people here in Mount Isa and it should not be your government's responsibility; it should be the Northern Territory. If they offend here, send them back and make them serve their sentence in the Northern Territory. Why are we doing it? It is probably against Northern Territory people as well. To me it is like we need a northern Australia approach—if you can talk about that. Certainly I think that your 10-year plan needs to take account of that as well. Sorry, that is off the point.

CHAIR: If we have any further questions, would you mind if we write to you?

Father Lowcock: That would be fine.

Mr Khan: Can I just add something about the unemployment. I think one of the biggest problems is getting a positive blue card. It is one of the biggest hurdles in the community that we need to look at.

CHAIR: We have heard that. Thank you all so much. We really appreciate your time. I do not believe there were any questions taken on notice. Keep up the great work.

KATTER, Mr Robbie, Member for Traeger, Parliament of Queensland

CHAIR: Welcome. I apologise that we are running over, but it is important that everyone gets to ask some questions. I invite you to make your opening statement.

Mr Katter: How much time do we have?

CHAIR: We have half an hour.

Mr Katter: That is good. I do not think timing would be an issue for anyone here—it would only be for you to get back—because you cannot overstate the impact of youth crime and social disruption here. I will talk a bit political at the start, but it does build back into a practical way of going forward. I think part of the problem that we all confront now with addressing these issues has been created from hiding the real problem for the last five or six years. I have been a member of parliament for 12 years. I used to have one or two people through my door complaining about crime or some sort of crime issue, but that slowly built up to become once a week and now it is normalised to the point where people say, 'Well, he can't do anything about it anyway.' I try to express a sense of that anger and frustration in parliament, and I am here today to try to be constructive.

It has now created a political playing field for any government that is there to address the problem. In the past, a softly-softly approach might have been more acceptable to the general public, but whoever is in government and making the decisions now is confronted with this angry public. The problem has ballooned, and I would argue it is exacerbated in an area like this. It is hard enough to attract people to work here. I have a catalogue of terrible stories I could give you, but I will trickle some of them out. One was a dad who drove his daughter out here who was keen to work in rural medicine—and we are trying to get doctors out here—but her car was stolen in the week she was here. His email to me said, 'You won't be seeing us again.' One of my friends had bought a caravan park here. Caravan parks get smashed and it is now on TripAdvisor saying, 'Don't stop in Mount Isa. You'll get your car stolen.' It is hard enough for us here with everything else—we are getting killed with FIFO and the mines. These things are bad in Townsville and Cairns, but it hurts us even more.

Added to that, we have the social problems, as Father Mick addressed. It is not all about the territory, but that does play a role. It is only common sense: if you are going to have alcohol bans there and this is the first bitumen road access to a city that does sell grog, guess what is going to happen? There have been multiple meetings in state parliament about that and addressing this very issue over a protracted period. Unless there is a line in the sand here somewhere—again, I am trying to be constructive but this has been raised before and has been put right in front of the government. That is a big contributor. There is a lot of stuff coming in from the gulf. There were alcohol bans on Mornington Island for about eight years. That is not there now but that contributes.

I go to the hospital transfers, and it does contribute a lot to the social disruption here—people not going back on the plane. There probably is more effort that can be done in that space. The hospitals try to do a good job with the travel and everything, but there are still people who end up at the riverbed who do not catch a plane back to Mornington, Doomadgee or wherever. They end up being pulled back into critical care or something two months later by the ambulance. That all contributes.

There are civil libertarians and the like who are saying that you cannot go too hard on kids, but we have all the people over here who are getting angrier and angrier. I am sure you have heard this a lot over the last few days, but it is pretty hard to keep that compassion when you hear about 80-year-old women being habitually targeted because they are weak. They are having their cash stolen and then dying a year later because of the stress from that. Those stories are not isolated. It is pretty hard to marry those two up into legislation and find the appropriate way to deal with this problem.

I think everyone in this room wants to rehabilitate kids, and we know that Cleveland Bay is not working. You would be a fool to say otherwise. You can argue all day about whether it is an adequate deterrent or not. The fact is that numerous people and police who work in that space say that kids readily tell them that they wanted to go to Cleveland. It may not be all of them but there is definitely a large cohort. They do not see it as a consequence.

I am no child psychologist, but I do not see how you can even get to the starting gate of trying to turn these kids around without offering them a consequence. There are trends like getting more kids at Christmastime so they can get out of the traumas of the home and get somewhere where they get a feed and that sort of thing—smashing windows of cars and the like. The problem is that big now, while there is the kiss-and-cuddle approach and trying to manage every little kid. I think the latest number I heard was that 24 of the high-offender kids are here in town. In that same conversation,

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someone said that that probably equates to about four dedicated youth workers in town per kid but not one of those kids has a 24/7 person watching over them, which is a problem in itself. I am not sure how to fix that. That might have been raised by that same magistrate that Father Mick was referring to before as one of the issues.

Kids do not see consequences, and that is why we have always advocated for an alternative form of sentencing. There have been iterations of it saying, 'Let's just take a batch of kids out into a remote area and try to work with them.' Again, I do not profess to know the system that well and I do not work in it, but I just do not know logistically how you can work anything like that without a mechanism to force them when you have to. Sure, in a lot of cases you might not need that and a magistrate can give them an order and that can work, but I just do not know logistically how it would work if you are trying to get 10 or 20 kids. There have been so many things like this that have collapsed because they are knocking on the door to pick them up, or they cannot find them around town and someone is driving around town eight hours of their shift trying to find people before they even start to attend and everyone drops their bundle.

That takes me to the point of staffing. You can keep throwing money at these problems, but the perpetual problem you will have is that you need to have someone who is embedded in the community who can get past the front gate. I do not know if I would be any good to you there, but you need to be able to get past the front gate of some of these houses with the kids—they need to see you as helping them and you need some buy-in. On that, we have been trying to push a policy of turning that towards sport—so having some of the NGOs and departments where they offer volunteer hours a week volunteering at Rugby League here in town. If you want to touch base with a lot of the kids who are playing up, you can go down to Rugby League every week and help coach. That forces you to engage and become part of the community. A lot of well-meaning people come up from Brisbane and Townsville with their psychology or social work degree, but if they are not engaged or injecting into the community they are going to spend five or 10 years here before they get results. That is always the problem here. It is an itinerant type population so we have workers in all of these areas, which then goes to the blue card issue again. If you try to recruit locals, there are all these barriers—not only blue card but often qualifications. We have knocked back three bills on that in parliament, so good luck fixing that.

Something that is plugged into that also, which is starting to raise its ugly head, is the kinship care. I heard at the LGAQ conference in Gladstone that 70 or 80 per cent of houses in the gulf are ineligible to take the kids although they were in the past. Those kids are in resi care and foster homes in Townsville, Cairns and wherever and are floating around stealing cars. If they have come from broken homes and they are not loved, they are going to have a tendency to play up. I am not making a gross assumption there, but that just makes sense to me. The fact is that we have not fixed up the blue cards for that. There is some movement in that space in the kinship care area. There are a lot of contributors to this. We could see a lot of this happening six or seven years ago, but those things that are contributing to it have not even been addressed yet.

There is a reporting culture throughout the government agencies, even some of the NGOs. For years you would have ministers coming up here and I think in good faith they were saying, 'That's not what I'm hearing, Rob. It's pretty good here. I'd like to talk about the good things we're doing here.' Maybe there are good things, but the reality is the reality. If car thefts are going up and people come screaming into my office every week because they had their windows smashed and have been terrorised by kids, that is the reality. You can tell me all about the good things—and it is good if you are doing good work—but there is still a growing problem. There seems to have been a culture of that for too long. We need to air the dirty laundry to try to fix things. I do not know how you fix that, to be honest, but I think that has played a big role in where we are.

Father Mick spoke about the men feeling disempowered. I think that has played a big part in social disruption. The one I hear all too often now—and no-one wants to hear it or say it—is that parents cannot smack their kids anymore. Smacking is not the panacea of great parenting. It is not that you have to smack your kids, but it is the principle. Parents feel disempowered to discipline their kids. That might not be a reality in the law, but it is a reality in their head and the culture. That is embedded and no talk back is going to help that. They have to feel like if that kid is playing up they can do what they can do to bring them in line, and they do not. You will hear that very strong in the Aboriginal community, although it is not isolated to the Aboriginal community. A lot of the elders will say it is since we lost the power to smack our kids, to discipline our kids. It is an ugly thing for some people to hear but that is the reality. That is what people are saying. If you are serious about trying to address these things, you had better think about that as well because parents and families will be the best people to help us turn this around. If they have meaningful work and a purpose in life and they can discipline their kids as they see fit, I think we will be on a path of trying to help.

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The main policy our party has talked about for seven years now is alternative sentencing and incorporating a bush sentencing, so remoteness in that. Father Mick must have pinched my notes on Urandangi because that has also come to my attention. You have a freehold town just sitting there with power and water and a modern school building and it is all abandoned. One of the best experiences I have ever had in this space, youth justice, was at Urandangi. There were 100 per cent Aboriginal kids at the Urandangi school and it was probably one of the best behaved school classes I have ever seen, and I do not say that lightly. I know that is a big call, but they were a beautiful little group of kids who had a teacher who cared and some parents who disciplined them pretty hard at home—whatever that means, but they disciplined the kids. They were in a remote area so there were no mobile phone out there and there was no skate park, no pool, no facilities—and these kids were as happy as Larry. The teacher said that they were chasing wallabies on the weekend and going fishing in the river. That was costing the government nothing above what you were already paying for their schooling.

Mick said that we are spending half a million dollars a year in Cleveland Bay at the moment—I would say \$300,000 as a conservative figure. The key element for relocation sentencing—or, as we see it, alternative sentencing—would be remoteness, and we can have a conversation about staffing during questions, and giving them vocational skills. You have to keep people busy. You do not just keep them out there for nothing. Everyone wants to turn these kids around and give them an opportunity. There is the sentencing part of it, having that ability. Like I said, there have been other programs before—the Mona program and others—but it is about procurement. How do you get the kids? How do you pick them up? How do you force them to turn up? Trying to do that in town is exponentially harder because there is all that distraction. It is easier for your workforce, but good luck with trying to keep those kids turning up every day to your events.

Again, I argue with a lot of people who say, 'It's all about keeping them in the house and showing them love and showing them a better way.' That is probably true if you have five kids to work with or three kids to work with, but we have 24 high-risk kids here and counting. The numbers have not been going down over a long period of time. Like I said, we struggle to get people who work in this space to stay out here for a year or two. Good luck with trying to fix this using the normal methods of what the government has been doing over the last 12 years—just throwing money at programs in town. We have had a few iterations. We always talk about service mapping. It is true that it does help to know that. Again, that is not the panacea. You are still going to be stuck with a similar workforce and similar programs.

Cheryl Scanlon, I think it was, came out and said, 'We're going to stop all of this. We're going to make sure everyone is working.' I have heard it all before, that we are going to make these organisations work harder. I would not accept that as a solution by itself. I think the problem is a lot deeper than just making everyone do their job and working better together. Yes, that does need to happen—of course it does—but you could do all of that and I still think you are going to have some of these problems.

I go back to what I said earlier. Until we fix some of the issues at the heart of it—Father Mick touched on that—we are all kidding ourselves. That is why I go on about the blue card so much. It is not the panacea, but it plays a big role and nothing has been done about it. That is about it from me.

Mr PURDIE: You have some unique challenges here that other communities do not such as the NT issue. Obviously this committee cannot solve quickly domestic discipline issues and societal issues around the family. What can you tell me about police resourcing in Mount Isa—how have you seen that over the last seven or eight years—coupled with the laws available to police to actively do their job in relation to youth justice?

Mr Katter: I am really glad you asked that question. I think I will answer it but it will not be directly. It is probably not bad but a little bit below. I have heard that at one point we only had one or two patrol cars at night. That was a few years ago. It might have picked up. Policelink is an absolute disaster. I have tried it myself. It is just a joke. Most people say, 'I don't even bother reporting. They were smashing my solar panels the other night. Kids were throwing rocks. I don't even bother reporting anymore.' I think there is a bad cultural problem in the QPS. A lot of people are chasing cars around here now. It is happening more and more. Residents are saying, 'Well, that's my car going around town,' but the police are saying, 'Stand down! Don't chase them.' The police are not doing anything. What sort of a mad world do we live in where the police are saying, 'You cannot chase them,' and you get the full force of the law thrown at you when you do something because no-one else is doing anything? This is madness.

They are on the TV all the time calling these people vigilantes. Guess what you are going to get? You have let this build up to where we are, so it is no wonder. You cannot keep saying to these people they are vigilantes. I have called for this: you need to look at the laws that go the other way, to protect the victims who are starting to give a bit back. Sure, in some cases they are going a bit too far and doing the wrong thing, but can you blame them? They ring Policelink but they do not come. Kids are driving their cars around town shouting and waving—cars that they have saved up for. They are not going to get their car back for three months because of the investigations. There are all of these horror stories.

I think we have a real risk of cultural despair in the police. A lot of them are trying to do a good job. I would find it hard to have a go at it with those restraints. I do not have all the answers. I certainly do not think we should be going so hard on the people who fight back every now and again. It is a natural thing to do when nothing else is being done to help you.

Mr PURDIE: That is a good point.

Mr HARPER: Your policy is called 'relocation sentencing'. I think we should just call it location sentencing.

Mr Katter: I am not stuck on a name.

Mr HARPER: Cairns have a petition going because they do not want a detention centre up there. Townsville is a melting pot of people from everywhere. Father Mick was saying that if you can keep the kids in the community with some sort of program you are better off keeping them in the community. My issue is to do with resourcing. What was the place called?

Mr Katter: Urandangi.

Mr HARPER: How far away is that?

Mr Katter: It is about 300 kilometres by road at a guess. At about halfway to Dajarra you turn west. Someone from the audience said 180 kilometres—I overstated that.

Mr HARPER: I am not sure how far you have progressed this policy—to Premiers or whatever. Is there some kind of business case behind it?

Mr Katter: We do not have the resources to put that together. We do not know all of the government regulations about how many people you need for the number of kids. I think it needs some elements like house parents. I think there needs to be a limit of 20 to 30 kids. Beyond that it is too big. You can split groups up as well. I am told that the magistrates know who is who: 'Don't put those kids together'; 'He wants to go with his cousins over there.' I do not know where to land this, but I think blokes like Keith Hamburger are pretty good. There are plenty of people here who would be a good judge of what cohort belongs at what centre. I would love to see 10 or 20 alternative centres around the place. There are camps around. I am not stuck on where they should be. I think they should be remote.

To answer your question about staffing, it is a big issue but not insurmountable. To me it comes down to how much you want to fix the problem. We can find police for Forsyth. We cannot at McKinlay at the moment, but we have had police at McKinlay and Kynuna for the last 20 years. You can find schoolteachers to go to remote areas. There are all sorts of highly skilled jobs. If we want to fight this problem, surely we can find someone.

Random people ring up all the time. I had a retired machinery operator ring and say, 'Mate, I'd love to help out with something like that and teach kids machinery and employment.' There are a lot of people out there who surprisingly would like to work in that space. Everyone is worried that whatever government creates it becomes sanitised: 'No. We need to have a psychologist from Brisbane coming up there with qualifications.' You go, 'Well, don't bother because no-one is going to cut through.' Again, that brings up the blue card issue. You need people with lived experience to talk to the kids, but they are the ones who usually cannot get approval for a blue card.

Mr HARPER: Some of those barriers to resourcing do make sense.

Mrs GERBER: Robbie, I am interested in your view on the current sentencing principles within the government's Youth Justice Act. We have heard from the mayor of Townsville, Jenny Hill, and a couple of retired police as part of this inquiry, and they think the principle of detention as a last resort should be removed from the Youth Justice Act. I am interested in your view on that. If you do not have a view on the specific principle of detention as a last resort, what have you heard from police and magistrates in relation to the effect of the current operation of the Youth Justice Act in terms of its sentencing principles?

Mr Katter: That is a good question. We strongly support the removal of it. It probably just builds on that point. The problem has just ballooned and it is acute now. My view is that we need some pretty strong tools to put a circuit breaker in at the moment. I think the public are really calling for that. I have not met the new magistrate yet. The last fellow who Father Mick was referring to I thought was really good. I will not discuss this directly, but lawyers who act in that space have criticised some of the activity of magistrates. Take it out so there is less wiggle room. I think we have all heard stories of people coming out of detention who we did not think should have and who then have reoffended straightaway. It does seem to tilt too far on kids being able to get out faster. I do not have a much more enlightened view than that.

Ms BUSH: Thanks, Robbie. It is good to see you again, and thank you always for your advocacy. I am mindful that a few of us this morning have made comments about people working in different departments. I think it is important to say that there are some really good people working in those departments. If we want to attract people to the regions, we have to build up their strength. Despite the best efforts of people in places like Cleveland, I think we have probably all heard that it is not working for some cohorts. You have suggested and we have heard a lot about smaller centres, being closer to home so that mum and dad and the family can still be involved, having wraparound supports, getting to the root cause but still detaining them so that the community can be kept safe, which is the main thing. Sometimes when we toss that idea around communities push back and say, 'We don't want them in our town. We are scared.' What is your sense of the community's willingness to support something like that or what assurances would people need to support something like that so that we could build towards a model?

Mr Katter: Are you talking about alternative sentencing?

Ms BUSH: Yes.

Mr Katter: You would not upset anyone at Urandangi because there is no-one there! I was joking. Quite seriously, I would envisage places where there is hardly anyone there already. There might be five or 10 people at some of these places. It is for the greater good sort of thing.

Ms BUSH: Part of that model is keeping them close to their culture and close to connections so that family can still visit and it is not so abrupt when they have to come back. How would you balance that?

Mr Katter: If you talk to Troy Fraser at Doomadgee, they have said, 'We want to solve it ourselves. Give us some money for the outstations. We'll take the kids out there. Stop sending them to Cleveland. It is not helping anyone.' Personally, I would be all for that. I have been advocating for that just at Doomadgee because that probably does not suit the rest of the state. He is a good CEO who could probably facilitate that. It is horses for courses. A lot of people jump straight on to cattle stations. There have been two or three big cattle station owners saying, 'We'll put them out there. We can fund a lot of this. We can help. We will put them to work.' A lot of these kids could become good grader drivers with the council or on the road crews or out on stations. They could do that but they have to see it.

There would be a lot of options here. Fred Pascoe at Normanton has been suggesting a gulf academy for years. It is just an iteration of the same principles that I am talking about. They want to do something a bit different there. They have the big Aboriginal owned cattle station up there to work with, so they would have a bit of focus on that but not necessarily all of that. To me, it is horses for courses.

I would not be advocating they be anywhere near a town. I think the whole point—again, I am no psychologist but we all go camping to clear our mind. You do not want a kid at Cleveland Bay looking at the Cowboys stadium going, 'If only I can break out of here and get a car.' You want them somewhere where they are going to have nothing but their own thoughts to think about things: 'What AM I going to do when I get back?' I just think that is a better platform. The little bit of evidence I have seen has shown that it has been most effective.

As you say, there are a lot of good people who work in this space who I am constantly humbled by. There would be great people working in Cleveland but it is not working. That tells me that that platform is not a good one. I hear that up to 150 kids can be in there. That is just too busy. We watch kids going in there. I do not see that we are ever going to get anywhere with them. Then they come straight back out here on a plane. We are all kidding ourselves.

Mr McDONALD: We have heard from a couple of witnesses who talked to us about the fact that kids know the system and will play the system. They know they will get a caution and then another caution and then a diversion. They know each of those steps along the way. Have you turned your mind to how that consequence for action could happen earlier—maybe even in school?

Mr Katter: That is a really good point. A dad from Doomadgee rang me the other day upping me about the police saying, 'My son has accumulated 20 charges. If they had got him earlier on and had given him a rap over the knuckles, we probably wouldn't be here.' That is an odd conversation to have with a dad, saying he wanted the police to come in earlier.

Mr McDONALD: And get him back into school.

Mr Katter: Yes. It is a good point to raise, Jim. I do not really have a good answer for that.

Mr McDONALD: We have heard a lot about relationships—kids needing trusted relationships and meaningful connection with people guiding them as opposed to 'plastic' relationships, which is a term that they used. If we link that to the on-country program that was here that stopped operating, do you know why that did not work? Was it a lack of community ownership?

Mr Katter: Yes, I probably could comment there was an element of that. There were some good elements in that respect. It was run by locals and they used to go to the cattle stations, but I think the biggest part comes down to procurement. If you are trying to organise some fencing work, as they were doing, or some cattle work and you were trying to organise all of that for the cattle station owners and then you spent the next four days trying to chase around to get the kids, it would be like herding cats sometimes, chasing kids around town. I guess that played a part.

I think the biggest issue confronting that initiative in the end, which I fully supported initially as an initiative, is the fact that it was not mandatory. I do not know how you really get past that. Hopefully you would not have to use that element most of the time, but why would you not provide magistrates with that option to say, 'No, you are going to participate'? This is the problem we face: if you still put something in Mount Isa or just five kilometres out of town, outside of locking them in a jail cell—they would go back to Cleveland—you cannot make that kid stay there. They will just bounce out, steal a car that night if they feel like it and you are back to square one. I think that is where that remoteness comes in again: making it that bit harder for them to reoffend or be tempted to reoffend immediately while they are going through that transition period. That is an important point to make. A lot of people I speak to who work in that space talk about the first three or four weeks where the kids are getting used to getting a meal, getting out of bed, just getting that routine, and then once they get past that month or so they start to do some stuff.

Mr TANTARI: Earlier we spoke about the potential of the removal of detention as a last resort. In your opinion, particularly in relation to that cohort of serious repeat offenders, do you think under the sentencing principles that detention as last resort should be removed from that cohort?

Mr Katter: Sorry, can you ask that question again?

Mr TANTARI: If a serious repeat offender came before the court again, do you think the principle of detention as a last resort should be removed for that cohort?

Mr Katter: Yes. I would say a blanket 'yes' for that. I have to put my hand up: I do not have a lot of experience of that court process. I have hung out at the youth courts a lot and I have talked to them a little bit, but I keep defaulting back to the fact that these kids need a circuit breaker at the moment. Coupled with that, I think there needs to be alternative sentencing. To put them in Cleveland—I look forward to them coming back worse in four months and doing the same thing. We are desperate for something different.

CHAIR: I know that we have run out of time, but the one part I am struggling with—and I am trying to get a better understanding—is that on one hand you said it has been shown that detention does not work; they are just cycling through.

Mr Katter: Yes, in that format.

CHAIR: So it would have to be coupled with that alternative sentencing.

Mr Katter: Absolutely.

CHAIR: And at what point much earlier that would have to occur. That alternative option would obviously be for the courts or the magistrate—or is it within the realm somehow of the police in the restorative justice space?

Mr Katter: I would have said at the magistrate level.

CHAIR: In the magistrate level, yes.

Mr Katter: Again, it is a bit hard to say that singularly. It has to have a bit of context there. I do not know if any of that works unless you have a few options. I would be a big advocate of a pilot, just because there is something there. If you only have 10 or 20 kids going, you are not going to see a great outcome.

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CHAIR: That is right.

Mr Katter: However, if you have three centres and perhaps one is for the higher risk kids and one is for—

Mr HARPER: Separate them.

Mr Katter: Yes. I imagine there will be all types.

CHAIR: Until you have that, if you remove detention as a last resort you are just pushing more into the same situation.

Mr Katter: Yes, which I have to admit is probably better than nothing at the moment. I would rather them there than back on the street at the moment, even though it could be creating something long-term. The problem right now is just so acute. It is a really unfortunate situation to be in.

CHAIR: Yes, it is. Robbie, I want to thank you so much. There were no questions taken on notice. Do you have a problem with the committee writing to you if we have any further questions?

Mr Katter: Not at all, Sandy.

CHAIR: Thank you so much. All the best.

HARRIS, Ms Leanne, Centre Manager, Mount Isa Neighbourhood Centre

CHAIR: Good morning, Leanne. I am sorry we are running a bit late, but it is a very vital and important inquiry. I invite you to make an opening statement, but, as you can see, the committee would like to ask lots of questions, so leave us some time to do that.

Ms Harris: That is probably a good thing, because my opening statement is quite small. Thank you. I certainly would acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Kalkadoon people, and pay my respects. I also welcome all of you to Mount Isa, and welcome to everybody who has taken the time to be involved and hear what is going on. I think a lot of us actually live what is going on in Mount Isa. I have the absolute pleasure of managing a neighbourhood centre. We work with people who come through our door, and the diversity of those who come through our door is quite incredible. We are a truly multicultural community and we work with diversity—diversity of people and their capabilities, too.

I think one of the big things that is really important to reflect upon is that children do not grow up in services; children grow up in families. I think it is important that we look at families and work with families—noticing the skills of the family, what they already have, and supporting them to notice their own skills. It is about working with the young people as if they can, too, notice the skills and capacity they have.

I think it is also important to reflect upon people's natural support networks and how we can value-add to those natural support networks. Robbie also mentioned that there are businesspeople and local mentors within the community who would like to be involved. How do we value-add to them so that they can support some of those young people? How do we work with them to involve and engage? We have often said that it takes a community to engage a community. I think it is important that we engage. There are some great kids out there. There are some kids with some great skills and there are some kids who are achieving greatness.

I often say that people are people because of people—the people they hang out with, the networks they engage in, the capacity building they learn from sharing skills with other people. I remember doing some work at the flexi learning school around a 'tree of life', which talks around your hopes, dreams and wishes. It talks around, 'I have great grounding and these are my roots. This is the country where I am from. I have family, which is my trunk that keeps me strong and steady and nurtures me. Then I have those branches, which are the people I have met, the people who have influenced me the most.' Then we also talked around a concept of storms of life. Sometimes through no fault of your own, storms come into your life. We talked with young people around, 'What is your safe space? Where is your safe space that you go to when some of those storms happen in your life?' Some of those kids talked around, 'I went to Aunty's place,' or 'I caught up with friends or family,' but some of them also talked around, 'I reoffended so that I entered back in Cleveland because I was safe, I was fed, I was well housed and I had a network of people that I connected to.'

I think it is interesting to reflect on that. If you talked around a network of people that you connected to, could there be, as an alternative to the youth justice service, alternative networks that kids can connect to? What would that look like? I think that is the really interesting thing to maybe ponder. With regard to that 10-year plan, I think a 10-year plan is, exactly as Father Mick said, far too long.

We have great people who come to Mount Isa. I know of quite a few people who said, 'You know, I came for a three-year contract. That was in 2004.' They are here 20 years later. There is a great connection in this community. There are some fabulous people. To get out and about—to get out and see the big skies—to be involved in some of the country, to breathe Mount Isa air and to breathe this country air are some of the highlights of my life, and are some of the highlights of many people who come out here and say, 'You know, I will come for a contract,' but end up getting stuck here.

There are some great skills in this community, too; it is not just the experts. There is some fabulous expertise, too. I was listening to a child psychologist who said, 'The meaning of life is what you notice.' I thought, 'Wow, that is really interesting.' When life is going really well for you, it is meaningful and you have a sense of connection, but when life is not going so well, that is what you notice. For some of those kids, life does not go so well for them. It is around how we engage them in meaningfulness that connects to them and is made meaningful to them. That is the important thing.

Housing is an issue in Mount Isa—absolutely. We support a service at the neighbourhood centre called no-interest loans, which support people to get things like whitegoods and televisions. I know—I think Father Mick mentioned it—that when people are housed, often it is just a stove. However, there are alternatives to that. We also have emergency relief at the neighbourhood centre Mount Isa

which supports people in crisis. I think it is interesting that we ponder what exactly a crisis is for people. We are pretty broad around what a crisis looks like. We are mindful that when people do not have food in the house that is a crisis, so how do we support that?

Father Mick also talked around the gambling in Mount Isa that is open until 4 am. One of the other sad things is that some of those people keep checking their bank balance to see when that money comes in, but each time they check their bank balance they get charged \$2.50. Therefore, it just keeps building. For people who do not have capacity around good budgeting and understanding that sort of thing, it impacts their money each week. Then when they get involved in those payday loans and they default on that, they get charged \$15 for each default, and actually some are up to \$35. Then because they are overdrawn on their bank account they get charged 15 bucks by the bank. Some of our service is supporting people's capacity around managing money. It is not about financial counselling; it is about financial capability and understanding some of the logistics about some of that.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you very much, Leanne, and thank you for the work that you do in this space. I am very proud to have three community centres in my community. They do a wonderful job. I know that the return on your investment in providing for your community would be greater than the very small amount of money you get in emergency relief and for assistance. Can you talk us through what extra you would need to be able to support your community truly, and how you prioritise where that money goes to?

Ms Harris: We have a timeframe around when people can access emergency relief, but, having said that, we also understand if they have nothing. You cannot leave people with absolutely nothing.

Mr McDONALD: How much do you actually get?

Ms Harris: Off the top of my head, we get about 160K.

Mr McDONALD: For the year?

Ms Harris: For the year, and it is around supporting that. What we have learned is that previously we used to open the door and just have up to 30 people or maybe 40 people come in on a Monday. Certainly COVID changed the way that we involved and engaged in that. Now we have people ring up on a Friday to make a booking for a Monday. We talk around how many children people have. We make sure that people can go shopping and get groceries or we support people around their electricity bills or their car rego. The other day we had a young girl who had organised for her sister to go to boarding school. She had organised everything but forgot the uniforms and the books. She had never accessed emergency relief previously so we made that happen for her.

Ms BUSH: Leanne, I have been to your centre and it is a fantastic centre. Thank you for all of the work that you do. I acknowledge the work that all of the neighbourhood centres do. We have heard evidence that the issue is not one of funding; there are lots of buckets of funding going to lots of different agencies. I have a slightly different view on that but, parking that, what can make a material difference? Obviously, there are organisations such as yours and workers like you who are doing great work. There are lots of agencies getting funding. What needs to change? Is it a reallocation of funding? Is it information sharing? Despite continued investment, we are in this position. What has to change locally to get a better outcome? Is it that agencies do not have to report on things? What is the accountability?

Ms Harris: It more the concept around coordination and people knowing who is who, basically. Again, Father Mick talked about that community connect stuff. We are reinvigorating the mental health network. It is not just supporting our community; it is also supporting our peers. It is those new workers who are coming into town and maybe mentoring them about the services that are available. There is a community door where you can go online. If you google '4825' you will find every single service that is available in Mount Isa. Have a look at that. There are a lot of services here.

Ms BUSH: I guess that goes to my point. What are those services doing now to coordinate? You do not need government authority to do that; you can do that now. What is stopping that work happening now?

Ms Harris: That is a great question. I know that we have the Local Level Alliance and then there is the RYAN, the Regional Youth Alliance Network. Certainly there are two. I think it is around the meaningfulness of the structure around what are they doing and how they are doing it. For some of us going to meetings, you need to be mindful around, 'Which meeting am I going to and is it actually worth being involved?'

Mrs GERBER: Thanks for everything that you are doing and for making time for the committee today. In other areas that we have travelled to we have heard about the impact of the housing crisis on the area and the impact that then has on youth crime in the area. I would like your view on that for Mount Isa.

Ms Harris: We have created an area in Mount Isa called Pioneer, which is mostly Department of Housing houses. I think that has definitely shaped that community and that area of town. I know that when people come to town they will be told, 'Whatever you do, do not live in that part of town.' There are also quite a few people who have come to Mount Isa and bought housing here but have let those houses get worse and worse until they are no longer able to rent them because they are not houses that you would want to live in. There is lots of housing here but some of it is derelict housing. That is not just Department of Housing houses; it is also those people who have come to Mount Isa, bought when things were really happening and now things are not so happening around housing prices and, therefore, they are not maintaining their houses.

CHAIR: You spoke about financial capabilities. What are your thoughts on the whole situation with NT people coming over the border because of a different policy regarding their cash card?

Ms Harris: Huge.

CHAIR: Do you think Queensland really should be similar and come into line with the NT? I have heard positive and negative things regarding the cash card. What are your thoughts?

Ms Harris: If you are talking around financial capability, I do not know how that would value-add to people's capability if you are saying, 'This is what you have to do within a cash card.' Certainly that does not give them any sort of self-determination around looking after and managing their own money—I do not think at all. With what goes on, absolutely territory laws impact Mount Isa hugely. They certainly impact our emergency relief, too, with people coming here and then saying, 'You know what? We are stuck here.' What do you do with that? Do you keep people stuck here or do you support them to get out of town, but it costs you to get them out of town?

CHAIR: Is that what is happening—the transport is paid for so they can go back?

Ms Harris: Certainly with what we utilise around fuel to get people out of town, absolutely.

CHAIR: Of those, does everyone say, 'Yes, we want to go home,' or 'No, we're staying here and that's it'?

Ms Harris: It is interesting, because certainly our funding supports our community but then you reflect on that, and getting somebody out of town certainly does support our community in the long term as well.

CHAIR: Leanne, I thank you so much not only for the work that you do but also for the time that you have given us today. If committee members have any further questions, would you have a problem if they write to you?

Ms Harris: Not at all.

CHAIR: Thank you and all the best for the year.

Proceedings suspended from 12.08 to 12.38 pm.

ILES, Ms Hayley, Manager, Youth Support Service, Injilinj

TAKURIT, Mr Jacob, Board Member, Injilinj

CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement, but please give the committee more time to ask questions because we have very eager committee members who would like to learn more.

Mr Takurit: Thank you for this opportunity. I want to acknowledge the Kalkadoon people and all other elders present today. I thank the committee and all the other dignitaries here today.

Ms Iles: I would like to provide apologies for Injilinj chairperson Valerie Craigie and chief executive officer Pattie Lees, who could not make it here today; they are actually out of town.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms Iles: Injilinj Youth Support Service's objective is to deliver a contemporary model of support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse young people aged between 12 and 21 years who are at risk of: disconnection from family, community, prosocial or recreational activities or informal support networks; disengaging from school, training or employment; harm, including self-harm or suicide; cultural disconnection; homelessness, or already experiencing homelessness; or entering, or already involved in, the youth justice system.

Our service has been funded to provide a regional youth alliance network. We meet once a month to discuss youth within Mount Isa. This involves a whole range of services and government—Commonwealth and state—as well as Health, the QPS et cetera. It should be noted that Injilinj Youth Support Service's directors and chief executive officer have been trying to lease a building over the past 12 months within the Mount Isa district to operate a service implementing case management, with staff members working nights—a couple of hours on Thursday, Friday and Saturday—and then to introduce a drop-in centre. To date, Injilinj Youth Support Service is still waiting for the best possible building to be able to roll out the rest of our Injilinj youth support working charter.

I refer to question No. 1 of the stakeholder consultation. In 2018 Mr Atkinson delivered his report on youth justice. He recommended the government adopt four objectives, which he calls the four pillars, as its policy position on youth justice. These are: intervene early; keep children out of court; keep children out of custody; and reduce reoffending. In line with Mr Atkinson's four pillars, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander native title groups should provide a cultural healing camp for young people and families to engage with their traditional cultural practices and cultural healing and then work with health services, rehabilitation services as well as other service providers to provide a holistic approach for healing young people, children and families. This is our view on it.

It should be noted that we must work with the whole family unit of a young person who has various traumas and loss. They need to be healed and to attend health, mental health, counselling, legal aid, ATODS and other types of services for their parents, grandparents and caregivers to become emotionally, mentally and physically well to be caregivers to their young people, children and families. I have heard other groups ask what we need for children. If there is not a holistic approach with regard to family, it is always going to fail. Through this delivery of an overall approach to healing families, we can work with the parents to acquire education and employment. It should be noted that the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disadvantaged in part due to living below the poverty line.

Further, the final report of the Productivity Commission in its first three-yearly review into government inaction on the Closing the Gap agreement found that just four of the 19 national socio-economic targets are on track, while four are trending backwards. An article states—

Commissioner Siegel-Brown said the lack of progress reflects a disregard for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's knowledge and solutions throughout government.

"Breaking down these entrenched attitudes and ways of working will require a focused and deliberate effort from every department and organisation" ...

My second point relates to the youth justice department. The court system and other service providers need to make referrals or schedule meetings with culturally appropriate service providers, such as Injilinj Youth Support Service, which provide a service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culturally and linguistically diverse young people, who can walk with a young person to find out what their worries and concerns are and schedule meetings with family to provide overall emotional wellbeing support for that young person and family.

The Injilinj youth support service provides an overall support system and they can advocate for the young person and their family to assist through accessing health, education, legal and housing. The Injilinj youth support service can also meet with other service providers in order to have a

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collaborative approach to providing overall assessment and service delivery to the young person and their family. The Queensland Police Service and the co-responder should be scheduling meetings with the Injilinj youth support service and other service providers to be informed to undertake preventive case work with the young person and family to ensure less likelihood of the young person continuing offending.

No. 3, there is a lack of accommodation for our young people, including the families within Mount Isa. There needs to be culturally appropriate accommodation built in Mount Isa for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people that is funded and operated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Key elders and community people could form a group that supports the best needs of young people who are detained, remanded or are transitioning back into the community. That includes an assessment of what the needs of the young person are such as accommodation, medical needs, education and employment opportunities and the relevant service provider working with the young person and family to achieve good outcomes for that young person. There needs to be brokerage funds available to support the young person to acquire food, clothes, incidentals and other needs to be able to start functioning and to acquire the confidence to move forward in their lives; consistent wraparound service providers to support the young person to re-engage with their family and community; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander native title groups to provide a cultural healing care for young people—I have mentioned that already.

No. 4, our service and other service providers should be engaged immediately with the young person to source various culturally appropriate programs, as well as cultural practices to walk with the young person for their overall emotional wellbeing and spirit. There needs to be a culturally appropriate accommodation built in Mount Isa. I have already discussed that as well. I did not really have much to add to five and six.

Hopefully the strategies outlined within this response will assist in strengthening public confidence in the youth justice system. It could be expected that intervention and strategies that are consistently implemented and actioned will bring about a reduction in youth crime. Victims of the community expect perpetrators to be punished for their misdemeanours—not just given a rap across the knuckles—a ‘do the crime, do the time’ concept. They want justice. At the moment there is a feeling of fighting a losing battle and that it is just us.

A fair law and order approach requires the rehabilitation of offenders and reoffenders. All service providers are not able to access youth crime data. This information is held with the Queensland Police Service that will not release this information to the public and to services. We have tried on numerous occasions. For service providers to view criminal data would be invaluable in finding out what the gaps are in providing services to young people and to apply for funding for various activities that could support young people within the community. It is also really good mapping and, with the right meeting that we have, they are the things that we could discuss so that everyone is overlapping and working in collaboration.

No. 7, there needs to be a strong emphasis on the restorative justice program as it brings the victim and offender together, hopefully with the expression of sincere remorse from the offenders. This may provide opportunities to guide victims towards the support services that they need. I have already stated what our service is.

I would really like to hit home the healing camp or family camp for blackfellas, especially for our black kids, to walk with the family. I am not saying all black families where there are two or more at home. We have heard statements where kids are just going to detention because it is safer. We need to go back to our cultural native title groups—whether that is one created out here—but you also need funding to have that. For families and kids to go back to learn respect and reconnect with their culture again, get healing and then work with the mainstream on other things—whether they are ATODS, and all of those sort of things—like their mental health. People are not just brought up bad; there are reasons for, and it is about how we approach that and get the right model. I think it is a winner—this cultural camp for our black kids. What is the basis of the crime? There are 70 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids in Mount Isa. How do we fix this? I believe this is a way forward. Thank you.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you very much, Hayley and Jacob. I know you have not had a chat yet, Jacob, but I want to recognise your recent Australia Day Spirit of Mount Isa Award. Congratulations.

Mr Takurit: Thank you.

CHAIR: Congratulations, well done.

Mr Takurit: Thank you for that. I could quite easily be a statistic. I could have ended up in jail or dead when you look at the stats of black children in custody. For me, it is having strong role models as a kid growing up. We need to give an opportunity for our mob to really empower this next generation and work on the prevention side of things. That is what we do at Injilinjji. It is about giving these kids someone to look up to, something to look up to because kids cannot be something that they cannot see. In the room here, there are so many different things that are happening in the background. There is a local gym that I am attending and they let kids go in and work out for free. There are little things like that in the community. Injilinjji is connected to what is happening. I think that we could really help with prevention.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you for the work that you are doing. Can I ask about the complexity that we are hearing about with the number of people coming from the Northern Territory and the lack of connection there? Have you thought about how you can help those people who are causing a lot of problems here?

Ms Iles: We deal with a whole range of young children and families from the Northern Territory. We have a little bit of brokerage and we have come up with kids who have never been registered at birth. It is those dynamics to get them registered to get a birth certificate. Then they need to get a Medicare card—there are all of those things. Those main identification things have been a real barrier for our young people. Lots of times they are stuck here, their parents go back and they do not have anyone to support them. There is no person who has the skills or the capacity to say, 'Look, I know this person', so we deal with a lot of that. We write a lot of support letters and advocate for the young person. I have rung up births, deaths and marriages and said, 'How can we go forward with this?' I have found out some new things in that regard.

There is a big issue with the number of pubs that sells bladders of wine and the amount of alcohol in this town. That is why people come over here—it is cheap and they can buy them. I think the pub opens at 10 and goes through until 12 or 1 and bottle shops close 12. It is a big issue that people from the Northern Territory and from the gulf and other areas come here because they can drink and can get drink. Then what happens is the connection with their kids and families is lessened. Father Mick was saying there were 200 people living in the riverbed. A lot of them are not just from the Northern Territory, but from the gulf, too. They had a big rain event, so they came here and they have never gone home. Then our shelters for kids and all the necessary things are smashed because we have other groups of people who normally do not reside here residing here. Then the Mount Isa people are missing out. You do not want to take away from anyone, but they live here all the time and they miss out.

Ms BUSH: Thanks, Hayley and Jacob, for coming along today. Locking kids up is simple. It is a simple solution, and Queensland is quite good at it. We have some of the highest incarceration rates of young people across the country. I refuse to accept that it is because our kids are worse, so something is not working in that service delivery space to intervene for those young people. There are a lot of funding and services in place; what are the barriers that you are facing? What can we do to make it more effective for you to intervene sooner and to do aggressive outreach? You have mentioned some things about data linking and accommodation, but what can happen now? If you had three wishes now for Mount Isa, what would they be?

Ms Iles: We currently have three staff and two youth workers. I am the manager and admin person. We have another three positions. We are waiting for an office somewhere in town and we have had a lot of issues. There are no available buildings, or what is available does not suit our purpose. It is also about additional money. We also have to provide an outreach service to Camooweal. I do not have enough staff, and we do not have enough money to deliver that. If we are going to provide a youth service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Mount Isa and Camooweal, we need more resources. For us to get another new building, the department that funded us did not give us any set-up costs. We are trying to save money to be able to move into an office, so we are cutting short other things to be able to do that.

Ms BUSH: You mentioned that you chair a monthly sector network; has there been any talk about pooling resources together in a coordinated way?

Ms Iles: There is a new youth Lions network, the abbreviated Ryan meeting, that meets once a month. Various services—Health, Education, a whole range of service providers—attend. We have started an action group for items that come out of that meeting—I also chair that; we have so many things on—which I am putting together. In that youth space, a couple of the speakers have come up and said, 'We can do this with youth,' but they still have to go home. We need to fix the families. The family unit needs to be fixed up and, like I mentioned, there needs to be a culturally appropriate healing program out on country for our black kids and families to be fixed.

Ms BUSH: Are there services here in Mount Isa that are funded to work with families now?

Ms Iles: There are all different types of groups and whatever funding. Our age group is 12 to 21—Aboriginal and Torres Strait and the CALD group. I think 54 reasons has a youth program and they deal with the mainstream. There are not that many youth services. They had a few, but they have cut them down so there are only two in here that were specific for that. Then you have Centacare and 54 reasons. They all provide a range of services, not all youth—there is only two in town for youth.

Then you have PCYC which is more of a kids' program and a gym and all of that sort of thing. They do Chilling in the Park and things like that, but they do not do case management like we do. We are culturally appropriate because we have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers who walk with our children and our young people too, and we also have culture. We have a whole range of culture that we are able to tap into to provide a service for that young person.

Mrs GERBER: Thanks for everything that you are doing in the community with the obviously limited amount of resources that you have. It sounds like you are really trying to make a difference to the young people in this community, and we thank you for it.

You touched in your opening statement around victims and victim support. One of the terms of reference for this committee inquiry is to look at what more can be done or the gaps in relation to victims and victim support. I am interested in hearing from you and your perspective on what you think the system could improve in relation to victims? Are victims feeling heard; are they feeling like they are receiving justice?

Mr Takurit: As a community we are all frustrated, whether you are black or white. A lot of the victims are the families who have been broken as well. So if we support the family we can probably help fix some of the problems, I reckon. I want to acknowledge anyone who is here, or in the community, that has been the victim of crime. We feel your pain. We do not like seeing in the news one of our black kids doing something wrong. It is really hurtful and we are trying our best to try to fix that. I want to acknowledge that we in this community are all hurting and we want to see the best for Mount Isa.

Mrs GERBER: Does your organisation help? If a person is a victim of crime and they want to access the compensation that is available under the victims support act, do you play any role in that, and do you want to speak to the committee about any gaps in that system for victims?

Ms Iles: We have had a few through the Injilnji youth support service which we refer on to the relevant service providers. I would also like to talk about the blue card. Blue cards are such a big issue in our community, especially amongst our black people. They did silly things when they were young, they have a family, they are 30 and are working in the community, but they still cannot get a blue card. They did not rape anyone, did not have a firearm or get busted for drugs. That really needs to be put on the table. It really holds our people down as a community—whatever colour you are—to be able to move forward.

We are all not born perfect and when we are young we all played up, we did silly things. How do we move on and create jobs and allow any person to get a blue card? The assessment process for blue card is just crazy now. It is non-existent. We are lucky to get one and we work, so that needs to change and go back to the community. We met with the blue card mob up at the Overlander where we talked through a lot of this. We even looked at a model about going to an elders' panel. We never heard any more.

Mr Takurit: Our elders are the best ones to judge a person's character. They have seen that person grow up. They have seen that that person has potential to really have an impact and make positive change. We can look at giving our elders a chance to be at the table to assess when it comes to blue cards because blue cards are vital. If you want to be a kinship carer you need a blue card. We are seeing a lot of our kids taken away when there are family there that can look after some of those kids who have been removed. They want to be kinship carers but they cannot because of the blue card system that really does not work for us.

Mr HARPER: Following on from the previous question, there is the tool of court conferencing. That might be delayed six months so a victim of crime might not get to face that person. There have been reports of delays there. What do you think about turning it around and making it a victim-led conference so that they get to engage and tell their story?

Ms Isles: Sometimes that works but sometimes they do not want to be retraumatised.

Mr HARPER: Yes, it is totally up to the person. The work that you want to do is very ambitious and it will take a lot more funding to set up that camp and things like that.

Ms Isles: That is why I have come here to talk about it.

Mr HARPER: I am very glad that you did.

Ms Isles: We keep talking about kids but we are losing the missing part, which is the family unit.

Mr HARPER: That is exactly my question. When you have a child in detention, do you think the committee should consider that the family has a mandatory responsibility to come into the case management? Before the kid comes out of detention and goes back home, should the family be made to attend the case management and be assisted where they can? Do you think that might play a role?

Ms Isles: That would be great but maybe it is the case that that has never happened.

Mr HARPER: We have to think about what happens down the road. We have to think about how we can do things differently.

Ms Isles: I do not know if you can make anyone do anything.

Mr Takurit: There are so many challenges that our families face when it comes to poverty or being capable of helping that process when they come out of detention or whatever it might be. It is difficult.

Mr HARPER: There has to be responsibility there.

Mr Takurit: Yes, definitely.

Ms Isles: That is what I was talking about with the cultural camp, having the right funding and the right native title group. I was asking Jacob earlier about this. There are probably about 20 different native title groups that are sitting in Mount Isa currently, from the territory, the gulf and all around and then Mount Isa and the Kalkadoon people. How do we address that in a culturally appropriate way? To heal, you have to go back to your own land. I am Waanyi so I would go back to Lawn Hill. I would not do it here. A lot of dynamics would have to be talked about in that model or do you just do a general one.

CHAIR: I have one final question, which goes back to the cultural camp. What does that actually look like? As we have heard earlier, the on-country program folded for various reasons. What would the difference be? How would you not encounter the same challenges?

Ms Isles: You put in the right model and you get the key people, the Kalkadoon people and other traditional groups that are here, to have a bit of a panel and have discussions with Injilinjji or collaborate and put it together and see what that looks like. As I say, there are about 20 native title groups here. This is Kalkadoon land. How do we incorporate the cultural aspect so that it is not going to upset other native title groups and run something out there? That is a collective approach. The Mona program that was on-country was one organisation. That was not a collective approach and it was not from the native title groups from here—the Kalkadoon and all the other native title people who sit here.

Mr Takurit: Just to add to what Hayley said, I think it comes back to what the member for Thuringowa was trying to ask around accountability with families. We need to go back to that cultural structure of respecting whose land our mob are on. I am a Torres Strait Islander person from Murray Island. I am a Magaram man. I acknowledge that I am on Kalkadoon country. While I am on Kalkadoon country I want to respect this land and the people and do the right thing by this community while I am here. When you get back to accountability, I think we need to go back to that cultural capability of acknowledging where you are from so you have that identity and you know who you are. You teach your kids to be proud of themselves and to acknowledge wherever they might be and to have that accountability. It goes back to that cultural structure.

Ms Isles: The other thing is that a lot of those kids do not know who their cultural groups are or have very limited knowledge. I was dealing with kids in Cloncurry. As soon as I told them, 'Boy, I know who your family is'—da, da, da—I would see the different way that they walked and talked. I said, 'You need to be proud of who you are, of your ancestors and what we did in this country.' You could see their dynamics and how they felt about themselves just change like that, just with my words. If we could get an intensive program like that happening then you would see the results. A lot of people have grasped my knowledge. Some have a lot of tradition, some have medium, some grew up mainstream. Getting them to know a bit about their culture changes who they are. I said, 'This is your identity and you need to be really proud of that.' I have seen the aspect of those kids change, standing straighter and all that of, just from me having a yarn with them. Imagine taking them out there and doing cultural camps with the right people.

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How can we make a difference? Even their parents and grandparents cannot. But if they can realise that and have respect, give them their cultural healing, that can make a big difference to heal that family and then they can take that wherever they go.

CHAIR: Hayley and Jacob, thank you for the work that you do. Thank you for taking the time to be here. I think you have added another missing piece to our puzzle today. You have our deep gratitude and we wish you all the best. I now welcome representatives from the Mount Isa City Council.

KING, Mr Chad, Director, Community Services, Mount Isa City Council

SLADE, Ms Danielle, Mayor, Mount Isa City Council

CHAIR: Good afternoon to you both. I really appreciate you taking the time to be here. You have seen the format. Of course, we always like to try to give all committee members the opportunity to ask questions. Obviously, you have put in your submission. Is there anything that you would like to add in addition to that?

Ms Slade: Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Kalkadoons, and pay respects to elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to any of Australia's First Nations people in attendance today. I will give you a little background on myself. I grew up in Mount Isa. We immigrated when I was seven and came straight to Mount Isa. I have lived here all my life. I have a very strong sense of connection to Mount Isa and the community.

Since I became mayor four years ago—I went from zero to mayor—youth crime has been probably front and centre for the entire time. There are a lot of things that we have done as a council to try to address this. We are roads, rubbish and waste, but people look to council for help because this is about liveability. One of the things we have done is that we meet as a vulnerable person's meeting probably bimonthly or three to four times a year. I have met with business owners, I have met with agencies—you name it, I have met with everybody in regard to youth crime. I am also the victim of youth crime and I have done restorative justice. I think I have another hat there that might be helpful.

I heard Father Mick talking earlier. We were not always in this situation. Pioneer did not look like that 20 years ago. We have got into this situation. We are getting people with addictions, whether it is alcohol, drugs or gambling, coming to Mount Isa to access those things. We are impacted by the Northern Territory when they bring in changes to alcohol laws as well as other things. There is a banned drinkers register in the Northern Territory. If you are an addict, you are going to do whatever it takes. If you get banned from purchasing, all it stops you from doing is purchasing alcohol at a bottle—nothing else. You are going to go where you can get alcohol. Mount Isa has been affected. I believe you heard from Jenny Hill. Townsville has been affected and so has Cairns. There was a bit of a partnership between Mount Isa, Cairns and Townsville. We were trying to work together to see what we could do to address this. I talked to Senator Malarndirri McCarthy. She said that absolutely Mount Isa should be looking at: if people are banned from drinking in the territory then they should be banned from drinking in Mount Isa. That would be a good deterrent for them living rough in our Leichhardt River.

The other thing that is happening is we are seeing people and families living rough in Leichhardt River. We are trying to get them into houses in Mount Isa, but we really do not have the support services we need to wrap around them. We are probably the highest per capita for DV in Queensland. On 23 February 2023, when we should have been celebrated around Queensland and Australia for turning 100, we had the *Courier-Mail* run a story about us being the highest per capita for youth crime. That was really disappointing for the residents. There is a huge amount of fatigue in Mount Isa, which is unusual for us because we are quite a resilient community. The fatigue around youth crime is enough for people to say, 'I've had enough and I'm thinking of leaving.' That is not what we want because it is so difficult to get people to Mount Isa in the first place.

It seems to me that when I am talking to people—and it does not matter if it is about Child Safety, Youth Justice, Housing, DATSIP—I am talking to people who do not live in Mount Isa. They are trying to run communities like Mount Isa from the coast. I think that could be one of the big problems. The other problem is that the services do not work together and they are all competing for funding. If you get any of those services in a room, and you probably will, they will dish on the other services because they are all competing for that funding. That is not productive. There is a lot of duplication. I think a lot of kids are being serviced by a lot of the same people in different groups. It is really hard to understand who is funded for what and what services they provide.

As a council we invited the Cairns Regional Council to come to Mount Isa because we were looking to pay them to monitor our cameras. They are doing some great things in Cairns. They said to us, 'If we are going to monitor these cameras and the only people we can call are the police then you are wasting everybody's time.' That is right. At the moment with the DV in Mount Isa, that is all the police are dealing with. It is incredible how much they are just not present anymore because they are actually dealing with DV.

With housing, we are starting to accommodate people from everywhere. The housing department is not building in communities like Doomadgee, Burketown, Mornington Island and Normanton. They are centralising in Mount Isa. To put it in perspective, the Gold Coast has 100 social houses per 10,000 people. On those statistics, Mount Isa should only have 200 social houses but we do not. We have 600 to 800 houses. The other thing that is fatiguing the community is that some of the people who have chronic addictions are being put into those houses. If you are living in the same street as some of them, all-night parties happen. There may be 30 to 60 people at those parties. Kids, quite understandably, are not going to be there. That is when they head off onto the streets. You have children as young as eight, nine, 10 or 11 walking around at 2 o'clock in the morning—definitely.

I have sent to every single government department videos of children at three o'clock in the morning—all different age groups—wandering the streets. One child stole a car and smashed into a police car. When they asked him, 'Why did you do that?' he said, 'I wanted to go to Cleveland for Christmas, because I want to get Christmas presents.' There are definitely a lot of issues here.

When we talk about the family unit, as Father Mick said, there may not be a father there. There may be a lot of aunties or grandmothers trying to help. Kids are really the victims. They have a right to an education. They have a right to a meal. They have a right to a home. It is a human right. In some cases they are not getting any of that. I could take you now for a drive and we will find 100-plus, maybe 200, kids who are not attending school today. There is nobody doing anything in that regard. If these children are not registered in a school, nobody is looking for them. If the police walked past 10 kids right now, they are not going to pull up and say, 'Hey, why aren't you at school?' Nobody does. Again, can we pressure these families into putting them into school?

I think Housing could step up to say, 'We are giving you a four-bedroom house. We want to know what school they are going to and what their attendance rates are.'

Mr McDONALD: Conditions.

Ms Slade: Yes, conditions. Further, if I rent an Airbnb I have to sign a contract to say that I am not going to make noise after 10 o'clock—things like that. It is a reason to get out of social housing anyway, isn't it, if you want to have a life. Centrelink is supposed to be monitoring if the kids are attending school. I believe they are supposed to be, but they do not. Why do they not monitor: 'We are paying you for four children. We want to know what school they are going to and what the attendance rates are.' These could be some triggers to find out which kids are not attending school. Centrelink would go, 'We have Danielle Slade. We are paying her mother, yet her mother is not giving us the school she is going to.' There has to be more effort to get these children into school.

We are finding now that people are not drinking in pubs—that may be the price of a beer or whatever it is—but are turning their homes into pubs. That is what is happening in Mount Isa and that is what is happening in Pioneer. If you are up for drive at one o'clock in the morning, you will see all these party houses. You cannot blame the kids for walking out and wanting to be anywhere else but in that home. The police sometimes pick up the kids—as young as eight—take them home and think, 'No, I can't leave this child here.' Again, they could take the child home but there is no-one at home. That is the reality of what is happening.

I will give an example. There was a party house across from someone. At two in the morning, they are videoing the party—and Father Mick was right about Policelink—and they had to get onto Policelink. Imagine when you are really tired at two in the morning trying to fire up your computer, go onto Policelink and tell them, 'There is a party across the road.' They have taped the raging party and there are children on the video with nappies on. There are heaps of kids. The police turn up, all the lights go out, it goes dark and the police drive off. Then the party restarts. That party house went on for a week.

Every time they sent me a video, I emailed at least 15 agencies and said, 'Here is the video.' I want to know if Child Safety has knocked on the door of this house and checked on the children. I want to know if the police checked in the next day to see what was going on. I want to know if Housing knocked on the door to check on the house and what is going on. Where was everybody? Why are they not turning up the next day?

This party house went on for seven days. Eventually there was pressure and they apparently left with all their mattresses. A couple of days later it rained and they came back with about 30 or 40 people and partied again. Can you imagine the fatigue in that street? They are getting an email from the mayor. Imagine if you do not have the mayor sending those emails to put pressure on that party house? This is happening throughout our city. It needs to be talked about because my expectation would be that Child Safety went straight to that door and checked on those babies.

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The other issue regarding this house was that that family only lived there for about a week at a time and then disappeared for a few months. They obviously had two houses. I do not know where they came from. There is definitely a shortage of social housing everywhere, but when the government builds they only build in Mount Isa, which is not fair to all the other communities that are in desperate need of housing. One of the places I visited a few years ago was Burketown. They have nearly 100 per cent attendance at school. They live with a pub. They cannot get housing there. Where do people go? They end up in Mount Isa.

The other thing with the housing problem that is affecting us is that we have local traditional owners and local Indigenous people who are generational from Mount Isa who cannot get social housing because the people who are being moved in are in the middle of a crisis. At what point are we at the saturated mark where we say, 'Mount Isa cannot cope with more social housing and more people in crisis.' We cannot. The people who are the victims in the end are the children because they are stuck in situations where they are not getting the support and help that they need. I know I have gone on a bit.

Chad King is here. He is originally from South Australia and has been here for about four or five months. As a council we want to address what is happening. His job going forward is to look at what we as a council can do in that regard. He is going to put in this submission in two parts: what we as a council can do and also in terms of highlighting some of the issues.

The former premier was here in March. She gave us lots of time. She met with victims of crime and implemented \$7 million for a Mount Isa youth co-responder team. She also provided for a community coordinator—someone who reports directly to the Premier's office—and made sure that Mount Isa was included under the safe houses grant scheme, which means that people and pensioners could get up to \$10,000 worth of cameras and security screens. She also made sure that Mount Isa would have an engine immobiliser trial. At one point a police taskforce was provided for Mount Isa. This had a big impact for the police in terms of having those extra resources because, again, they are so tied up with domestic violence. There is actually quite a long list in relation to what the former premier did. We are only six to seven months into what is happening in those terms. If you get a chance, talk to Allan Bailey, the guy who reports to the Premier's office. He has been going around talking to everybody, which has been good.

CHAIR: Excellent. Mayor, thank you so much.

Mr PURDIE: I am sorry I do not know, but for how long have you been the mayor? I know you have been here since you were seven.

Ms Slade: Four years. I went from zero to mayor. I was not a councillor.

Mr PURDIE: You are obviously quite passionate and I can see you are doing a great job. In your previous role, did you have a vision in terms of this crime? When did you start seeing crime escalate? You obviously have unique issues here that other communities do not have in terms of the Northern Territory and the alcohol bans. Is there anything else you can point your finger to as to when crime started escalating and maybe why?

Ms Slade: I definitely can. I grew up here. We did not lock the doors, did not lock our cars and we certainly did not—half the time—close our windows. We have gone full circle. About 15 or 20 years ago, if a family were playing up the community could ask them to leave. They would have nowhere to go, so a lot of times they would end up in Mount Isa. That has happened more and more over time. We had a couple of families from a community come in who were really playing up. We just saw overnight a huge spike in crime. In fact, they were robbing places during the day when everybody was at work. That was the first time we really had been impacted. I would say that it was 15 years ago, but it might have been 20 years ago.

What eventually happened is that these families moved on and we had a reprieve; it just stopped. Housing is buying more houses to meet the demand for social housing. We have seen a whole suburb now—Pioneer—turn into social housing. If I were a child now growing up in Pioneer, I would honestly feel like I was living in a third-world country. We as a council definitely have a responsibility to ensure urban renewal, but no-one should be living in some of these houses. They are that bad. I am happy to take you for a drive. I always fear that if someone took a wrong turn and went into Pioneer before they got to know Mount Isa, they may not stay.

Mr PURDIE: That is sad.

Mr HARPER: I hear your frustration, particularly in terms of agencies. It angers me, actually. I wrote it down. No-one wants to own that situation. You talked about a week of it. I have been through Pioneer a couple of times, so I know what you are talking about. I want to ask a question about

community fatigue and anger and frustration involved with this issue. It is about accountability; holding the kids to account. We have all of these good ideas about rehab and community-led responses after they come out, but a line in the sand has to be drawn, particularly when there violence is associated with crime. To put it in context, last year we passed—I asked this question of Mayor Hill—laws concerning breach of bail as an offence and the declaration of serious recidivist offenders. To date, I think about 46 have been declared as such by the courts. Do you believe that we should consider removing youth detention as a last resort for that cohort of serious recidivist offenders causing the community great angst?

Ms Slade: It is a good question. I think all children need boundaries. In fact, you will be told that if they cannot find their boundaries they actually do not feel safe. At the moment, we are not providing any boundaries, are we? They can offend, offend, offend and offend. Where is the boundary? What used to happen was that rather than detention people would say, 'This child needs to be taken somewhere where they can actually be rehabilitated with their entire family.' They need to be somewhere where they can continue on with their education and have counsellors come in.

One of the things I did after I had a young person come into my home was restorative justice. When he came into my home, he was very open and honest. He was only 14, but he said quite openly that he had been smoking drugs and drinking all day. His only regret really—and he was quite honest—was that he scared my son. He said, 'I really want to apologise for scaring the young fella.' He said, 'You should just be happy; I could have taken a lot more than I did.' When he started talking, I realised that he had lost his father very violently. He had lost a lot of members of his family who were very important to him. He was probably in huge trauma and not getting the support he needed. What do you do when you are so hurt? You try and numb the problem. Numbing means they often turn to drugs and alcohol.

When I listen to the things he said, I thought, 'Wow! My son goes home, he has a huge dinner, the world is almost over if there is no dessert, and he is in bed feeling safe at a reasonable time.' That is what all children should have. If you are not doing detention, you need to look at what you could do for these children to get them off the path they are on. What was disappointing about the restorative justice is I thought I could actually nominate, 'I want you to play sport for the whole year,' or, 'I want you to do this TAFE course,' but there were only a couple of things to pick from. Within a couple of weeks I received a letter to say he completed whatever it was he did. When you have that much trauma and you have this life of what is happening to you, is it enough to do a two-week course with some agency?

Where is the support for this kid? He is definitely going through the loss of so many people in his life. Where are all these people who are funded? Where are they all to help him? Don't get me wrong, I am not against going back to country and all that sort of thing, but we have to get the fundamentals right which is a safe place to sleep, food in their belly and education because one day they are going to be an adult and the education will change their life. Whatever you do with detention, they still need to get education and counselling and bring the family in because if the family are in the midst of huge addictions and DV, that child is going to come out and go home to a family that has not changed. The family have to come in at some point.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you very much, Ms Slade, for being here and thank you for the work you do for the community. I highlight what you said in answer to that question about the basics of education and kids knowing the system—you might have heard my question to the member for Traeger before—kids know the system. Why is education not making those kids go to school? It is a compulsory requirement for kids to go to school. You mentioned Centrelink and linking Centrelink to that. There might be other programs from a state basis that could be linked to that to ensure kids are going to school as well.

Ms Slade: Yes. I have talked to the education system. If that child has not entered the school system, how is anyone to know to look for them? Father Mick made a really good point about that zero to four age group. Who sees them? Who sees any child from zero to four? If you do not take that child to a doctor, there are four years that that child could be missing to the system. It is a really good point, but there are hundreds of kids who are not attending school. We have a few schools that would do anything to get them there: they have buses and they drive around and knock on doors. People are not up because they have been drinking all night and they are not answering the door, and the children have been wandering around all night so they are not getting up.

Mr McDONALD: You mentioned housing earlier and not building houses in other communities. Why is that the case? That is causing displacement of people from other communities?

Ms Slade: I do not want to speak for other communities, but from what I can understand, in some places there is not the capacity for them to fill all the paperwork out and do all the forms, but also they may be overcrowded where they are, and they are terrified that if they say, 'Hey, I am here, but I am overcrowding here and I need a house,' they then may be asked to move out of that house. Every time there is a commitment to build an extra 100 houses, they seem to target Mount Isa. There are people who want to live in Burketown and want to live on Mornington Island and want to live in their community. You need to build there. They are only growing. One of the issues for Burketown is—and I do not want to speak for Burketown—when they lose a family to Mount Isa because they need a house, that can impact on their school because you need so many children to have one teacher. If a family moves away and takes all the kids, that could impact on having that teacher resource. I believe the state government did address it a couple of years ago, but there are so many factors to that.

Another beef I have is in regards to services. If they come in to service Mount Isa, they have to give a commitment then to service the whole of the north-west, yet they are really struggling just to service Mount Isa. I have no problem with anyone being based here, but give them money to service certain areas, not try to service the whole entire north-west. It is almost impossible. That is the case with Health.

Father Mick made a very good point that there are a lot of children who probably have disabilities and they are undiagnosed. I know that Youth Justice and Child Safety is looking into this, but that is setting a child up to fail in school as well. If you have a disability and it is undiagnosed and you go to school, you are already feeling like a failure because you cannot keep up. These are the things where they need more support.

Mr TANTARI: Ms Slade, this is a question directed to you, but probably also to Chad as well. With interest, I note that you adopted a Mount Isa youth strategy in the middle of last year. It is interesting. Obviously, in consultation on that, you would have spoken to local youth. Out of interest, I would like to know what insights you gained from local youth regarding that strategy.

Ms Slade: Actually, the council did a really great job with that strategy. They not only brought in local youth, they brought in teachers and all the agencies. There were not too many people they did not bring in to do this strategy. They kept them all separate, too, which I thought was very good. Obviously some of the youth we talked to are not the ones offending. The hard thing was the opportunities for youth. They did not see a future here. They did not see a lot of things to do in Mount Isa, so they wanted more things to do. I think that was a big one, really, not having enough social infrastructure. It is not so much the little ones, it is those in the age group who are not an adult but not a kid. When I grew up here, we had a skate rink and we were always there. We had a big water slide park as well. Those have all gone. The council now has a water slide coming—it is on a boat. There will be one for the little kids and one for the big ones. We have missed out on funding for a couple of water parks in Camooweal and also in Pioneer. I think having a lot more for the kids to do, playing around in water during the day, could really help as well. The feedback was there is not enough in Mount Isa for them to do.

CHAIR: We have run out of time, but I do have a burning question. Basically everywhere we have gone, we have heard that the understanding is that detention is not a deterrent and it is just cycling around; it is not working. We have heard of suggestions from different organisations, but we have also heard from Robbie about alternative options for the courts in sentencing. With council being a key stakeholder and front facing to the community, have you put your thoughts to what you would see would be possible and suitable in that space, and who would be the coordinator or lead in that project?

Ms Slade: There are definitely councillors who have been advocating for a detention centre in Mount Isa. Again, I am not sure if that is the answer. I think rehabilitation. There are families who have addictions—alcohol, drugs and gambling—so to have somewhere where the whole family can go would be ideal. If you have ever talked to anyone who has had an addiction, it is not a five-minute fix. You can take months to a year. We do not even have a dry-out bed in Mount Isa, yet I could take you down to Burke Street now and we could probably find 100 people who are in the midst of a huge addiction with alcohol, and there is not one dry-out bed. What that means is if you start drying out personally, you can start convulsing; you can actually die. Imagine now that there is a person who is coming down from alcohol and needs to go to hospital, they will actually try to escape the hospital to get back out to have a drink. If you want to keep the family unit together, they need to go to rehab all together as a family maybe. It is tricky. It could take a year.

CHAIR: That is right. So a lot of thought has to go into bringing the community together. Everything we have heard so far from community is saying that it has to be community-led. It takes a village. It has to be place based because you cannot continue putting people off country a long way from home and keeping that connectivity and relationships. It has been a very consistent message. How that actually looks in practice is what we are trying to draw out.

Ms Slade: The Salvation Army is in control of the old cash store which is sort of like a rehabilitation centre. There are no Mount Isa people there. They are coming from elsewhere. That is a lot to do with not having dry-out beds. We definitely need somewhere where the whole family can go. I think that has been the common theme here today: things need to happen with the whole family, otherwise you will rehabilitate the child and he or she will go back to the same environment that probably got him or her on the street in the first place.

CHAIR: We are in a huge hurry. It has to be super quick, member for Currumbin.

Mrs GERBER: It is probably not a question that can be answered very quickly, so if you do not mind, Mayor, can I ask you the question and then if you want to take it on notice and provide the committee with a response at a later date. Will that be okay?

Ms Slade: Yes, sure.

Mrs GERBER: Firstly, I want to say that I think your community is very lucky to have you as an advocate for them. Your youth strategy is very admirable. However, I think that your community has been fundamentally failed by the government and the example that you gave around—

CHAIR: Member for Currumbin, I have been very clear. Either rephrase your question or I will be moving on.

Mrs GERBER: I said 'I think' and that is my personal view.

CHAIR: We are here to ask questions.

Mrs GERBER: Don't mention the elephant in the room at the moment!

CHAIR: We are here to ask questions, not to state your personal opinion. We are here to ask questions.

Mrs GERBER: My question is around the example that you gave in relation to Child Safety officers and your expectation that they would knock on that party house door and check on those kids. I would like to know from you what you would expect Child Safety to do in that instance and the steps that should be taken to ensure those children are educated, housed and safe. I am really happy—

Ms Slade: I can answer that quite quickly. I have met with Child Safety and said, 'Why aren't you doing that?' It is the red tape. You might have a child you have picked up who is eight years old. The police might identify that child. By the time that child is put through the Child Safety process, it can be a week or two weeks later. They do not have the capacity to go and knock on a door, unfortunately. That is where things could change. If it is not Child Safety's problem, maybe it is somebody else's problem. I will just say that I was very grateful for the state government's help over the last year, and I am very mindful that it is happening not just in Mount Isa; it is happening everywhere. However, I do think we are different in the fact that we are so close to the Northern Territory and that makes us a little bit different.

CHAIR: Mayor Slade and Chad, thank you so much. You have been fantastic. You do not mind if we have further questions we will send them through. There are no questions on notice. I wish you all the very best. Thank you again.

We will now begin the open floor session. Please forgive me, I am not being rude but we do have to be on a flight, so you are going to see us pack up quickly. If everyone can be mindful that there are other people who have registered to speak as well. For those who are speaking, if you have put in a submission, take it as read. You can always provide what you have written down to us as a submission. I invite Mr Karl Howard to the table.

HOWARD, Mr Karl, Private capacity

Mr Howard: Thank you for the opportunity to talk this afternoon. I have worked in the Northern Territory for the last 35-odd years. I have worked in the youth justice space. I have worked with Operation Flinders in South Australia and managed the new youth justice program based in Alice Springs. There seems to be a big need around cultural camps in particular. I have taken youths—male and female, as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous—out on country. That program seemed to work in the Northern Territory.

It is about having the appropriate NGO to facilitate or apply for funding. From my perspective the funding has been a big issue. We cannot seem to solve the issues within each electoral cycle. Every four years we have a change of government. We know that the government NGOs find it hard to acquit the money and then reapply for it. By the time the funding is reallocated there could be different priorities of the government of the day in terms of whether they want to be hard on crime and mandate prison sentences. There needs to be a balance from my perspective. The people who have spoken today have a very good idea of what is needed.

I have certainly experienced a lot of the policy and legislation. It does not generally work remotely from the east coast. A regionalisation strategy needs to be implemented. We know that from the Northern Territory government's local decision-making. I have worked with the department of the chief minister and I have worked with Price Waterhouse as a consultant on that. A 10-year strategy is too long. You need short-term implementation. The Closing the Gap targets have been going for 13 or 15 years. Out of the seven key policy or focus areas, only two have been met. The other five have failed dramatically. We see a lot of that intergenerational trauma being compounded.

Out of that, NGOs, government policy and legislation is always trying to catch up. When it comes to law enforcement and sentencing a lot of that is not aligned. In particular, a Western perspective does not really align with a cultural or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective. A multipronged approach is needed and we need to come from a grassroots perspective.

I live in Pioneer. I see it every day. My sister has lived here for well over 20 to 30 years. When I came back in 2015 I used to see the police lock down the whole street. I would drive in from the Northern Territory and see the police lockdown. Every car would get stopped for a breathalyser. We generally did not see kids on the street. They were in the backstreets doing what they were doing.

Once again, it is about resources. Aboriginal liaison officers are probably not used to the effect that they could be used. In particular, in the Northern Territory we have a very high intake of Aboriginal police liaison officers. We generally do not see that here or in the north-west.

It is about building relationships and engaging communities. Sitting on my balcony or going for walks in the morning between 6.00 and 6.30, I would see people coming home or kids going to bed. The NGOs or child protection services would drive up to the houses and beep their horn. There would be no response but they would tick a box—'Yes. We went to that place.' It is about value for money. KPIs or having a tokenistic approach need to be looked at with the funding model. We hear from Injilinj staff that funding needs to be proportionate and match the weighting of that service delivery.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr McDONALD: Karl, thank you very much. I hope you will put a submission in if you have not done so already. You obviously have a wealth of knowledge and your operational experience is great. It is one thing to have an idea. It is another thing to operationalise it. Can you tell me about this Alice Springs camp? What does that look like?

Mr Howard: There are two things on that. The organisation was South Australia based. Operation Flinders took the young people—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal kids, male and female. They were ex-military. We worked with the youth in the Flinders Ranges—seven hours out of Adelaide. We took them away from the fluoro lights where they did not have the peer pressure or the groups. They were able to leave their home and we would work on them for over 10 days.

Mr McDONALD: How many kids?

Mr Howard: Between 10 and 30, depending on the intake.

Mr McDONALD: Was it voluntary?

Mr Howard: It was voluntary and mandatory—court ordered. It can be both.

Mr PURDIE: It can be court ordered?

Mr Howard: It can be both, yes. From that, we implemented it in the Northern Territory. We worked with young people over on the Tiwi islands and at Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. Once again, a new government came in. The funding cycle ended and the program finished. The other good thing was that there was a priority to work with the family. The priority that the corrections minister had was to bring the family out and work with the young person and the family as well.

CHAIR: That is fantastic.

Ms BUSH: A lot of what you have said we have heard and I think we are really hearing. Local decision-making is so important. Having clear targets, a long-term strategy but short-term outcomes that we can measure and report on—we totally get that. Something that you said was interesting. A few people today have approached me and spoken to me about the relationship between law enforcement and locals, particularly First Nations people. A few people have mentioned that to me. If you are comfortable to say, what is the relationship like on the ground between locals and First Nations people and police? What is working or not working in that space?

Mr Howard: I have just come back from Darwin. The first thing that happened with the police is that I got pulled up. It was not good. It was not for speeding. From my perspective, it needs work. I used to do a lot of work for the Northern Territory police around cross-cultural training and engagement. I do not really see that here from what I have seen so far. It needs work. Their role is tied up in domestic violence, serious crime and drugs with the major crimes unit. A bit of work needs to be done with community engagement from my perspective.

CHAIR: Karl, thank you so much. Have you put in a submission?

Mr Howard: I will be putting one in, yes.

CHAIR: That is wonderful. We want to capture your details so that if we have any questions we can contact you. I do have questions but I am mindful of the time. We are happy to catch you online.

HARMAN, Ms Emma, Private capacity

CHAIR: I welcome Emma Harman to the table. You can say whatever you like. If we have time, we will ask questions.

Ms Harman: Thank you for calling me because I was itching up the back to talk. What I said that I was going to say in my email is not what I am going to say. I was going to have a whinge. I am the president of the chamber of commerce.

Mr PURDIE: Congratulations.

Ms Harman: Thank you. I was going to talk to you about the impacts of crime on the business community and the expense involved and the mental toll that it takes. I am quite happy to tell you more about that if you want to listen. Sitting up the back, I was reminded of an idea that has already been discussed—that is, creating a hub with a concierge service with all of the agencies. My imagination conjures up a large building such as the one in Pioneer—it is the old Woolworths building; it has been all sorts of things—where all of the agencies, whether they are NGOs or state government bodies or federal government bodies or whoever they are, have an office. There would be combined community spaces within this building and a concierge person or team who sit at the front desk.

I do not know how to fund it, but my feeling is that these people need to be funded externally from the state government, whether it become a council appointed role. It needs to be somebody who is not funded by the state government because all of these other bodies are. That body can then hold these people to account. When you are holding each other to account for the same bucket of money there is a conflict of interest there. I would like to see an independent person or body be that concierge.

That concierge person would then facilitate the engagement with the agencies so that there could be a holistic approach. We have heard time and time again that we need to talk to the family. We need to heal the family. We need to rehabilitate the family. If a young person presents to the concierge because they have just stolen a car, the concierge knows who is in the room. They know what services are available. Hopefully, we can minimise the double-ups and overservicing. If this agency has a bus and this agency has a bus, maybe we can just have one bus.

So this young fellow presents to the concierge because they have been naughty but then the concierge is able to refer them: 'This is the agency that can talk to dad about his domestic violence. This is the agency that can talk to mum about her gambling.' I am making it up but you know what I mean. 'This is the agency that can help you register your baby sister's birth. This is the agency who can help because your aunty died out on country somewhere and you have sorry business coming up and you need to get there.'

If we could do that, we would solve the silo effect that we have now where this agency is funded for this and that agency is funded for that. There might be double-ups and there might be gaps but we do not know what they are. My understanding too is that each group is funded: this body is funded from age 12 to 18; this group is funded from zero to five. Families are not made up of just 12- to 18-year-olds. Do you know what I mean? That is what I was going to say.

Mr PURDIE: I appreciate your passion and for being here. I have a problem with your model. Who then is ultimately responsible? After being on the road all week we have heard from all these people that kids are falling through the gaps. Without pointing any fingers, kids are falling through the gaps across the board. Communities and police seem to have been left to pick up the pieces. No-one is ultimately responsible.

I am concerned that if a concierge—I applaud you for putting forward this solution—engages all these services, what happens if that child still falls through the cracks and in 10 years time ends up at Cleveland? Still no-one is ultimately responsible for that child. The concierge did what they did. I think what you are talking about—the concierge concept—is great, but there needs to be someone who is ultimately responsible, whether that is the child safety department, the youth justice department or someone as a lead agency so that when that child falls through the cracks you can come back to that person and say, 'You were notified. Someone called the police. Someone asked for a welfare check, yet 10 years down the track this kid is at Cleveland and has not gone to school and has never had an assessment.'

Ms Harman: That is a very valid point.

Mr PURDIE: I just wanted to value add what you said.

Ms Harman: I think that this is a conversation that we have not had enough of.

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Mr McDONALD: It is the same thing. The concierge is Child Safety or Youth Justice doing their job.

Mr PURDIE: That person needs to be accountable.

Ms Harman: I am in business. I am not in community services. Efficiency and value for money is what I know about.

Mr PURDIE: It was a great suggestion.

CHAIR: I am mindful of time. It is good to have these conversations and hear the ideas. That is what we are here for.

Mr HARPER: They are brilliant concepts. It is almost like a nurse navigator in health. It gets the patient to the right treatment. A number of years ago in Townsville we set up the Strong Communities early action group and it takes us de-siloed. Basically, it has Child Safety, Youth Justice, police, Housing and everyone involved. I was of the understanding that that had been or is being established here in Mount Isa. I do not know if anyone in the room knows about that. I think it has the beginnings of work. Danielle knows about it. Perhaps there can be a conversation to see how that can build and stand up like it has in Townsville. It has been going for about six years in Townsville. It is replicated in Cairns. I think that is the model that might help. You are down the road on this. It is a good concept. That was a comment only.

CHAIR: Do you have a submission in?

Ms Harman: No, but I am writing one in my head.

CHAIR: You will get it to us?

Ms Harman: I will put it in an email, yes.

CHAIR: The types of things we would also like to hear about are the impacts to businesses but also around insurance, which becomes hugely expensive not only for communities. Anything that you can add in there about all of those impacts we would really appreciate. Thank you so much. Can you please wish the chamber all the best from us.

BOSHOFF, Mr Chris, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome.

Mr Boshoff: Thank you very much for coming up here and doing this because I think our community, as a lot of people have expressed, are very frustrated in a lot of ways. This is a huge issue. There are a couple of things that you probably all know already. In Mount Isa 24 years ago they actually did a document to try to work out the challenges going forward in the city, and issues involving youth crime was listed in the year 2000. This is something that is not new to Mount Isa. It needs to be addressed. I could go through and tell you the stats which showed that last year crime was up six per cent on previous years and youth crime is about 25 per cent of all crimes, but these are things we all know already. We have spoken about different models to try to address it. Putting someone in jail might not be the correct thing, but having some form of responsibility or deterrent needs to be there. About 80 per cent of kids who turn 18 do not offend because they realise now they are going to have to pay for this.

One of the problems that I did hear last night was that there is a huge backlog in the judicial system, in actually getting people to address the crimes they are alleged to have committed. Is it possible to have extra magistrates put on in Mount Isa? The extra magistrates, even if it is on a temporary basis, would get rid of the backlog so that when people are committing crimes they are not waiting a year to a year and a half to face those charges. For some of them, if they were incarcerated they would there be longer than the penalty for their crime would be. Could we have more magistrates put on to address that?

I would like to speak about deterrence. For families, at the moment if the kids commit a crime or are involved in that type of activity, money is pumped in to help them. It is almost like people doing the wrong thing are getting rewarded. Can we possibly look at a reverse of that and say, 'Listen if you do the right thing we will put funding behind supporting you and your family'? A lot of these are single mothers. 'Do the right thing, get your kids going to school and we have money to assist you with that process.' If others doing the wrong thing see extra funding—obviously money talks and bulldust walks—they might change the way they are approaching things, because they are going to get rewarded for good behaviour with their kids rather than bad.

Mrs GERBER: What is your background? You live in Mount Isa, obviously. Give us a bit of context.

Mr Boshoff: I arrived in Australia 16 years ago. I came straight to Mount Isa. I worked in business. I was the previous president of Commerce North West. I am now part of Regional Development Australia, from Townsville to Mount Isa. I am one of the board members. We look at housing, which has been raised here—how we can address the housing problem. We have looked at flat pack housing to try to ease the delays of getting things built. We will be talking to the Minister for Housing to see if we can get funding to get that over the line. For me it has been years of touring about the community to talk.

Ms BUSH: I do not have a question but more of a comment. What you have said today really reflects a lot of what we have heard. Trying to speed up that time between a young person being charged and the verdict and sentencing certainly helps in rehabilitation. We have a couple of pilots happening in Cairns and some different places now, trying to compress that time frame. Is that something you would support for Mount Isa—trying to shorten that time frame and the magistrates getting matters heard quicker?

Mr Boshoff: I fully support that. My daughter was a victim of crime in town. We went down the pathway of meeting that kid with my daughter. He went through why he did what he did. We found out that this kid was the same age as my younger son and they had a class together at school, but it took quite a while from the time this happened to when that conversation took place. That was actually instructed by the magistrate, so we think in Mount Isa one magistrates amongst what we are having is not enough.

CHAIR: You mentioned flat pack housing. I know that the mayor spoke about that, with the influx of people coming in. I am sure that somewhere today I heard there were houses literally sitting empty in Pioneer. Is that because the department has not spent the money to have them rejuvenated?

Mr Boshoff: The mayor could probably answer that better. I also worked for (indistinct) services at one stage, just for a brief period of time, and there is a big problem in that type of sphere where contractors to repair and rebuild are not really sufficient in town. The ones that are in town are extremely busy. This concept they were talking about, with flat packs, is not really supporting locals, which I do support, but you have to look at the bigger picture. We are talking about bringing teams in

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and putting up a house in six to eight weeks, from nothing to move in. You could adjust your model to having duplexes or what have you on the same block. We should just try to look at different ways to address the challenges we have in the regions, in rural Australia.

CHAIR: Thank you so much. We have run out of time. We wish you all the best for the year. Thank you.

BARWICK, Mr Phil, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome.

Mr Barwick: Thank you, everyone, for coming up here. It is great to see you all. I do not represent council, because council has already put in a submission. I am just speaking from my perspective as having been on council for eight years and also as a long-term local here in Mount Isa.

CHAIR: You already have a submission in?

Mr Barwick: No. I just want to make a couple of pertinent points, because a lot has been covered today and there are a couple of things I want to raise. I want to succinctly say a couple of things. In essence, we have this crime problem. The state have absolute control over all of that, in my view. You have the courts, the police, detention services, Housing, Justice, youth services, Child Safety, mental health, Education and liquor laws, which is the one I am going to come to.

I believe that this problem has been steadily increasing, as has been indicated. Around 2020 there seemed to be an escalation of the stealing of cars, the breaking in of houses and those sorts of things—the threatening of our community. At first the community expected the leadership—the council, mayor and councillors—to deal with this problem. My point is that I do not think the state took ownership of this early enough. I am not trying to cast aspersions. I work with the police. I work with all of these services. I know all of these people and I know that they were frustrated as well as we were. The point I am trying to make is that it took roughly two years before people started to realise it was not a council responsibility. There is nothing our plumbers and our loader drivers and all those people could do about youth crime—nothing. We are left out there. This is probably not right, but it seemed to me that the state was happy to let the local council leadership take the brunt of this when it is not something we can do anything about. I will not go on about that.

My last point about that particular item is that the liquor laws are a state responsibility. If we do not dry up the alcohol into this problem, we are not going to go anywhere. The kids who are running around on the streets now are just a symptom. If we just keep dealing with the symptoms, we are not dealing with the problem. As was mentioned earlier, the alcohol that has been going into the riverbed here and into those overcrowded houses is a big problem. It is a huge problem. There are drugs along with that as well, but the alcohol is something that is in our control more. I do not know if we are ready for an alcohol management plan here in Mount Isa, but somehow we have to dry up the alcohol into this problem.

As has been addressed quite a bit today, the families of the kids who are causing these difficulties—this car stealing and theft—need to be brought into this. They are running away from their own families into this life. I do not know how we do it, with all of the resources that the state has. I am sorry I do not have a solution for it, but the families certainly need to be brought to the table whenever there is any justice being dished out. Thank you for hearing me.

Mrs GERBER: Thank you very much for giving us your time and your advocacy for your community. It is very much appreciated. It might be a question for the mayor as well—I am not sure who is best to answer it—but I want more information around the early action group that has been established in Mount Isa. We visited the early action group in Townsville and heard about how they operate in terms of having all of the services—Education, Child Safety, Health—co-located in the one room and they only deal with a small cohort of children and they only deal with children who are low risk. I just want to understand how your early action group is working in Mount Isa. If you cannot answer it, maybe the mayor can take it on notice and give us some information.

Mr Barwick: I think that would be best. My portfolio is economic development. I know that we are working furiously to try to build the city, but at the same time the livability is crashing. That is the reason I am here.

Mr HARPER: Thank you for coming here today and articulating those points. Do we go stronger? This committee is tasked with looking at every issue around youth crime. Do we go stronger to fix it? What are your views?

Mr Barwick: I have given that some thought. I am not big on maximum justice for people because I know that there are often mitigating circumstances, as is the case with these kids, but do we need a town sheriff reporting to council who can do that or something, or a few deputies? I do not know. Certainly the kids have to go to school. They have to be made to go to school. The parents have to enforce that and make sure that happens, and we have to make sure that the parents are making sure the kids go to school. That is a really good starting point. I think we do need some more official intervention at that family level to get those things to happen.

CHAIR: Thank you so much and all the best for the year.

LIYANAGE, Mr Aubrey, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, Aubrey.

Mr Liyanage: Tourism is a big concern here because of the youth crime. On social media, it kept on spreading: do not come to Mount Isa. I am hoping that tourists will still come because there is big interest in Mount Isa. There are quite a few things that have happened in youth crime.

The hospital employs a specialist nurse from the Isle of Man. She came in with her 14-year-old daughter. The daughter was bullied at school. The kids came along and trashed this lady's home, fought with the girl and bruised her and bashed her up. That nurse gave it a bit of time but she decided to leave.

There have been quite a few incidents. One of my friends is a young girl. She came here. Rocks have been thrown at her window. Aboriginals next door have had big parties, screaming and carrying on for days and days so she is leaving too.

We live in teacher accommodation. My neighbours have been affected and I have been affected. The windows have all been broken. My neighbours had two cars stolen. They got them back but it takes a long time to get them back. These are the things. Last year caravans were stolen and cars were stolen. Something has to happen. It is really bad news.

I work for Meals on Wheels. I hear stories when I go around delivering meals. The mother and daughter in one house had to be shielded from the attacker because he was breaking all the windows. They got into the bathroom and stayed there until the police came. These things are happening here.

I am helping a little bit. I am joining PCYC and I am going to train youth with their driving skills. Something has to be done and I am doing something small to help. That is all.

CHAIR: That is fabulous, thank you, Aubrey.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you very much, Aubrey, for your advocacy. I was pleased to have a chat to you in the break. Thank you very much for what you are doing. Can you tell us about how the community feels at the moment about the deterioration here in Mount Isa and what we can do?

Mr Liyanage: Vigilante groups are not good because with that the offender can be attacked in a big way. We had crime spotters here. Father Mick and I gave our names and emails. Nothing happened. We were going to do something. There is nothing much you can do.

I think the police do a great job, but they are limited with the laws. One of the churches here has a youth night on Friday night. They minister to about 200 youth, which is great. It is on every Friday night. At least it is something. One of my friends was president of the Basketball Association. That is a place too, but it is too far away. There is nothing for youth. They need something to do.

Ms BUSH: Thanks so much, Aubrey, for coming along. I wanted to check something with you, if I can, as a local. The impression that I have from coming here is that people are really exhausted and fatigued and are looking for both some immediate relief and some long-term, sustainable change. It also seems to me that there are some really good people here who are wanting to be part of the solution as well. That was probably more of a comment than a question. Is that the sense? It sounds like, despite the tiredness and frustration, there is still a lot of willingness and capacity in this community to be part of that solution—together as a community.

Mr Liyanage: Yes. Father Mick, I suppose, would be the main person. I have worked with him a little bit with the multicultural association for the new people coming in, to stop people from leaving. I know the mayor said that as well. We need to bring them here and let them stay instead of leaving.

CHAIR: Aubrey, you said that the police are limited by laws. What do you believe that the police would need to assist them in terms of laws?

Mr Liyanage: A few things I have heard include that, at the Coles supermarket at the Shell service station, the staff have been told if there are youth coming and stealing then they just do not do anything. I have heard that the youth can go into a Shell service station, load themselves up with goods and the staff are told not to interrupt.

CHAIR: I am a bit confused, because you said that the police are limited by the laws. Is it that they are not calling the police to take action?

Mr Liyanage: I am not sure. I think they are limited in what they can do. It is age, too, isn't it? If they are under 17, what can you do? They go in to the watch house and they are released the same day.

CHAIR: Thank you, Aubrey, and all the best to you.

WHITE, Mrs Lyn, Private capacity

CHAIR: Thank you, Lyn. I know that you have had a long day. You have been with us for the whole day.

Mrs White: That is okay. I am going to be a bit direct, if that is okay. Youth crime in Mount Isa and particularly the recidivist youth present a significant challenge to public safety. The wellbeing of every individual in this community is at risk. A comprehensive approach to addressing the issue statewide is absolutely required. Unless you enforce a multicultural and multifaceted mandatory strategy that will encompass prevention, intervention, rehabilitation and reintegration, that risk is not going to go away.

What qualifies me to speak about this issue? I have worked for 20 years in social services in Mount Isa in education residential facilities, out-of-home care, residential facilities run by Child Safety, giving money to NGOs—and that is a broken system, by the way. I managed a residential that had an over \$1 million budget for four children, and those children are the ones in and out of detention. I am now working in NDIS supports. I am a full-time self-employed NDIS worker supporting a ragtag family of eight. I am a permanent foster mum and a respite carer. My family has cared for newly released offenders, young people involved in youth justice, and family and friends with disengaged youth from school. You have youths in this town who are not even finishing primary school—forget secondary school. Do you want to know why? It is because their family never completed high school.

This is the third time I have sat in front of one of these hearings—the third time. Why do you keep coming to somewhere like Mount Isa and asking the same damn questions and not doing anything about it? You were provided last time with some real strategies. Local people who have sat in the last three meetings that I have sat in have given you some solutions and you have done nothing. All of you are guilty of child abuse. Like it or lump it, when you do not have consequences in place that a magistrate can give to a child then that is called child abuse. Remember the biblical saying: spare the rod, spoil the child. That is not about assaulting some child; it is about discipline.

When we have families that do not have the capacity or the capabilities to discipline their children or bring their children up in safe environments then it is up to the state government, because that is whitefella law. You also have Indigenous organisations that are saying, 'Let us bring back in our lore—blackfella lore, L-O-R-E.' That is what they presented to you at the last meeting and you all just went, 'Oh, that's a great idea. Fantastic! We'll take that on notice.' What has actually happened? Where has it gone to?

Without consequences that actually cost the young people, nothing is going to change. The very basics that you guys could implement and probably one of the cheapest options with the youth is 'three strikes and you're out': give them a bracelet. People go, 'Oh, that's deprivation of liberty. We can't do that.' Have you ever thought of the other side of the argument? You actually then give that young person a perfectly good excuse to say, 'Gee, brother, I can't come tonight. They're going to know I'm there.' That is their excuse for not joining in on some crime spree. That is what some of them need.

It seems that the state government has got to the point—and it is not just the state government's fault; it is society's fault—where we seem to have put criminals before victims. That has to stop. Without a mandatory law reform that says 'three strikes and you're out' or 'you have to go to a camp' or 'you have to do something', there is no way you are going to change it. When you have young people coming through the system who do not even know how to look after themselves, telling them, 'You have the choice, bub: you can go and join in with the arts and crafts session that Youth Justice is doing over here or Save the Children has this little community program going over there', if it is not mandatory then it will not work.

I happen to disagree with you guys doing anything to do with a step-down or reintegration program with large numbers. Large numbers will not work. You are just going to create another toxic environment. You need small groups with culturally appropriate elders who can take them and talk to the kids and give them a sense of pride in themselves, because they are not getting it from their families. Then you work with the families. If the families do not have the capacity or the capability to undertake education or employment then give them a dedicated care worker. You are spending \$500,000 per youth. I can tell you that 10 years ago in the out-of-home care system it was more than \$250,000 per child. I do not know what the costs are now. I have been out of that sector for about four years, but I would say it is probably around the same cost.

I have stood in front of magistrates and had magistrates ask me, 'Why is it that that kid got out of Cleveland yesterday and he's back in front of me today? Why didn't he stay home last night?' I said, 'Because I can't lock the door.' My staff cannot stand in front of the door because then we will

be charged—by Child Safety, by the way. Child Safety will open a standard of care report against you and say, ‘You got in the way.’ I have personally seen Child Safety staff return a heightened child straight from court. The child walked into that building and started assaulting staff, but when my staff used protective measures to get that child to calm down and save another staff member they had a standard of care report opened against them.

If you want to talk about failures, look within your own departments. Listen to the people in this room who can give you some real solutions. Obviously you all give a damn or you would not have put your hand up to do what you are doing, but do not come back in another three years and ask us the same questions, because I can tell you: I was not going to come today. I was going to send you a report that said, ‘This is bullshit,’ because that is what it feels like. Are we passionate? Yes. Do we care? Absolutely. This is our town. These are our kids. That is all I have to say.

CHAIR: Thank you, Lyn. I hear your frustration, but I can reassure you that we did not come here—and I definitely did not agree to take on the position of chair of this committee—just to do a tick and flick.

Mrs White: Can I tell you: that is what we were told last time, and the time before.

CHAIR: Well, can I say: that was not me, and as the only Independent in Queensland I take what I do and how I do it very seriously. What I can promise you is that along this whole journey we have been listening to every submission and we hear what everyone is saying. Some of it is difficult to comprehend when we are hearing what needs to be done and the logistics of how to make it happen, including around those small therapeutic detentions within communities. We have heard constantly that it has to be community-led, that it cannot be—

Mrs White: It has to be community-led and it has to be led from within the Mount Isa people who are sitting in this room today—people who have given their lives from this community. You have aunties and uncles and elders sitting here who absolutely have bled for their children, but nothing has happened. Three years ago we were at the council building, but nothing has happened and the crime rate is worse.

CHAIR: Please understand that I am desperate, as is every single person sitting at this table, to assist. We are not here because we are ticking a box.

Mrs White: Can you explain to the community realistically—no bullshit—what you guys can make happen within the next six months?

CHAIR: We will be doing an interim report. We want to have it out before the end of March. We are not taking the full length of the inquiry—

An audience member interjected.

CHAIR: Please. We were given until the end of this term—so basically September. We will be doing an interim report before the end of March with a series of recommendations, because we understand the frustration, we understand the urgency and we understand the angst. We understand that everyone wants to get onto what can be done right now. We have also heard constantly about the cycle of detention and reoffending. We have to address safety but ensure we do not create further problems for the future. That is what we are trying to drill down to. I know that members are desperate to ask questions.

Mr McDONALD: Lyn, thank you for your passion. Many communities across the state are equally frustrated about the different processes that should have happened earlier. We are charged with looking at the whole system. We have on the committee the shadow minister of police, the shadow minister for community safety and youth justice, a former officer in charge of police and a high-ranking police officer looking, listening and hearing, because we want to make a difference. I hope that the government listen to our recommendations.

CHAIR: We are bipartisan. We have both sides represented here. That is why this is very different from normal committees. This is different from the previous hearings. That is what we have to take forward. We cannot take forward a standard report and recommendations. It has to be agreed to by both sides; otherwise, the politics keep playing out and we have to see an end to that.

Mrs White: It keeps going back and forth.

Ms BUSH: I think we have seen a healing. I have been out here a couple of times to hear about victims and blue cards. I am not trying to justify it, but I want you to know: when we have come out and listened, we have come away with lots of recommendations. Some go as far as we personally want and some do not. There are processes that are frustrating to us, too. While we can secure the funds to come and do this process, we do not get funds to come back and tell you what we have done with it. That is very frustrating for us, because things have happened.

Mrs White: Like what?

Ms BUSH: If you write to me, I am happy to give you a summary myself, personally.

CHAIR: Lyn, I want to thank you. I am looking for the one person who was missing before. Has Gemma managed to come back to the room?

Mrs White: I do not think she has. I know Gemma. Gemma was actually a victim of crime twice over. She has a very tragic story. She was a child brought up in care, did residential care as well. She has a husband with a brain tumour, passing away. She has had her vehicle stolen twice and nothing has come to help her out. She is a mum of little kids. She has a very tragic story. I will get in contact with her and encourage her to put in a submission.

CHAIR: Please do.

Mrs White: Without the state government bringing in mandatory laws—and they have to be mandatory—you cannot expect these young people to change. They face disengagement from education, from employment, from mental health and from health. Try getting a kid in out-of-home care to get a check-up when they have an infection. It is impossible. They do not have to go because they do not trust the system. They have a disconnection from their own culture so they have no pride in themselves. We rely on you to make the rules. You need to come together on this to save the children, because they are the future of this country. You need to give them the strength to make a positive impact.

Mr HARPER: What are those mandatory laws that you want? What do they look like?

Mrs White: I think it should be mandatory to participate in programs that can help.

Mr HARPER: Court ordered?

Mrs White: Court ordered—definitely. And do you know what? Three strikes. Everybody is entitled to make mistakes—absolutely. We heard that earlier around blue cards. Everybody is entitled to make a mistake. If you make a second mistake, you have to be questioned about it. If you make a third mistake, that is your choice. There are good programs in this town that want to support people. You have to make these children go and give them the opportunity. When you have a kid that does not even know how to make a bed, have a shower and clean their teeth, you have to take them back to the basics. You have to put them in very small groups with caring people who can show them the way forward and give them the opportunity to grow and be productive members—for themselves, for their family, for their community and then for their country.

CHAIR: We have heard in hearings and in submissions that short programs are not enough.

Mrs White: No, they are not. Short programs are not going to work. You need dedicated local people who will walk alongside a family for years—and not just one child. If the mother is coming in and saying, 'I can't keep little Jimmy home. He's already gotten involved with this and this,' where are their dedicated supports—the wraparound services? We all agree with wraparound services, but when little Jimmy is starting to step out of line, where are the consequences for him? If mum or dad is walking in and saying, 'I need help,' where is the help for them to come into that and get little Jimmy back on the path? That is for Indigenous and non-Indigenous families, by the way.

CHAIR: Lyn, thank you so much. You have been invaluable. That concludes this public hearing. I want to thank everyone again. We hear you. I trust that you will put some faith in us and that you will keep an eye out for our interim report in March. If anyone would like to put in another submission, please go to our webpage. Submissions are open until 1 March. I thank our Hansard reporter, Bonnie. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I wish everyone a good afternoon. May we move forward towards solutions. I now declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 2.41 pm.