



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**  
11th Assembly  
**Select Committee on Youth Suicides in the NT**

**Public Forum Transcript**  
9.10 am, Friday 2 December 2011  
Litchfield Shire Council, Bee's Creek

**Members:** Ms Marion Scrymgour, MLA Chair, Member for Arafura  
Mr Michael Gunner, MLA, Member for Fannie Bay  
Ms Lynne Walker, MLA, Member for Nhulunbuy  
Mr Peter Styles, MLA, Member for Sanderson  
Ms Kezia Purick, MLA, Member for Goyder

**Witnesses:** Derrick Tranter, Litchfield Council  
Russell Anderson, Litchfield Council  
Dianne Jackson, Sattler Christian College  
Neil Wright, Cornerstone Christian Fellowship  
Ian Fleming, Cornerstone Christian Fellowship  
Stuart McMillan, Moderator, Living Water Uniting Church  
Pastor Sharon Orook, Baptist Bush Church/ the Gathering Enc.  
Marilyn Morris, Community Recreation Officer, Coomalie Council  
George Kasperek, Humpty Doo Scouts  
Bev Garside, Chaplain, Bees Creek School  
Charity McAleer, Wellbeing Team, Taminmin High School  
Deb Russell, Wellbeing Team, Taminmin High School  
Erin Evans, Wellbeing Team Taminmin High School  
Penny Kellaway, Wellbeing Team, Taminmin High School  
Beverley Ratchi, Chairman, Taminmin College Council  
Miriam McDonald, Principal, Taminmin High School

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you all for coming to the committee's public forum today and we appreciate all of you with taking the time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you.

Today, just to give you some indication to-date we have received well over 40 written submissions and we have heard certainly in our travels from a wide-range of organisations and individuals that have been affected by suicides. Public hearings, we have held in Darwin, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Nhulunbuy more recently and further hearings we are going to reprogram further hearings in Darwin in early February. We have got Katherine and the Tiwi Islands early next year.

This afternoon the committee we will holding a youth forum because I think when we look at statistics across the board there is this cohort of youth so we are certainly looking forward Kezia, Lyn and myself to having this forum this afternoon with youth and to get their views and their comments and to have the discussion with them.

The purpose this morning is to ask you is what you see as the current and emerging issues in the rural area and to hear your stories and one of the things that we have certainly said very clearly is that the issues of suicide, whether completed or attempted is not just an Indigenous issue and that these are issues that affect everybody across the board whether you are Indigenous, non-Indigenous or where you live and it is not associated with socio-economic factors either.

So we are certainly very keen and working with Kezia to come to the rural area, talk to people, to have a look and to take on board your comments and have this discussion.

This is a formal hearing of the committee. I think whilst we can sit behind a desk, I think it is more important and less threatening if we sit in a circle and have the discussion. There will be a transcript that we will produce after this meeting and it will be made available to all participants of the meeting. You can have a look at whether what has been recorded is according to what you said if at any time during that proceeding you feel that evidence or discussions you want to have with the committee you do not want it to be heard in public. You can at anytime notify me to have your evidence heard in private, so we will take it and make it an in-camera discussion and when that occurs your discussion will not be uploaded to the website, it will be evidence that will just be purely for the committee's use in terms of our deliberations but it will not be made public.

I will ask each of you as we are talking, whilst we will try and keep this as informal as possible and try and keep the conversation flowing, if before you speak, state your name and the capacity in which you appear ...

**PERSON UNKNOWN:** Each time?

**Madam CHAIR:** Sorry, as we are talking I do not want you to state the capacity in which you appear, but your name would be helpful just to assist Hansard in the recording.

My name is Marion Scrymgour; I am the Chair of the Youth Suicide Committee. I am the member for Arafura and my electorate takes in all of Western Arnhem Land across to the Tiwi Islands.

**Ms WALKER:** Lynne Walker, I am the member for Nhulunbuy in North East Arnhem Land, and it takes in not just the township of Nhulunbuy, but through to Elcho Island, Yirrkala and all of the Laynhapuy and Marthakal Homelands.

**Ms PURICK:** I am Kezia. I am the member for Goyder, as you should know, and we also have from my side of politics, Peter Styles, who is on this committee, but he could not be here this morning. I think he is coming a bit later.

**PERSON UNKNOWN:** Yes, sure.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes, he is going to try and come.

**Ms PURICK:** He is the member for Sanderson, but he has a very keen interest in this because for most of his career he was a school-based constable out in all those high schools in the northern suburbs, and he has three young children himself, so he has a very keen interest in trying to understand what the issues are across the Territory.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The other member of the committee is Michael Gunner who is the member for Fannie Bay, an inner Darwin seat.

As you can see all members of the committee come from various areas, but we are part of this committee because we all have a commitment, both personally and professionally, to ensure that we get the best outcome, not just for ourselves as politicians or for government, this is about getting outcomes for people on the receiving end of those systems.

Thank you very much for coming, and if any of you want to start or – we could go around.

**Ms PURICK:** I might just say a few words.

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms PURICK:** I know most of you, but we know all about the youth suicide and the high rate in the Northern Territory compared to the rest of the country, and statistically we know that young Aboriginal men are suiciding more than anywhere else in the country, probably the world, I do not know,. But, what showed up in research I was doing it, and it was actually thanks to Sharon's daughter, Steffa, who did a report and in that report ...

**Mr CROOK:** Reeves Report.

**Ms PURICK:** Reeves Report – she had done a whole lot of research from all sorts of places, which I used in parliament and I thanked her for that, but it showed up that in the rural area, and I define the rural area as down to Adelaide River and Pine Creek and around, there is a high suicide rate. That is pure statistics data. Then we heard from the Police Commissioner, which is not public information, that there were some 470 attempted suicides in the Northern Territory, which they record, and there was a whole lot through the Darwin and the rural area as well. They are the people who actually did not manage to kill themselves. For some reason it seems to be a high level and then there seems to be what I consider to be a very high level for attempted suicides; hence coming out here and talk to your kind of groups and constituents to find out what is happening, and what can we do.

So, over to you.

**Ms CROOK:** I am the pastor for the Baptist Bush Church and the CEO for the Gathering Corporation. I just fill Marion in, in case she does not know. We service Berry Springs, Marrakai, Humpty Doo, and we also work in Palmerston, and we are also starting to work in Batchelor, mainly handing out food parcels, but we do intense mentoring and counsel referrals, and we do social groups with kids. We have a boxing club and a fitness club.

At the moment, I am working with seven people who are suicidal. One person has just recently attempted. Out of that there are two adults, and the rest are children. The youngest one who attempted is 13 years old, non-Indigenous. About three weeks ago, one of the people we had worked with a couple of years ago, he did some trades training with Indigenous -----9:19:30 school, committed suicide.

Our group, we have got about 30 main volunteers, and then we have other volunteers from that. So, we have got a large database. We do a lot of work with headspace. We had an Indigenous guy from Mental Health come out and show us suicide profile, particularly targeted for Indigenous people, going through the cultural issues, and we are pretty familiar because we have got very large Aboriginal families that we deal with on the cultural side of things. We also had a Mental Health social worker come and go through the volunteers to try to educate them on suicide prevention and we have just recently; two of us have done the ASIST program, which is headspace, which was really good.

They are now coming out in the new year and they will do a four-hour workshop for about 15 of our key volunteers and that is sort of a start.

We have been screaming about it for quite a long time because we have been aware of the suicide rate; most of the suicide rate, a lot of it, is directly related to sex abuse and then, of course, it is accentuated when drugs and alcohol and things like that come into it; so sex abuse is the thing.

We have found Ruby Gaea to be really good in the past and I do not think they have the funding now but previously - there was one particular young girl, there was a couple of copycat suicides, excuse the terms of this, it is just the terms, and one girl identified her. We found out that, yes, it was sex abuse, we got Ruby

Gaea involved and they have very good psychologists who helped to stabilise her and then we had to remove her from the Northern Territory.

**Ms PURICK:** And she was someone from out this way?

**Ms CROOK:** Yes, yes she was actually a Taminmin High School student because we are in a prime location. So, we get the people - the people we get and the kids that we get - are the kids who do not normally go to school and, if they do go to school, they disrupt it. You know their parents - how it works with us is that the people come for food, we build up a relationship with them over, it can be over years, and then the kids come to us because we have a lot of social events. You know, I have got one kid who has been self-harming and has attempted suicide; he is about 22, so he is not really a teen, he is a young adult, and he uses all our music equipment.

He has our drum kit, so we are doing these sorts of social activities and things with them. We did have a Trades Training and Mentoring Program. It took a couple of years to initiate which you, Marion, endorsed and it never took fruition. We showed it to industry service and training and they took it onboard because we were not a registered RTO but that sort of - with the men in particular, that sort of intense mentoring - where you get them out of bed. Suicide is not a singular problem, it is a multiple, very complex thing, so you have got to get your individuals - we did this on a trial basis and it was quite successful - mind you, I am just thinking in saying that, one person from that trial basis - well, two of them - are now dead through suicide because we did not follow it through. Well, maybe not, but you know what I mean.

So, they have to have the intense mentoring, they have to have job training, and then they have to actually have certified accredited certificates where they actually get jobs, but it is a long-term thing.

All of the government things that we have come across is only three to six months and, for suicide prevention, you have to look at a minimum of 12 months, because it is a whole family thing. So, I do not know, I have got more to say, but someone else might like to.

**Madam CHAIR:** We can have a continuous discussion about some of this. I would like to maybe - if we go to each person and you want to each have an opportunity to broadly go through some of the issues about why you are here, and who you are representing, and then we can open it up to questions from the committee.

**Mr WRIGHT:** I am Neil Wright from the Cornerstone Christian Fellowship, the Baptist Union Northern Territory, and we are currently meeting at the Lutheran School, Good Shepherd, on Whitewood Road, and looking at getting some land pretty soon granted, so we can build.

I guess really for me this is a sort of an exploratory meeting in a way, to find out what is going on. I am not that aware of what services are available and things like that at this stage; however, part of, I guess, our church's mission is that we could be useful in the community, not just in Christian ways, but practical help ways as well. We really want to use our church site as a base for a lot of things. One of the first plans we have, as time goes and we get enough money etcetera, is to actually open up the hall on a two-day-a-week basis to youth within the rural area as an after school youth thing - a little similar to what Sharon is doing out at the Bush Church - just to be somewhere they can come that can be a positive environment for them.

So I have had a little to do with some kids mainly at Marrara Christian College and, generally, from the Indigenous communities - with kids there who know people who have suicided, etcetera. It is a little eye-opening, I guess, how many there were because, obviously, it affects their communities in a really big way.

I guess, on my part, I would just like to really find out what we can do - not so much what you guys can do, but how we can help you in what we do. Apart from that, I really cannot give too much more input.

**Ms WALKER:** Can I just comment on that?

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms WALKER:** Neil, the point you are raising is really valid. What we have learned from the hearings that we have held to date is, whilst we know there are limited resources dedicated to issues affecting youth, what we found in a couple of places we have been to is the resources are not connected.

**Mr WRIGHT:** Yes.

**Ms WALKER:** Somebody might be out here doing this, somebody might be out here doing this. In some communities they seem to be well connected and, in others, they are not. It is just how do you bring those resources together to ensure you are getting the best value; that you are working collaboratively and not duplicating things - going off on a tangent. So the point you have raised is very valid. We will probably hear more about that this morning about where that connection is amongst the various stakeholders.

**Madam CHAIR:** And most of the stakeholders – you are right, Lynne, and you are right as well, Neil - is we have yet to come across any provider or stakeholder that is not caring. Everyone wants to do everything. It is how do we join everyone together and try. You are absolutely right; we do not have the answers. That is why we are on this journey; to listen and to pull that together. It is not just about the Northern Territory, it is also about the federal government. That is one of our keen interests; to ensure the federal government, with all the mental health and wellbeing funding that is there federally - a lot of that goes to the eastern seaboard and we do not get our fair share up here, even though there are organisations that are a bit disconnected, there is still a number of things that need to be done. Do you want to add anything to that?

**Mr WRIGHT:** Can I comment just on one thing? I guess I think that obviously suicide is the end of problem. I am very keen to get in on the 'before that happens' side. While, obviously, treatment is fantastic, but if we can prevent it, it would be better. So, I see it as how can we build kids up, and families and communities up to really ...

**Ms WALKER:** To build that resilience.

**Mr WRIGHT:** Yes.

**Ms WALKER:** So, you are looking at the prevention as opposed to the postvention.

**Mr WRIGHT:** Yes, that is right because, in the end, that is what you want. You want to solve the problem, but you cannot solve the problem by reacting to the end result. It has to be ...

**Ms WALKER:** Yes, certainly.

**Mr WRIGHT:** ... where are we going wrong as a society, community – whatever - that is making that a valid option? Saying that is all right or – not that it is all right, but just we are going to get to that place because of how we are.

**Ms PURICK:** Just on what Lynne said, the best example is Alice Springs - 35 groups delivering youth services, apparently.

**Mr WRIGHT:** Yes, that is a lot.

**Ms PURICK:** And we have heard similar things ...

**Madam CHAIR:** No apparently; there is still ...

**Ms PURICK:** They were – oh, that is right, the money. Similar probably – I mean we live in Nhulunbuy, the smaller the community, the less that happens - or the smaller the town. The same as what you are saying; if you are looking at it strictly from a business point of view, it is not efficient or effective for you to be setting up a drop-in centre - and then you set up a drop-in centre, and you set up a drop-in centre. Clearly, that is what children and young people - they want it, because they are very social. We are all social animals. It is like trying to find out exactly what is out in these areas that is contributing to the issue. I am a great believer and a firm advocate of contributing factors. As you said, a person killing themselves is the last thing; however, what has happened all along here to contribute to it. Families, of course, are one of those key contributing factors.

**Madam CHAIR:** We do not have any research in the Northern Territory that looks at completed suicides. What has happened with that individual on that journey to where they have completed? Was that individual in the attempted cohort six months or 12 months ago? Where did that young person fall through that gap? You are right, we should not be looking at postvention and putting all our resources towards that, we should be working with families to try to get that resilience.

**Ms PURICK:** The other thing too, on that, Marion, is people tend to think of it is an urban problem; however, there is data all around the country, particularly country Victoria, New South Wales or wherever, the more rural you go the proportion goes up, specifically with men. I have my own ideas as to why that happens - isolation, the means. Farming people have guns, swords, daggers and tractors and whatever and isolation - and we will probably ask some questions about why young fellows do not talk.

**Mr FLEMING:** My name is Ian Fleming, also from Cornerstone Christian Fellowship. A little like Neil in the sense I am here fully in support of Neil and, hopefully, to pick up the bits and pieces he misses. In a sense, it is a fact finding mission. I am also interested to follow through with doing whatever we can as far as ongoing research and work with youth suicide in particular.

My major contact with the whole problem is through Kormilda College - I am a house parent there. Likewise as we were saying, one of the things that concerned me was there seemed to be a lot available, but as far as health etcetera and counselling was concerned, everything focused on the event rather than the process, as we were just saying, leading up to that event.

One of the things that always struck me as interesting, and I do not know if there is any research available on it, was not just the lead-up to the suicide and that is the end of it, there is a knock-on effect, almost a contagion that goes with it. Dealing with the young boys I was dealing with, it was the event, the attempt, or even the talk of suicide generally came out of a sense of frustration, an inadequacy, an inability to deal with a particular problem, either real or imaginary. Unfortunately, when it comes to a suicide event, that not only brings all the issues of the group, it also brings up the issues of grief and emotion etcetera with other family, friends and members of the community who, in turn, do not have the capacity to deal with those emotions. They do not know how to handle the situation and find themselves then working down that path towards another event. It is almost like a contagion, a knock-on effect.

I would be really interested to see what, if any, research has been done on that. In essence, that path from event to follow-on events, I imagine, from talking with these young fellows, would be very similar to the path before the event. That could very well be instrumental in breaking that chain of events if you can address that issue of equipping young people in particular to handle the problems, to cope with them.

**Ms PURICK:** Can, I ask Neil a question? I thought you got land, or are you still trying?

**Mr WRIGHT:** It is not official thing. We have the e-mail saying it is happening.

**Ms CROOK:** Slowly.

**Mr WRIGHT:** Yes. It has been surveyed and marked and everything and is just waiting for official notification.

**Madam CHAIR:** Ian, you are right about that. The research is so important because it is only through that research we are going to get that evidence and have our services more honed in to get that effect because too many fall through the gap, and we do not take that time to have a look, particularly where you have got those clusters occurring and what is happening within those areas.

**Mr FLEMING:** It often seems that we are applying dressings to the wound when we would have done better to prevent the wound in the first place.

**Madam CHAIR:** That is right.

**Mr FLEMING:** But it is not until the wound occurs that we are aware of the problem.

**Ms CROOK:** This research in this McKenzie's Report we were given where there is a much higher chance of suicide if there has been a previous suicide in the family, and I agree with you, especially in Indigenous culture, Aboriginal culture, afterwards they do not like to talk about it and the people are not equipped to deal with the grief. I think government is quite often looking at the suicide, but like you say, it goes on, so if they actually did some – especially with the old people, with the elders, with the traditional owners - grief counselling, some proper, really solid grief counselling and give them means to cope with it, then they can hand that down, at least, which will help to stop that flow-on.

**Mr McMILLAN:** Stuart McMillan; I am a local pastor, Living Water Uniting Church at Humpty Doo, but this year and for the next two years I am the Moderator of the Uniting Church as well, which means that the

whole of the Territory is my territory at the moment. I was at Gapuwiyak last Saturday and I move around your areas, Lynne, as well as the Kimberley and the Pitjantjatjara lands of South Australia.

For the purposes of this committee the Territory certainly is part of our area; so I have a particular focus with respect to the rural area - I have lived and worked here for 30 year - but also a broader focus in terms of the Northern Territory.

I was pleased – Julie said to me before that Erin Evans will be here at some stage for this hearing. Erin is the nurse at Taminmin, and has a wealth of experience. She is just finishing at Taminmin, I believe, and will be working at RDH, but I think in a mental health role, and she certainly has a wealth of experience with the sorts of issues that we are talking about.

I am trying to pick up some things that have been said before so I am part of the discussion. Kezia was saying about the number of attempts that the police had spoken about and, as we all know, they are the attempts that are recorded and there are a lot of other attempts that go unrecorded.

**Ms PURICK:** That is right, because they must be the ones where the police are involved, but then there could be ones where just the family works it out and finds out and the person does not obviously succeed.

**Mr McMILLAN:** So as bad as the figure is, as sad as the figure is, it is probably a lot more. Suicidal ideation, I believe, is a lot higher than the figures reported.

**Madam CHAIR:** Stuart, you are right, and that is what a lot of the mental health people are saying, there are so many that are not part of the system, that the health system, the police – I mean, there are people, but no one ...

**Mr McMILLAN:** Well, for years we have known fellows run cars into trees and we record that as an accident.

**Ms CROOK:** Yes, drug overdoses, accidents.

**Mr McMILLAN:** Yes, lots of those sorts of things. I just make that point by way of discussion of the data.

Lynne talked about resources and connection and was speaking about the point that Neil had made. One of the things that used to happen, and Sharon might know, or Kezia might be aware, years ago, maybe 2006-2007, there used to be a regular meeting at Palmerston Town Council offices for those people who were stakeholders or working with youth within the Palmerston/rural area. There was also a meeting that happened in town for Darwin-based service providers, and it was a really good point of communication and contact. I think the youth worker with the Palmerston Council used to organise that meeting, coordinate it, and make it happen, but people from the school, counsellors, people from Education, people from church groups, YMCA; all these myriad of providers that are doing something would be there. I would not always be there every time, but it was a good point of contact, a good point of seeing what different people are doing, and what services are being provided; what means are there.

I can remember particularly where Palmerston Council had an allocation funds for the rural area and it was the week before Christmas that anybody in the rural area even found about it; they had \$20 000 sitting there for youth to be used over the Christmas, school-break period, and we found out about it a week before Christmas. We had to try to get people onboard, get people to provide services and all of that, so the planning and coordination was just not there. So, that type of coordinating meeting - and we have had that in other ways across the Territory for different issues - particularly for youth, that is an excellent way of having that good communication between people.

**Ms CROOK:** That does still happen actually, but one of the major concerns - it is effective, but it is not as effective as it could be - because the meetings are during the day and the youth are at school or at work. So, you are not getting a major input from the amount of youths that you could and you are not getting a real cross-section of youth.

**Madam CHAIR:** Who facilitates that Sharon; is it Palmerston City Council?

**Ms CROOK:** Palmerston City Council.

**Madam CHAIR:** So, has that been put to the council to maybe change its time?

**Ms CROOK:** I am not sure. I know, because Stephie used to be on it, she has gone to it before, and she said it is very frustrating because it is really hard to get to and I think my eldest boy, because he was in Palmerston, he used to go to it too.

It was a very good meeting, but it was not actually representation.

**Madam CHAIR:** There are - and I should have said in the outset - there are issues, if they come up at any time, the committee can raise those issues and bring them to the attention of different providers. There is also - you have raised issue of land and that is what I said to Kezia ...

**Ms PURICK:** I do not even think that is even in my electorate; I think it is in my neighbour's electorate, but that is all right, I can beat him up.

Stuart, I see that where the church is, there is also an op shop, and there is a big thingy where people go for cup of teas on Wednesday or any day. Do you want to tell the committee about that because I reckon that is very successful; that is a bit more for the elderly?

**Mr McMILLAN:** It is mostly adults that engage with that, except on weekends - Saturday mornings, there is a lot of young people there.

**Ms PURICK:** You go to the op shop, but there is also a big thing in the middle where you can sit down and have a cup of tea and ...

**Mr McMILLAN:** Yeah, that has certainly provided - for some people it is their social contact - just like other drop-in centres, people going for food and building relationships. For the people who go there regularly, and they have become regulars, it is their op-shop and the coffee, tea, cakes, and things like that are one of the ways they engage socially in the community in that. That is what we are all trying to do; is create those opportunities for people to engage socially.

The other thing we have tried to do, specifically with the facilities that we have, is try to get some community services in the rural area. We have another building on that property and, out of that building, Sommerville Community Services does counselling two mornings a week. A baby health clinic operates one morning a week from Palmerston; operates out there one morning a week, and often that is young mums living in the flats in that area, single young mums who do not necessarily have the transport to get to Palmerston and all the rest of it. Bus services are better these days but one of our - in looking at the community and looking at the gaps in things - there is very little community services. You have GPs and that is about it, in a rural area that has - 28 000 or something, Derek, in the rural area?

**Mr TRANT:** Rural area, the whole place is about 18 500 – 19 000 people.

**Mr McMILLAN:** Okay, my rural area is a little bit bigger than yours. I am going down to Adelaide River and out to Batchelor which, I guess, is the Coomalie Shire, but anyway - so, there is an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting happens a couple times a week out of our facilities, Somerville do the counselling, the baby health clinic happens there.

Some women have just started a scrapbooking club which, again, there are kids and adults both come to that - teenagers and adults. It is just another point of social contact. The Girl Guides are now operating out of there. Trying to provide some facilities, as we all are, for social connection and cohesion because that is half the battle with depression and suicidal ideation.

That is one of the things I wanted to say in terms of what people have been saying about intervention and early intervention and that sort of stuff. There is - and data would substantiate this - an increase in incidence of depression in the community. I do not want to get into whether there is an increase in prescribing, but it occurs to me, in the people I see, that there is increasing levels of depression. The Darwin rural community is a microcosm of what you were talking about in terms of rural communities where isolation is just felt, because we know people can become very isolated, and isolate themselves. I see a lot of that in the rural community. So, the whole mental health, how we address mental health before we get into suicidal ideation, how we address depression, how we address anxiety, how we create greater social cohesion ...



**Ms PURICK:** Stuart, this is what I think is one of our biggest challenges in life. Why is depression increasing? Why do you think it is in young people, not-so-young people, and older people? I am not a medical ...

**Mr McMILLAN:** Well, in young people, one of the factors – and I do not pretend to have, and I certainly do not have the answers – seems to me that there is incredible expectations on young people. I find - and maybe it is just that I am getting older and I have had three or four different careers in my life - the expectation on young people to achieve, make that life choice: what is your life going to be, what are you going to do when you leave school, this is the rest of your life? - for some people that is the way life goes. You leave school, you train for something, and that is what you do. However, for a lot of us that is not the way life is. We train as adults, we have retrained, we can do an enormous number of things.

But I think there is an incredible expectation placed upon kids. Certainly, the pressures of senior school for those kids who stay in senior school - VET has been wonderful. The increase in VET programs in the Northern Territory has been marvellous. It has created some pathways for young people who otherwise were either going to drop out and get into bad lifestyle choices which, ultimately, is going to lead somewhere, or kids are going to stay in - they are so pressured they are heading into the depression, suicidal ideation thing because they are not going to make it; they were never cut out for that academic stream. So, VET has been wonderful, and I really hope we continue to fund those VET streams because they provide pathways for kids - really important pathways.

**Ms WALKER:** Stuart, can I just jump in there and say I am really pleased to hear you saying that. It is a very important message for us to be taking back, as a committee. I am Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Training assisting Chris Burns, the minister. My focus in that role is on this pathways. We all know the increase in funding of VET has been quite significant, but it is still insufficient to meet the demand, because there is a growing demand out there. The Northern Territory has the highest uptake of VET of any jurisdiction in Australia, and it highlights that fact of the point that you were making; that we need to give kids appropriate pathways - not have expectations up here about where people need to be going, but of having something because there is a skills shortage across the Northern Territory. We all know that, and we need to be meeting that skills shortage. What you are saying here, it also meets that need of kids around the capacity to achieve and with the self-esteem - they are so interconnected. Sorry, I interrupted.

**Mr McMILLAN:** Absolutely. No, that is good and it is important. I had not even thought about it until we were in the conversation. It was not something I came to say.

**Ms PURICK:** What about social media?

**Mr McMILLAN:** Yes, that is another pressure, Kezia. That was the other thing. Two things I pick on. One is the pressure to perform and the creation of pathways, and the other is social media. Socially, there has always been pressure on young people. When we were young there was pressure on us to look like everybody else and be cool and all that sort of stuff.

It is heightened because of social media; it is in your face all the time. The text messages. I was talking to somebody yesterday who said - in a girls group, that is right; we have Chaplains in five of the schools in the rural area – so, in four of the primary schools and at Taminmin College we have Chaplains. One of the Chaplains was talking about a girls group she was running and one of the girls in her group was severely depressed, not clinically depressed, but depressed in the general sense of the word because she had not had several responses that morning on her telephone to something she had tweeted. She was expecting all of her friends would be coming back to her and, because they did not come back, she felt friendless and started to get into this - and this was in the morning while she is in the classroom. Yes, it is heightened by the social media, the Facebook stuff and all that sort of thing. It is in your face.

**Ms PURICK:** Social media is probably limiting it. It is probably the advances of technology; the fact we have mobile phones now which we did not have 15 years ago. There is this expectation that you will immediately respond when your phone rings and it is very hard not to, just ask my leader. I do not always answer my telephone and he gets very cranky with me. However, there is an expectation out there that because you have a mobile phone, you should answer it or use it to do other things like take photographs and send them somewhere. We see it on the TV every time something goes wrong in the world the number of people that have their phones out and it is around the world in a split second – about tragedies.

**Madam CHAIR:** And a fight. If you go onto YouTube you can see, just in Palmerston, where there have been fights amongst young men and young women and within seconds it is uploaded on YouTube. When

you log onto Facebook sites like the Palmerston groups - Palmo Goss and Darwin Goss - if you are a young person in that environment, my God, the comments and the stuff that is put on there, you begin to then understand why we have this emerging crisis amongst many of our people when you look at what is put up there.

**Ms PURICK:** Talking about phones, Lynne might be able to answer this question. With the schools - I see stuff in the paper occasionally - does the government have a policy about use of mobile phones in classrooms or is it an individual school thing to say leave your phones at home?

**Ms WALKER:** No, we have had DET appear twice before our committee. The first time we asked them about policy they advised is was on a school-by-school basis to handle that. We were not entirely satisfied with that response so took it up to DET and had the CE, Gary Barnes, appear. Gary advised on the basis of what is happening in other jurisdictions, it is a policy area DET must address.

**Ms PURICK:** Must address?

**Ms WALKER:** They are dealing with it rather than leaving it to a school-by-school basis. We need a stronger position at a much higher level about the approach to these policies in schools.

**Mr McMILLAN:** The other thing I wanted to say is while we are talking about schools, you may or may not be aware, the schools that have been able to structure themselves so they have two campuses, like Darwin High, where they have the middle school and a senior school, have been able to duplicate wellbeing services for both of those facilities regardless of the student population number across the two facilities.

A school like Taminmin, I am advocating specifically for the rural area now, 1200-odd students, one campus, therefore one counsellor ...

**Ms PURICK:** There is some good news on that front, we will wait for the Taminmin people to tell us.

**Mr McMILLAN:** Okay, that will be good, and no doubt they will say that. But it is critical, 1200 odd kids it is an impossibility to touch the edge of the issues with one counsellor, one health promoting nurse, one chaplain; fortunately, a home liaison officer that is well skilled in a whole lot of other things than just following up kids that do not come to school but, nevertheless, it is massive, and we do need to address it.

One last thing, in picking up on conversation and talking about, Ian, I think, was talking about people having a better idea about you know what is happening beforehand.

One of the things that Taminmin did do some years ago was send three people - I was one of them - to a training program called Mental Health First Aid, which was an ANU thing, I think it is run out of Melbourne Uni now, and people do the course and come out with a Mental Health First Aid Certificate like a normal first aid certificate, except it is around mental health.

Having done the facilitators' training, the first year we ran that at Taminmin, one girl's life was saved, and that was worth all the money they spent for the three of us to do it, simply because we ran it in a Year 11 class, as a training program, and a Year 11 boy recognised what was going on with a Year 10 girl that he was friendly with, did all the appropriate stuff, got hold of the girl's father, told the girl's father what was going on with his friend, got some relevant referrals, and kept supporting that girl through that period of time.

So, programs like that, and there is a youth version of that now which Erin can tell you more about when she is here because she is a trained facilitator in that. Programs like that do give capacity to young people to recognise things within their own generation, and does give them the skills to be able to both deal with the immediate, with their friend, and refer appropriately.

I think that sort of capacity for young people it is really important, and it is a shame if it only happens for those kids that are doing psych at a senior school, there is a mental health unit within the psychology course in the Territory, in senior schools about 6 weeks in the middle of their psych course. But that sort of capacity is needed from about Year 9.

It would not be suitable for Year 8, but Year 9 and 10 you could be giving that sort of capacity to young people to be able to identify within their own cohort, and make a big difference.

**Ms PURICK:** Did you say that Mental Health First Aid was through Melbourne Uni?

**Mr McMILLAN:** It is run through Melbourne Uni I think, now, but if you see Erin later on she is the full bottle on it. I have not been associated with that for some time.

**Ms CROOK:** headspace does it, and it is called ASIST. They have been doing it for ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Oh, yes, I am with you. Are you finished, Stuart?

**Mr McMILLAN:** Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Neil, do you have something quick to say.

**Mr WRIGHT:** Just on what Stuart is saying, I did a course a while ago called Friends for Life, and it is not actually about getting friends it about preventing, not curing, anxiety and depression in young children and teenagers, and it came in two parts. You do it with junior school and high school and it is repeated but, obviously, at different levels, and parents are involved in the program, as well. Canada uses it in all their schools as part of their curriculum. It is by Dr Paula Barrett in Brisbane; she wrote it and -----10:00:22 six of them, presuming they're true because it has been a long study and it really did, looking at the study, reduce the amount of anxiety and depression that are in the kids and teenagers, which is obviously part of what we want to solve.

**Madam CHAIR:** One of the things - and it would be good once Taminmin come in - because we have been taking a lot of the evidence about MindMatters in senior school and KidsMatter in some of the primary schools, so it will be good to engage them in terms of whether that has happened, but I would like to welcome George Kasperek.

We will come up to you in a minute, George. I will just invite Diane; she wanted to make a few comments.

**Ms JACKSON:** My name is Diane Jackson, I am from Sattler Christian College and also Palmerston Christian College as the school Chaplain. We have recently begun using MindMatters and KidsMatter at Sattler, so we are just beginning on that journey, and it is quite exciting.

My comment is actually one I have had in discussion with Bev Garside, who is not here yet, and her question that she was raising with me was the facilities that we have out here; there are not a lot of facilities in the rural area.

We have headspace at Palmerston and the Tamarind Centre in town, and her concern was that as soon as the kids see 'mental health' on the front of the Tamarind Centre, they just do not want to know about it and headspace is really great, but she said they have become so busy that it is really hard to get in to see them there.

There is a long waiting list, whereas originally it was meant to be like a drop-in type thing, so that was the concerns that we wanted to bring.

**Ms PURICK:** When you talk about the young people - like upper primary or just anyone who you work with and come in contact with. Is it the - and it is across our communities - you were just saying that if you have a mental health issue, everyone goes: 'Oooh, something is wrong with you; you are a bit loopy'.

**Ms JACKSON:** Bev represents Bees Creek Primary, as well as Taminmin, and I am at Sattler and Palmerston Christian Schools are primary and secondary.

**Madam CHAIR:** Part of that early intervention and education about mental health is taking away the stigma of mental health and, like Kezia was saying, young people - the minute they hear a young person has gone to see this counsellor or gone into this facility - that person has a problem. It is not just young people; you would be amazed at how many older adults who actually say it; it is learnt behaviour, and it is part of - our young people are just picking up what they have heard, what their parents and other adults have said about this problem. We have to break down those barriers and de-stigmatize emotional and social wellbeing issues that affect our young people, because only then are we going to make inroads into it.

**Ms JACKSON:** Make it clear that mental health does not mean mental illness.

**Madam CHAIR:** No, that is right, that is it.

I came out of the health field and I always look at environmental health - and I have always said to people. If we look at environmental health - people often think it is e-coli in the water or it is this and it is that. If you look broadly at environmental health, it is about that environment in which we live in, and it is how we feel and our wellbeing in that whole environment.

**Ms PURICK:** Because I have not come out of any mental health background. I have never thought of it like that, I would have to admit. You said mental health does not mean mental illness, but if you have poor or bad mental health, do you automatically get mental illness, or do you sort of go to a zero and other things contribute to mental illness?

**Ms JACKSON:** I do not really know. That is not my area of training.

**Ms PURICK:** Just because - what you said before - I have never thought of it like that. When you talk about mental health issues, I tend to think mental health means the person has some issues they need help with. Yeah, I will probably have to ask medical Professor Tatts that kind of question.

**Ms JACKSON:** As far as I am aware, I do not believe mental health problems lead to mental illness, but mental illness can certainly accentuate other mental health problems.

**Madam CHAIR:** There is a lot of research that shows if you have chronic illnesses, that will lead to - because your chronic illness will bring anxiety, depression, all of those, from medication, and are contributing factors to then getting ...

**Ms PURICK:** Sharon would like to say something about that.

**Ms CROOK:** Just to define between mental illness and mental illness which is through social circumstances. The mental illness through social circumstances is temporary, and there is the other mental illness which is physical, hereditary ...

**Ms PURICK:** Something out of the ordinary.

**Ms CROOK:** Yes, there are two different things the psychologists seem to think.

**Madam CHAIR:** Sorry, Diane, have you finished or ...

**Ms JACKSON:** Yes, thank you.

**Ms MORRIS:** Gee, that was short and sweet.

**Madam CHAIR:** Marilyn – we can continue the discussion and interaction ...

**Ms PURICK:** This is the introductory part.

**Madam CHAIR:** This is the introduction. I am trying to get people - so, Marilyn, sorry.

**Ms MORRIS:** Okay. I am Marilyn and I am from Coomalie. I work in Batchelor for the Coomalie region. John Hughes is the CEO, and he could not be here today and asked specifically if I could come in so it be recorded that he is of the same opinion that there are a lot more services needed further out to do with Alcoholics Anonymous, to do with just anything to do with mental health. We need workshops for young people to wake them up a lot more. Batchelor is a really hard nut to crack ...

**A witness:** I know.

**Ms MORRIS:** Definitely, as everyone knows.

I have been involved with the Lingalunga Festival, running that for over six years, and working with the kids in that time with incorporating sport, as well as art and culture, into the festival. Last year and this year, we have had Kormilda and St John's coming down, and Woolaning coming in doing AFL. I noticed the difference with the kids because of sport. That used to happen in Batchelor a lot 20 years ago, 30 years ago but, as the community became less of a community, as lots of places do, it just seemed to fall by the

wayside. The kids are the product of a lot of really bad parenting. The parents do not support anything much at all, I found down there, because they need a wakeup call just as much as the kids do.

The kids do touch football now. As part of my community recreation area, I do touch football with the kids now on a Thursday afternoon. There are 30 kids who - it took a bit, a few weeks, three or four weeks - now there are a lot of kids coming down there, and older boys who were really problem boys are now mentoring the younger boys as well. I have had John McLean who works with Ironbark Fit for Life - he has been fantastic supporting me with it, as have lots of other people. The difference in them, because of sport and anything to do with workshops - because they do not have it out there. Because it is an extra hour out, a lot of the parents do not have the money because, as you know, it gets blown on alcohol and pokies and things like that out there. They are from a really bad spot in themselves as well.

There is a service providers group that is just happening in the last couple of months. John Sampson has been quite instrumental in pulling all that together, which has TEAMHealth come down from in town, Mission Australia comes down as well, -----10:09:17 Jenner, who is the government business manager with Amangale which outside Adelaide River and Acacia - they have all gathered together at the institute twice in the last couple of months to try to formulate some service providers group, so everyone is not going off in different directions everywhere, which is a really good start. Centrelink, as well, have been part of that, working in with it.

I just had an e-mail yesterday from a lady called Brenda Ford, from the Mental Health Professionals Workshop Network, who wants to actually start something in a week's time at the clinic. I said: 'Well, that is the same day as they want to have the service providers group. You are doing the same thing, perhaps you can sort of ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Be part of this other ...

**Ms MORRIS:** Yes. So, one of them has actually been cancelled and they are trying to work it all in together. That is great because it is pooling everyone's learning about everyone else and how we can all talk about different things to make it all change.

The young kids down there, sport is a huge part of what is needed. We need to get more sport happening out there for them all because, like you were saying, anything to do with - say it is to do with mental health and they run the other way.

A program came down on Wednesday, LOVE BiTES it is called. LOVE BiTES , and they are fantastic. They were really good.

**Ms PURICK:** That is not the one through Darwin Community Arts?

**Ms MORRIS:** No, this is Australia - 90 000 kids have done the LOVE BiTES training. They go into schools and do it throughout the year. Taminmin did it last year, or this year.

**Ms CROOK:** I think it was last year.

**Madam CHAIR:** Who is it done through?

**Ms CROOK:** Kormilda is doing it.

**Ms MORRIS:** I do not have the contact with me now - the two ladies who came to Batchelor - but the counsellor at Batchelor school is a facilitator. She has done the LOVE BiTES training so she followed it up and said she would like to have something in Batchelor. On Wednesday, we had ladies come down from Rosebery school, from many different schools in Darwin coming down, because we all trained as facilitators, through one day training, so we can help implement it into schools. They go into a school and do it for a whole year. Well, the main facilitator runs it and has additional facilitators, as in all of us. It is for 14- to 17-year-olds.

**Madam CHAIR:** It is called LOVE BiTES?

**Ms PURICK:** It is a social wellbeing type thing?

**Ms MORRIS:** No, no it is domestic violence and sexual assault. It is very intense. We had all three police guys from Batchelor there for the whole day and two males from the schools. It is the most males

they have had in a session, pretty well, they said. Many of the ladies from different schools up here came down as well.

Apparently, it has been hugely successful. They had little videos and all that. They did it Alice Springs and they had the kids doing hip hop about 'you respect me', all this type of stuff; talking to girls talking to boys and it was - they really know what they are doing.

**Ms McDONALD:** It takes the taboo from domestic violence. It gives a forum for the kids to talk that is safe and it also makes it fun. So it is not scary, it educates as well.

**Ms MORRIS:** They were very good. There were many different people. We had a young fellow commit suicide down there recently - three weeks or a month ago - a young fellow committed suicide who was really well-known to me through the festival as well. He was one of our hip hop artists, and many of the kids have questioned it saying - because someone beat someone else up down there because they said someone gave him bad drugs and that is what killed him, and many of the kids have said to me: 'We thought he committed suicide'.

So the young kids were not connecting the two and were asking was it that or was it that? So we are thinking of having a Blue Light Disco there in January and playing some of his music. The police are keen to work in with it to bring it out a little more but keep it safe as well. All the younger kids have not said goodbye to him and he has amazing music. It needs to come out more, talk about it much more, and also remember the good stuff because he was part of our festival.

He was employed through the festival each year, for the last three years.

**Ms PURICK:** Was he an Aboriginal fellow?

**Ms MORRIS:** Yes he was.

**Madam CHAIR:** It is just part of the road of getting through that grief and healing.

**Ms MORRIS:** We have St Barbara's Church down there - the Catholic church has said we can as a - Coomalie area can utilise that as a youth space. We can hire it and can work in with them, so we are in the process of making something happen there. We have about \$50 000 in grants to get work done on it and then we need to start doing things so the kids have a space to start talking.

We can facilitate; do DRUMBEAT workshops and all that as well. DRUMBEAT is coming down for the Blue Light Disco to work in with us, too. Maybe do workshops before in the school holiday program to get the kids talking and work in with the disco for this young fellow, as well, just to open it up a bit more because, as you say, it becomes closed and they do not talk about it at all, and if it is an Indigenous young person no one wants to talk about it at all, and the young ones are left wondering really why ...

**Ms PURICK:** What happened, why did it happen

**Ms MORRIS:** Yes, and to actually bring it out and have something where they can all dance and talk a little bit and have his music there as well. The parents have agreed the parents are happy for it to happen.

**Madam CHAIR:** It would be good to come back to you, Marilyn.

**Ms MORRIS:** Yes, sure.

**Madam CHAIR:** George, before I get on to you, and I do want to welcome Bev. I will just introduce ...

**PERSON UNKNOWN:** 10:16:25??We are from Taminmin High School, or Comprehensive School, Middle School and Senior School. We are actually the wellbeing team, so we have a school counsellor, and there is a home liaison officer, and Aboriginal and Islander workers.

**Madam CHAIR:** Fantastic. Well, we are just going through individually and getting people to say a couple of words. It is great that you have turned up, because I think we have got some questions, and it will be good to hear from you.

I also acknowledge Peter Styles, the member for Sanderson, who has also joined us.

Marilyn, have you finished?

**Ms MORRIS:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** George, do you want to say ...

**Mr KASPAREK:** Yes. I am probably a bit different to most; I am just a volunteer. I do not get too many grants and I do not have a program that looks at mental health. On the other hand, I have something like 50 kids turning up every Wednesday night, everything from about six-year olds to 15-year olds, and then there are another 15 of them turn up, slightly older, on Thursday nights.

I just have a few comments where perhaps we fit a slightly different role. To give you an idea, in the last six months I have had lots of problems simply because we have had two autistic kids, and a fairly traumatised Indigenous bunch of girls who kept on telling everybody what to do and when to do it, fairly loudly. We have had those sorts of behaviours come in. We have a program that is there to basically give kids skills. It is not school, it is nothing like school, but it is there to give them skills to get on with life, to get on with one another.

A lot of it is task oriented, so there is usually a 13, 14-year old, say, for the older ones, or a nine year old for the smaller ones. It is a small group, and together they somehow complete a task. It is their task, and when they finish, it is their grin and smile.

Now, just a few comments. What we do as leaders is actually take time to talk to the kids, so I actually know a lot about the kids, and that is something that I am finding incredibly valuable. Last night I rang one of the mums and said: 'How is your son?' and she said: 'Well, you know, he's been a bit' ... I said: 'Yes, I know, he's got something underlying, do you mind if I talk to him on Saturday, because he is obviously unhappy about something?' She said: 'Yes, go for it.'

We are good friends, all of us, and [Name] will probably come out with a few things he would not tell his mum or dad, because we are mates. So, it is a slightly different whatever, I wouldn't go if it is something I would judge to be nasty; I would obviously go to professionals, but there is a lot of room to be friends and that is where much of what we do is modelling. Modelling behaviour, older people, but also what we do is, a lot of the kids actually starting this year what a family looks like, because many of the kids come from some pretty weird set ups, pretty strange.

How strange is when suddenly you notice a nine-year old boy disappearing into the darkness out on the Village Green and you say: 'Where are you going?' 'Mum said just to walk home.' 'You are going to walk? You can't.' You know, Wednesday night, 8 o'clock, you cannot just walk home. He said: 'But Mum is not going to drive here.' So, you have to ring mum to say: 'Well, actually, Madam, hop on your bicycle, hop in your car and come and pick your son up', and he was really scared because mum was going to give him stick about this, but they see intimately what other families do behave like and sometimes it causes disquiet and sometimes they actually realise that what they are going through is not the only thing. So, that is about models.

The other model here with this autism, we also had lots of kids with trauma. I mean, there was one kid who had his penis punctured by nails, and saw his sister die, and all that sort of stuff. He was in foster care. His older sister was chasing his older brother with a knife in the kitchen just before they were separated, all that sort of stuff. The boy walked out. Well, he did not wet himself anymore at night and he did not scream after a couple of our camps. How did we do? It is just basically the kids. I talk about them as kids, but they are not; they are young people.

They made up their mind that everybody is worth looking at, looking after. So, the autistic kid, when he starts doing something really crazy, they do not just let him go and do something crazy. I have actually had an 11-year-old girl stand there and follow him when he was really unhappy about the world, just follow him at 10 paces, safe distance, to make sure that he was okay and when he wasn't, she ran back, and said: 'Hey, better come'. That is the kids; they take care of one another and there is a certain amount of acceptance. There is no way they would have said anything nasty to him - jokingly might have said: 'Jeez, you are a fruit loop' or something like that, but never nasty and that is really important.

It is not my decision, it is their decision, but where it comes from is the modelling, from us. We are not professionals, we are just a bunch of adults who just – you know - and sometimes we yell and scream at them for doing something really bad. I am just saying, you know, that is it. So, I suppose we fit in there somewhere with this.

Bad behaviour; we do not tolerate it, but it happens. The funny part is the peer pressure is more than us, the adults, right. The kids actually say: 'Well, hang on, do not do that, that is silly' and they will actually readily put pressure on those, and they are not goody-goodies, right, absolutely not goody-goodies. There are kids from some pretty broken down situations, but somehow they have decided.

The only thing that I can sort of ascribe it to is that – if you can imagine little [Name] - little [Name] told me at the beginning of this year that he was just basically dumb and he could not do anything. [Name] is 11 and he said: 'Look, I can't do anything, I am just dumb' and every time he could not do something he just laughed and said: 'It is normal; I am just dumb.' The other day he – it was about getting a cooker going; it is a fairly complicated procedure and I had him do in front of kids. He said: 'I don't know'. One of his mates – I said: 'Do you want your mate?' Since then, he has actually shown that he has got a lot of brights. He is actually a fairly bright boy, but he has been hiding it for one reason or another. He does not hide it anymore. I have two or three of those sorts of kids who just do not hide it. There was a little bit of success somewhere and I do not know if it spills into the other world; I do not see them in the other world but, in our world, it is really obvious and I can only really – that peer pressure can be both ways.

That is what I am saying, for me, I presume that most kids are good and most kids are actually useful, most kids are bright, and that is what I see at the other end and certainly I have got a bunch of 15, 16-year-olds who help me and, basically, that is the way they behave with the young ones as well.

**Ms PURICK:** George, can I ask a question? You are just a volunteer, but if you think there is a child who is a bit out of your area, like this kid needs serious help, how do you move the child to more professional help?

**Mr KASPAREK:** I have had that with this autistic kid. Basically, we – because he did some pretty strange things - I rang the Scout Association, if they had somebody, and they said: 'Well, yes we do, but how about the parents?' Went to parents, parents said: 'Yes, we understand'. The parents actually ...

**Ms PURICK:** The parents did it.

**Mr KASPAREK:** ... did it themselves. They said: 'Yes, we understand. Yes, this fits in with ...' But, if anything, I would go and take advice from the Scout Association. There are a couple of specialists in the area who would direct me to wherever it is. Oh, no, we keep an eye on this.

**Ms PURICK:** Yes, I just wondered how you look after the child – was the next step.

**Mr KASPAREK:** I am just saying we are fitting in there. They are not angels. If I can say my perception on this is, if the only thing you have to look forward to in life is an absolutely crappy job, being in a pub most days, and realising that you, at the end of the day, are going to be in a family that is not, where there is violence and absolute unhappiness, your way of looking at the future is probably a little different to a kid just down the road - who may not have much better work; his parents may not be in a much better work condition. He will have a slightly different way of living. That would be my observation. I guess my role is to see if these kids can see alternatives. The beauty is I am not employed by anybody. There are a lot of things that I am not prescribed; I do not have to follow. Often, if I can talk to the parents who set me straight as a friend, half the time - it is extraordinary. That is it.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, George. Bev, do you want to - before I move on I welcome Beverly.

**Ms RATAHI:** I am Beverly from the Taminmin College Council.

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you want to say a couple of words before we move to the open form of discussion. Will you talk to Taminmin?

**Ms GARSIDE:** Yes, I am Bev. I have two different roles, I am a Chaplain at Taminmin and Bees Creek. I am also a teacher. I used to, a while back, be a drug and alcohol counsellor in England. I enjoy kids.

I have just sat and listened since I have been in. I missed some because I was late because I was talking to a family. For me, I look at our students out in the rural areas, and what concerns me is the lack of facilities we have for them, especially those who are on the edge. This term, especially, I seemed to have worked with a lot of problem people who are really confused about how they are feeling, and they are not really sure what is happening.



This last couple of weeks, there is one young lady who was suicidal and refused point blank - she did not want to go to the Tamarind Centre. We rang headspace - headspace was absolutely brilliant. They went out of their way to take her in and talk to her. They have a waiting list, which is really hard because she needed somebody there and she needed somebody then who has more skills than I actually have. I take my hat off to them, but it would be good to have some more things.

I love what you were saying about the music, the sport. The more we can engage with our young people, the more opportunities we have with them.

The other thing I wanted to say was I agree that there is lots of parents who are not supportive, but there are also a lot of parents out there who are, but who really do not have the skills, and they do not know what to do.

One of the reasons I was late was I was talking to a man who split from his wife, who really wants to help his son, but does not know what to do or who turn to. Support for parents as well, and parenting programs, and how we can equip people to actually get alongside their kids - what they can do - is something I am feeling really passionate about as well. Short and sweet.

**Madam CHAIR:** It would be good to ask you a question after I do Taminmin, in the need for respite for families dealing with some of that in the rural area as well - just in your experience with working with, as you said, the single father and others who do it pretty tough.

**Ms GARSIDE:** I think respite would be a lifeline and a breathing space while things are put in place to help.

**Madam CHAIR:** Welcome Peter, Erin, Deb, Charity, Penny and Parsena. You are all from Taminmin, both middle and secondary, and Beverley. I am unsure which one of you wants to say something.

**Ms RATAHI:** Well, if you do not mind, Erin, I will do the lead-in as to what the college council has had concerns about this year and, because you are the experts and have all the stats I will be referring to - my apologies for being late, hectic morning with four children.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are glad you have come.

**Ms RATAHI:** I have been chairman at Taminmin College for this year. Since I assumed the position, one of the first priorities for council was we are extremely concerned about the lack of resources for our students. That has come down to DET having a policy, supposedly, where wellbeing teams and counsellors are assigned to middle and senior schools regardless of enrolments. If you are a middle school you are allocated a counsellor, if you are a senior school you are allocated a counsellor. For some reason, remaining comprehensive schools do not fit into their equation.

So, this year, we have been regularly raising this issue with DET saying it is not rocket science to see if you are still a comprehensive campus with the same amount of students, even though it is not to be formula-driven, then we surely should be entitled to a wellbeing team for our middle school students and our senior school students.

Now, I am delighted to say, after much perseverance and probably what could be considered nagging, I received in writing yesterday from the Chief Executive that we can immediately advertise for another counsellor. So, it has been well worth the fight. However, my concern is it should not be a fight that individual school councils have to take up. It is not rocket science.

The other thing we have presented to DET regularly through this year is we are in the rural area. Our kids do not have the proximity to supporting health services like many urban - you can hope on a bus or go next door or whatever, and if many of those issues are because of family dysfunction, you are not going to be able to say to your parent: 'Can you take me all the way into Darwin because I need to talk to somebody or access resources?' That is not going to happen. So, not only should we have parity with urban schools, but we should have more.

The other thing that has been highlighted - these wonderful people here who work on the coalface every day will highlight stats. When you start going through the stats, it is that old thing of an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. When you look at some of the presenting issues, if only we had the resources which I hope now, from yesterday's confirmed written confirmation, we might be able to - these people are

so stretched and have not been able to do any of the preventive type programs. They have been purely reactionary because that is all the resources they have.

The other thing I have taken up with the DET CE many times is, and he confirmed it - initially it was anecdotal but he confirmed he had investigated the stats. There seems to be a policy of FACS, or whatever they are called now, to locate many of FACS foster care children in the rural area. Again, I am going left hand, right hand. If this is a government decision, a program to locate these kids in rural areas, perhaps to remove them from ...

**A person unknown:** Urban areas.

**Ms RATAHI:** Yes, and diminish some of those issues, surely it is not rocket science again to know these kids already have significant issues. So, why are we dumping them into an already overcrowded system without going: 'Right, Taminmin, you are now going to be receiving many of these kids who are already presenting with issues so we are going to give you additional resources'. No questions asked, and it is that left hand, right hand. If FACS has a policy, communicate with DET to say: 'We have to feed in extra resources for these kids'.

So I guess the last six months has been one of frustration; I must say I was elated yesterday afternoon when we appeared to have sought some resolve of those issues but, again, I did make the comment, it is still not enough. Right now we might have parity, but it is not enough with rural kids not having the proximity to other health services, and for the extra FACs kids.

The other issues that the DET CE and I had discussions about, and he acknowledged that perhaps we need to be taking more Year 5/ 6 kids before they get to middle school. Great idea. My concern is once you are involved and see what teachers already have to deal with, there is already an overload with the curriculum.

When he talks about adding programs to build resilience - great idea – but, quite frankly, teachers now teach sex education, obesity issues, all these extra things in addition to supposedly increasing literacy and numeracy results.

There are only so much pieces of pie that you can keep saying: 'Teachers, that is your problem again.' We need, if we want to increase resilience training and skills in primary school, we need resources in primary schools. I believe recently there was a letter received at primary schools from DET acknowledging that where you need counselling resources, here are some names of counsellors, and you can pay for it. Now, I do not think that is an adequate solution at all.

So, there is a lot of issues that need to be looked at with DET and, as I said, if we have early intervention the programs these people could implement would stop, if you look at the actual body, and we will focus on the counselling data, some of the presenting issues, what might start of as a seed, will end up as a festering sore if it is not attended to.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, Beverley, and it is great to see people that are passionate about this. I think it is important to hear that, and to have that come out. I just want to say quickly, it is not a policy of government in terms of relocation of children within the FACS system into the rural area, it is a major area and I think one that has to be looked at more closely, because it brings up the same issues that we have in our remote communities, as we have in our urban, because the more you go out, the worse those problems are going to be. So I will personally take up that issue in terms of looking at it.

**Ms RATAHI:** The DET CE has advised me he has checked that data and he can confirm there is an increase. Now, maybe it is because rural area people are probably bigger hearted and we already have a few kids each, so maybe we are happy to take a few more, but he has confirmed with me that ...

**Madam CHAIR:** I believe sometimes it is more a convenience of the bureaucracy rather than trying to have a look at that. But I will certainly take that up.

**Ms RATAHI:** Thank you.

**Ms PURICK:** The other thing I thought of when I heard this is, perhaps because in the rural area there are slightly bigger blocks, perhaps because there is more just bush activity, like at least you have got somewhere to play under the trees out the back, or you have got a pool, that is all I was thinking.

**Ms RATAHI:** More life skills, the potential to look for ...

**Madam CHAIR:** And there is nothing wrong with that, the thing is you are talking about children who have come from broken homes, and have problems ...

**Ms RATAHI:** That is right and we have got to support them as soon as they get to us.

**Madam CHAIR:** And often those kids are put out of sight, out of mind, and the wraparound services that should be occurring with those kids, do not occur, and then the school system, and that is why we are interested in the school system is because you have captive audiences during the day, but there are all these other kids that are not out of the school system, what are we doing with them? But those resources within the school to be able to deal with a multitude of problems, and you are right, teachers are being, and Lynne knows most of all, as an ex-teacher and having worked in that system, you know ...

**Ms RATAHI:** There is only so much you can keep putting into the curriculum day before you actually say: 'Hang on, we are actually going to think longer than the next election, we are actually going to think these kids are our future Territorians, we are going to support them now so that they will all be contributing, great citizens in the years to come.

Just one other thing, sorry, George, I have not met you. When you were talking about autistic kids, just one other thing because we have also had that fight this year about special needs kids; again anecdotal, but it appears, because the bucket of funding for special need programs just is never enough. But it would appear that the risk, the rating system determined to allocate funding for special needs, is being elevated so that children who previously were considered to have special needs and receive that additional support now fall just below that. So, you actually have a whole band of kids who have been pushed out of not getting that additional support right from the early years, from preschool, Year 1, or whatever, so there is a whole band of kids whose needs are not being catered for and who are going, as they increase in age, are going to just fall further and further outside the system.

So, that is another concern. But, sorry everybody, I will hand over to the experts of Taminmin College.

**Ms EVANS:** I have been at Taminmin since 2001, so I have been there for a long time. When I started at Taminmin in the role of the health-promoting school nurse, there were 465 students at the school and now there are 1200. There is still one of me.

**Ms WALKER:** Over what period of time?

**Ms EVANS:** Ten years; it is 2011. That has had a great impact on the proactivity of the school. You have the answer and good-quality evidence-based programs that are available for schools; MindMatters is the national program. That is based on the World Health Organisation's health-promoting school models and, if schools follow that model, they can quite successfully reach a number of students and staff across a number of levels. Eighty percent of kids in a school are usually travelling okay, 20% to 30% of kids have high support needs in terms of mental health and wellbeing, and probably 5% have an actual clinical diagnosis, but only 30% of the 5% who have a clinical diagnosis actually get help for their problems.

**Ms PURICK:** How much of that 5%?

**Ms EVANS:** Only 30% of five ever actually get professional help.

**A WITNESS:** Immediately help, seeking out, being brought over as a -----10:42:20.

**Ms EVANS:** Yes. So, I guess, schools are having to deal with up to 25% of their cohort and, in a cohort of 1200, that is quite a number of students who have high support needs. I would like to pick up with Bev's point about the children with the high support needs. These children are placed in a school and we often know these kids have high support needs, without a plan of care, and a school then will have to put in funding but, in the interim, the school has to manage that child with absolutely no resources whatsoever. Some of the children we have had recently have been right at the tip of that triangle and have taken up hours and hours of our time and then a lot of other students will actually miss out.

The health-promoting school model looks at the curriculum content which is the teaching about resilience, so there is certainly room in the curriculum for that; but it is so much more than that. Preventing suicide is about the way teachers teach, the way programs are run, the way they interact with their students, and the way they interact with parents and their fellow colleagues.

It is very much about that, and the policies and the programs that support that procedure. It is about the ethos, the way the school feels, it is also about the partnerships, and, at Taminmin, we have a lot of partnerships; we work very closely with our Chaplaincy service who value add to our wellbeing team.

We work intensively with headspace, alcohol and other drugs services, Top End Mental Health Services to meet the needs of those individual kids. We also – our Year 12 kids are actually being empowered to take on a leadership role in our school and they are now working with places like headspace and Top End Mental Health Services, Danila Dilba, the mob from Menzies on Aim High, to actually promote the message of mental health.

We have just had 25 Year 11 students receive their Youth Mental Health First Aid Certificate and those kids are actually picking kids up on the bus. There is no onus on them to practise the skills, but they are actually picking kids up on the bus and it is the students who are referring the kids to us. There is a lot that schools can do but my experience tells me that using that model is the way to go.

**Ms RATAHI:** But it has to be adequately resourced.

**Ms PURICK:** Can I ask a question, before I forget? When a foster child comes to a home in the rural area and has to come to Taminmin, you mentioned something like a care plan. So, how do you know - does the foster care department tell Taminmin: 'This child is coming to your school'.

**Ms EVANS:** The child may enrol but sometimes Northern Territory Families and Children does not actually tell the foster care family the full story. Sometimes, there are kids enrolled before the foster care family has all the details in front of them, which can be tricky.

**Ms PURICK:** Who would enrol the child?

**Ms EVANS:** Usually, it is with the foster care family and, ideally, the case manager. But, that does not always happen. Occasionally, there are gaps of information.

**Ms PURICK:** Also, you said the care plan. Does it ...

**Ms EVANS:** A care plan needs - if there are issues for any child that starts in a school, if they have a support need that needs to be provided through the school - whether it be a medical need, a wellbeing need, or a learning need - we need to know about that so we can accommodate that. It makes sense to know that so we can make plans to how we are going to meet that need.

**Ms PURICK:** Okay. Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** So, how is that cooperation between –when it comes to your attention that child is a child in foster care and has the special need. What triggers? It comes to your attention ...

**Ms EVANS:** Hopefully, it would be triggered through that enrolment process.

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms EVANS:** The sitting down with the assistant principal, and they fill out the enrolment form. The enrolment forms are quite lengthy. These details are at the very end of the enrolment form so, sometimes by that stage, things can get gone over really quick and we do not get the full story straightaway. Usually there and, then, the assistant principal should instigate that healthcare planning, or the planning for that student to come to school. It sits with the principal, is often delegated to the assistant principals. But, again, policies have come out, but there has been no resourcing for that, and no professional development to the schools around how that rolls out.

There has just been a couple of little things that impact on that process. We, as a school, have sat down and we have a case planning template, we have worked out the team, we have worked out who does what. So, it is a much smoother process through our school now.

**Madam CHAIR:** Are we able to get ...

**Ms EVANS:** Yes, I have brought a copy of ...

**Madam CHAIR:** ...be provided with copies?

**Ms EVANS:** Yes. We presented at the Third Rural and Remote Mental Health Youth Suicide Prevention Forum recently, so I have brought a copy of that presentation, but we can give you other data as well.

**Madam CHAIR:** We are doing another hearing in Darwin in early February before we finalise our report. Even if you wanted to do just a separate – we are putting a lot of focus on schools and the Education Department and some of the policies that are there. It would be good to maybe get yourself and a couple of other schools back for us in our hearings in Darwin over that time.

**Ms EVANS:** Yes.

**Ms McALEER:** Picking up from what Erin is saying, coming into such a large school, so under-resourced, and from a social work background, it was important to have a community development approach. We have to, as much as humanly possible, engage as many members of the community and services that are willing to come out to us. Something we have developed - like with headspace, for instance, we developed a memorandum of understanding around what would it look like for them to come and support us in the school. They come and they spend almost a day with us a week where they are seeing students, which is quite unusual in terms of other schools.

We had a memorandum of understanding with Ruby Gaea which started, three years ago now, a sexual assault and harassment prevention program, which then synchronises later into the Love Bites Program, particularly thinking that one of the main reasons young people think about suicide is relationship breakdown, and inability to cope with intimate relationships. So, we have embedded a lot of social learning and wellbeing programs into the curriculum over time. It is difficult, though, to find services that are willing to work with us like that.

**Madam CHAIR:** What are some of those difficulties or barriers if you do not ...

**Ms McALEER:** Well, for someone like Ruby Gaea, for instance, to get them to come out and develop a program we did, we actually had to go through quite a lengthy process of supporting them to get funding. They had to write grants. Then, as Bev is saying, with our stretched services and 1200 kids, it is really difficult to find time to write grants and do things like that. But, it has been valuable and that has become a self-sustaining program now. We have been running LOVE BiTES for a few years now, so there is this incredible synchronised wellbeing embedded into the curriculum. We have 11 and 12s graduating who are so versed - they have this vocabulary around their mental health, around wellbeing. They really are starting to just have really good knowledge.

The one other thing that is a huge issue for me as the counsellor is if I have a suicide with a young person who is involuntary, Tamarind will not touch it and headspace is non-clinical. They said I can get one appointment with the travelling psychiatrist who is there every six weeks.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Can you just go back to that?

**Ms McALEER:** So, if I had a young person - and I have had these types of situations where someone is feeling suicidal, but they are involuntary, they do not want to see Tamarind, there is nothing. I have driven home on a Friday thinking no one - I feel when someone is 15 or 16 and they do not want to see us, it is not good enough. There has to be a way - and I have approached Tamarind on several occasions to try to come up with an MOU with us about what we do. It is very rare that this is such an issue, but it will happen once or twice a year where there is no service available and we are providing a whole institution almost in service to these families; however, at the end of the day when we have to walk away or go home, there is nothing. There have been situations where a young person did have an attempt in one of those circumstances. It may be different with adults, but with young people there has to be someone who is willing to come in when that young person is saying: 'No, I do not want the service'.

**Madam CHAIR:** Is there a follow-up from the school with the family ...

**Ms McALEER:** Absolutely. We will everything we can to - safety planning, risk assessments, contracts, whatever it is we can do to our best to keep that young person safe. There is a time where I feel Tamarind and centres in Darwin have an immediate opportunity to step in and help us in those circumstances. Again, it is not often, but it will happen once or twice a year.

headspace has been absolutely fantastic. Going into the Tamarind Centre and sitting next to you an old man who is floridly psychotic, for a 15-year-old, is a terrifying experience and they will never go back. They never want to walk through those doors again. The importance of being youth-friendly, the fact that headspace is welcoming to them, they feel comfortable there, if we could grow a service like that it would be so valuable to us.

**Ms McDONALD:** Do you have LOVE BiTES going again next year?

**Ms McALEER:** Absolutely. We will never let that one go. It is fantastic, yes.

**Ms McDONALD:** You are about to do it in Batchelor? We had some workshops the other day. I think we will come down and support you on that day.

**Ms McALEER:** Programs like this are invaluable. Programs that are teaching them about things that happen to them and how to have a relationship. We teach them how to do maths but we do not teach them how to have positive relationships. We are really in there trying to work on that social side of themselves, and identity and self-esteem and all that sort of stuff.

**Ms EVANS:** Schools are picking up that social skills training from families. We have many families that are separated, families with a parent that works away for much of the time and families that do not have that extended family living close by. There is much more of that falling onto the role of schools but is not taught, necessarily, during teacher training.

**Madam CHAIR:** That is why, from a committee - we are placing a greater emphasis on the schools because there is pressure coming more and more, and we have had a couple of discussions with the department and have had Student Services appear before us. We were not completely satisfied with the discussions we had with Student Services so we have asked the CE of the department to appear before the committee. We have asked the department for quite detailed information which goes to the heart of positions and numbers and counsellors throughout the Northern Territory. It will be confidential and before the committee but, nevertheless, in our discussions with schools we will be able to cross-check that information with what schools are saying and advocate for that resource distribution. It is exactly what you have been saying, Beverley.

**Ms RATAHI:** One other thing I forgot, and I will put this in, I am pleased you had that same issue because we have had the issue with Student Services this year.

Palmerston Positive Learning Centre is another issue council has pursued vigorously this year because that centre is for children with extreme behaviours.

Now, initially council was informed that Taminmin could not access that so ...

**Ms PURICK:** With the school or Northern Territory government?

**Ms RATAHI:** No, it is run by DET. Yes, Palmerston Positive Learning Centre.

So council's question was: 'Where is the one in the rural area to accommodate our students?' There is none. So, only three weeks ago, Principal? Finally we were advised that, yes, Taminmin would be now be able to access the Palmerston Positive Learning Centre and, as I informed the DET Chief Executive again yesterday, that is a lovely principle to advise council about; however, the issue is we have only actually been able to get two of our students in there to be supported. We have another six waiting.

My bet would be for a Palmerston Positive Learning Centre with the amount of students in Palmerston, it probably is full, so therefore there needs to be a rural positive learning centre. So that is another that is significantly under resourced.

**Madam CHAIR:** I would like to welcome Miriam McDonald who is the Principal of Taminmin. Welcome, Miriam.

**Ms McDONALD:** Thank you very much.

**Madam CHAIR:** We have heard from most everyone now, and if you are ready we may open the session now to questions from the committee to different members. So I will start with Peter, then Lynne, then Kezia, and then I will sum up. So, Peter.

**Mr STYLES:** I would like to ask Erin: the stuff you are talking about in relation to schools having to pick up the teaching of social fabric, really, what glues a community together, and I think, Beverley, you added to that there are so many single parent families out there now, and blended families, that this is not happening. I know we need a 1000% increase, but in reality, what sort of resources does Taminmin need to deal with that particular issue? Is it a 50% increase, or 100% increase?

**Ms McDONALD:** Probably, as Bev would suggest, in terms of actually duplicating the wellbeing team - one across senior school, one across middle school - would make us in line with everyone else.

**Ms RATAHI:** Well, that is still insufficient, being we do not have supporting – what I would actually suggest, once we get once we get the middle school and the senior school, we need to double both of them. We need to actually be serious and say: 'These kids cannot just hop on a bus at any time of the day when they need support.' We have to give them the proximity to those services.

So I would like to see, and I intend to take that up now I think we are moving along with DET, and I have indicated that there will be further discussions next year once we get our next counsellor on the ground, that I would like to see at least a doubling for middle school and senior school.

**Ms McDONALD:** I think part of that, too, is building up the capacity of school staff for referral, when you deal with it in-house and when you do refer on so, again, that professional development and training is something that is really important to me.

**Mr STYLES:** The thing I see and I am hearing is that – and there is a great ad put out by the Teachers Union, it has got an apple – you now the apple one? It says: 'When I finish doing' - and there is about 300 listings - 'I will teach the kids.'

**Ms RATAHI:** That is exactly right.

**Mr STYLES:** I am not a teacher, but I used to be a school-based police officer working as part of a welfare team, and what I see is the need for the training of teachers and the curriculum, but it is just getting to the point where there are only so many hours in a day, and teachers walk out with an armful of books and curriculum stuff every day, and I feel we are overloading teachers. Is that something you would like to comment on?

**Ms RATAHI:** Council has very strong concerns about that; and I also serve on Bees Creek School Council and I have been a very strong advocate there about just what do we really expect from our teachers. I am not a supporter of the new NAPLAN concept because there are some kids who will never achieve an A in their life, but that does not mean they should not be valued and supported; but, unfortunately, teaching just to that specific test does not highlight individuals' strengths, and you accelerate the time that can be put into developing those strengths.

The other thing that irks me somewhat is I know we receive funding for 1.5 days PD for teachers. I am doubtful that we actually receive that some years, but 1.5 days PD for a teacher annually, PD are we really seriously talking about being able to engage in? When you are talking about the literacy, numeracy, maths angles; if we could then going to be trying to upskill them and widen the teachers role in teaching social fabric issues.

**Mr STYLES:** Would I be correct in - and I am just going to ask you guys - that within a generation, we have seen a massive shift in the responsibility of trying to hold the community together socially and it is sort of gone – I know my mum and dad did, but I have seen – so you guys agree with that.

**Group:** yes.

**Ms GARSIDE:** Yes, and couple that together an incredible sense of entitlement that seems to be coming up as well and it is not a great combination and parents who have to work incredible hours to pay mortgages and rent in this crisis of accommodation that we have as well in this environment.

??11:01:08 As a teacher, it is actually really hard, because I do both roles, and to try to teach, but then you have students in your classes with really high needs and it is almost impossible some days to teach because you are addressing the needs and trying to keep things flowing and teach the curriculum as well. Yes, it is really hard.

**Mr STYLES:** I hear that a lot.

**Ms McALEER:** Can I make a silver lining comment though. Part of the silver lining for us is, for instance, we had kids in maths build pizza ovens that now service our community and cook dinners for families. The teachers, the science and maths teachers, who got to do that with the kids had an incredible time, so when we can embed a social program, it is through a correct stream. PE still picks up the sexual health stuff and social but sometimes too, it provides an opportunity for teacher and student to see each other in a different light, to have some time that is not about core and it can be fun for all involved too sometimes.

**Ms EVANS:** Sometimes, like with the girls self-defence, it is about the teachers learning side-by-side the young women about self-defence, and I guess that is what MindMatters framework provides; it is more than a program. We are not asking teachers to teach another program; it is about the way that they teach and it is about their university-based education as well in relation to behaviour management, in relation to maintaining their own personal health and wellbeing, because it is a hard world out there for teachers.

It is about seeking that professional support from their leaders like Miriam and her team of seniors at the school. That leadership is key in our school; that is what makes a huge difference to the success of the initiatives we need to run for these kids in our school.

**Madam CHAIR:** The problems are becoming more and more complex, but it does not mean that good things are not happening and sometimes we can get so caught - because the issues are sometimes so insurmountable - we get caught on that, rather than looking that there are many positive and good outcomes that can happen, but we have to still deal with what is happening.

**Ms CALLOWAY:** Can I just say something too, Marion. I have worked at the school for eight years now and I came in as their aide first, the Aboriginal Resource Officer, and then moved to various other positions in the school but mainly focused on teacher inclusion supporter system. You see the children, like they come through many transitions as well, they have always transitioned, and we have also seen someone who comes in; they are troubled and everything, but we have also seen a turnaround with them and that is with them growing as well, finding their own identity, deciphering what is right and what is wrong with their peer group pressure, making choices, making right choices, making bad choices. I have actually seen students grow, and then go off, and you are walking along the street and they will come up to you: 'Oh, how are you going?' and they do recognise you because you were part of their educational upbringing, and there are some success stories.

I saw a student; he is still single, he is working with the mines, making lots of money but he was also helped intensively with his English and maths, and he got there, and he did it, and then look at the benefits they can have – that is just one person but there are a lot of stories, good stories as well as ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Sometimes we forget those good stories, and one kid; if we can save one kid also, that is one young one saved...

**Ms CALLOWAY:** Exactly. I tell you - and you do.

**Madam CHAIR:** ... then it is worth it.

**Ms CALLOWAY:** I am proud to be a part of that. I am really honoured that student has just reached the full capacity of what he is able to do.

**Ms WALKER:** I guess it is more a comment. Lynne Walker, I am the member for Nhulunbuy and I am an ex-school teacher. I have been out of teaching for 15 years. In the line of work that I am in, I happen to keep my teacher registration current because I have to have a Plan B up my sleeve ...

**Madam CHAIR:** In our game.

**Ms WALKER:** I am married to a school teacher and a lot of my friends are school teachers. On a personal level, and professionally, I would probably find it very hard to step back into a classroom and teach.

The curriculum clutter that schools are dealing with, and teachers from back in the days of numeracy and literacy and a traditional curriculum, it is much more than that. Out in the areas that Marion and I represent, schools are the safest places of wise counsel, they are places of nutrition. Those three lines



were a contribution from the Police Commissioner when he gave evidence. The issue we have is we cannot get enough of our kids into school, so how do we capture them?

My observation is around the fact the schools are doing so much. We have a group of people over here who are also working in this space, about how we can integrate the services to get them, not just captured in schools, but collaboratively across all those other services including the volunteer sector - to be on the same page and work collaboratively. I am just throwing that up there. We all know that and we want to know how do we do it?

**Ms EVANS:** There is a lot of competitive funding put out to respond to these issues. There is a lot of competitive funding in the non-government sector. I know organisations that have an awful lot of funding, but trying to get them – I know they are funded to do specific work, but trying to get them into a school can be quite difficult. Maybe linking some of those fundings to schools in areas of high need, which has been done, say, in Victoria. Potentially, that is something that may be worth investigating.

**Ms PURICK:** So what you are saying is ...

**Mr KASPAREK:** Can I ...

**Ms PURICK:** Sorry, hang on, George. I just want to clarify. A non-government organisation gets funding to do something ...

**Ms EVANS:** Say to work with the youth or at risk of disconnecting from ...

**Ms PURICK:** Yes, at risk.

**Ms EVANS:** ... school, for example ...

**Ms PURICK:** Then you are saying it is everyone wants them to work with them, so you are saying that is the competition?

**Ms McALEER:** Yes.

**Ms PURICK:** Like Darwin High, Sanderson?

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, there is no connect ...

**Ms McALEER:** Well, competitive for them to get the funding in the first place. When they are funded and do receive a large bucket of money specifically to connect with our at-risk students, but then you have difficulty actually getting the service. It leaves us a bit short.

**Mr KASPAREK:** I just wanted to make a comment. What I am hearing a lot is about competitive grants - doing this, doing that - and it is all rotating around money. It is not, because half of it is around the community. If you have a community that is actually worth something, the community will do quite a lot of what you are talking about,.

**Ms RATAHI:** That is right. Absolutely.

**Mr KASPAREK:** Yet, nearly everything we are talking about is school, school, some government organisation. Yet, half the time it is the community. I will give you an example.

I know an alcoholic mum who, every Wednesday night, used to pick up her kids from Scouts absolutely rotten drunk, until one of the other Scout parents, basically, went to the pub and said to her: 'Oi! Out! Don't do that. That is disgusting'. Some of the parents actually took her around and said: 'You are just disgusting'. They said a few words and it was her peers. Well, she moderated her behaviour somewhat. I see her now, she works next door and, honestly, she is probably 10 years younger to what she was 10 years ago. It was the community that did that.

That does not necessarily mean money, but there needs to be some strengthening of the community. I do feel that. If we can, somehow, make the community proud, I can tell you there are lots of people who do not even know how to spell 'community', understand what a community is, or that you belong to it. If we can do that somewhat, then we have a chance. In that, I feel there are lots of places that have a role.

**Ms RATAHI:** I agree with you, George, but the problem ...

**Mr KASPAREK:** I know there is always a problem ...

**Ms RATAHI:** Yes.

**Mr KASPAREK:** ... but there is a role. Lots of people have a role.

**Ms RATAHI:** I have four children ranging in age from 7 to 13. When my 13-year-old started school, many more parents were involved in that community than what currently happens. As we have addressed, with mortgages and the capacity for everyone to work, it is a bit of that sense of entitlement. Apart from working, so your kids really are not in your care from 7 am until 6 pm when you come home, then you want to be seen to be doing the right thing so they are enrolled in three different activities every week, and by the time you run around with that, community commitment is the thing first eliminated off that list; I cannot do this any longer.

**Mr KASPAREK:** I run a volunteer organisation scratching for leaders. Not only that, one of the big things that has developed is even the volunteers need to have a whole heap of rules, regulations, Ochre cards, Cert IV in this, Cert III in that. Suddenly, it is not a small involvement it is huge. I am not necessarily talking about that, just the community. The fact that people can be proud and say: 'Hey, I come from Humpty Doo', urban or wherever. The other end is basically respecting one another because sometimes we go somewhere and some other volunteer organisation says: 'Oh, that is them'. I know they laugh at Sharon. There are probably not many people in the community that would say a nice word about her.

Some of the leaders I have met would not say a nice word about her because she has a bush church. I know what she does, it is brilliant. Because it is not neat, it is not nice, but it serves a real purpose. That is what I mean by community; it is looking at it and saying: 'That does that bit, that is great; that does that bit'. You do not have to put money into it, you do not have to put much into it, just say: 'Well done', that is it, end of story.

**Ms GARSIDE:** Coming back to what you said, the program Taminmin is doing – the mental health awareness with their kids, they are building into those kids a sense of community and a sense of caring. They have students who, regardless of their role models - their parents or whoever it is - will refer their friends because they are concerned and it is that sense of concern that is a real sense of community. We are not seeing that as we used to and it really is important that, as schools, we address that. That is what things like that do and they are invaluable because we are losing that sense of compassion to one another and respect. They are showing that and have gone ahead and really are showing leadership in it.

**Mr KASPAREK:** No, we are not losing a sense of compassion; we have institutionalised it. We make rules around it, we make all sorts of things and individuals say: 'Oh, somebody, come and see, come and see'.

**Madam CHAIR:** Bev, if you finish and then I will get Sharon to ...

**Ms CROOK:** The way I see it you have stage one, stage two and stage three of suicide. From the study here, the main suicides are between the age of 17 and 25, and that is what we are discussing. I see the school as stage one, which is intervention. I have had a little to do with the schools, especially lately, and it is because you have the older students now, the 17-year-olds. Our organisation deals with stage two more so than stage one, and stage two are people that are suicidal. I have a few things to go through here.

One of the main reasons, or the one thing all of the suicides have in common - all the youth suicides - the majority of them - and we normally treat 17 to 25 - is youth accommodation, they do not have accommodation. They cannot live on youth allowance; they all have family breakdown. A lot of them are dealing with FACS and FACS is just overloaded with foster caring, and FACS has now got Foster Carers Incorporated, I think, to start supporting actual foster carers and training them up.

There is a culture of prison – a lot of our suicides are related to prison, Indigenous prison, but we have done a fair bit of work with the prisons lately and, as far as I know, you can confirm it, but the government is working out a thing where the prisoners can do more community services and more development; so that would help on the suicide thing.

With our organisation, which may be handy for the schools as well, headspace has agreed to come out once every six weeks. We have applied to government in the process for some computers, and headspace

now has e-space, so we want to have e-space available and that is taking off big time, and I think with e-space, and if we can get other services to provide a similar thing, that will take the pressure off the schools a fair bit.

We also have NT Carers Mental Health coming, and we have high-risk youth doing mental health craft, and we have got a social worker that comes. We have also had a lot to do with the drug and alcohol counselling, I forget what it called, Frontier and Alcohol Counselling, but they have just trained half a dozen people in the area of basic drug and alcohol counselling. Now, that is also online where you can sit through with the person and go through it, so we are trying to get that available, whether these things will help.

We had a meeting with FACS. We have a reference group and we have different heads of departments discuss services in the rural area. The last one we had was with the Department of Youth Affairs, headspace, Mental Health and someone else, but the general concession is that government does not have enough money to have – I am not talking about schools and education, but in the general community – government does not have enough money to supply counsellors and services for every different thing we need and, because the group we have is very involved doing all community service, the general thing, and this relates a bit to what George is saying, if you have someone who is suicidal for whatever reason, the person that can help them the most is their friend, a one-to-one situation.

So, what this little reference group was looking at is ways to empower the volunteers of the different organisations in the community through offering them suicide prevention programs, budgeting, and what have you. You do not necessarily need psychologists, social workers, counsellors, to help someone who is in a really bad place. You need a friend, a confidante, a mentor. I am not saying that they go in together; I am not saying do away with it, I am saying there are other community ways around it where you take responsibility and do not undervalue your volunteers, do not undervalue people, because it is that friendship that saves lives.

Another comment was that media has – and I know this is a big thing in schools and it is quite a thing in what we call the little ghetto mob, you know, in and out of court all the time and you are seeing it on Facebook and Twitter, I am going to bash this person, do that. That is not the reason they are suicidal - that is the triggers. So, I think when you are looking at suicide prevention you have to look at the reasons, but what you are looking at is the media, in my opinion anyway, from studying it a bit, is the triggers. So you do not look at the triggers and say: 'Well, the kid is upset because someone called him a name or something'. That is the trigger. That is like the straw that broke the camel's back. You have got to look at that not as a reason; you have got to look at that as a response to the reason.

We do have a 24 hour service which we do advertise, and we are just across the road from the school and we have a number on the thing that is 24-hour service. We have had – I remember a call out, I think it was about midnight or something, someone was suicidal and in the middle of the bush in Howard Springs with two dogs; that person is now a happy dad with two kids. Because people who ring up when they are suicidal; they actually want to live.

So, what I am basically saying is that more aid for volunteers in the youth service to look at things the difficult things like youth accommodation, youth allowance, and family break-up. As far as more services in the rural area, you can have as many services as you like, but these kids who are suicidal, who already have nowhere to live and everything is terrible, terrible, terrible; they will not go to services. They are beyond that. They are anti-society. What we have found at bush church, which is also known as a gathering. It is a different situation; if we have services there, because it is a home base for the kids, because their families sometimes have come for years for food, it is an acceptable thing, so they will.

If we have counsellors there, they will line up - line up is an exaggeration - but they will say: 'Can I talk, can I talk, can I talk', so I think the trick with this is, yes, have services available, but you have to have the service available in an environment and atmosphere that is conducive to the kid. I think you really need to look at stage one, stage two, and stage three is what we were talking about before which was the after there is a suicide, so that it is not acceptable, and it is not acceptable behaviour, and that is more – it is a grief and support counselling, so that is where I think you can network with services, with different churches and services in the area, and say: 'Hey, can we use your facilities to have a grief counselling workshop' and that is where you can work back and forth with the school.

Can I just compliment Taminmin High School with some of the things they have in place. Recently, there is a young lad there and you have this thing where you have a card and they can have a 'time out' type of thing, so you are recognising the triggers and that sort of thing; that is fantastic and it works really well and I think it is great where we can have – instead of going to the emergency services and we can ring

up and say, usually can or someone else, we can say: 'Hey, you know of this family' and we are going back and forth.

I think it needs to be recognised that that service has been reciprocated. If you have a particular kid, especially if you are worried about them over the weekend, say: 'Do you know this family' and the likelihood is yes because these family groups tend to - they all know where the social services are - the likelihood is that we will know them and, if we do not, we can find somebody who does.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, Sharon. One of the things we did not - and I should mention from him to Kezia, for the Taminmin people - is that this afternoon, we have actually asked headspace to arrange a forum for us which they kindly offered to do and bring together a number of youths for us to have a closed session with young people, so we can listen to young people. We have heard from - and it is great when we can get the people who we are trying to develop strategies and policies for, that we listen to them. The three of us looking forward to that forum this afternoon with young people to sit down and go through some of these issues firsthand.

**Ms McALEER:** One of the things I am really picking up with Sharon as well, which I think is a really important point, and it is not about necessarily being a social worker, or being a psychologist, but no child deserves a lone person to take on their suicidality - it is about team, it is about community, it is about shared effort, and it is dangerous really if we do not work together. If someone is like: 'I am going to deal with this and this is going to be my little bag', no child deserves the outcome. Again, it just raises that point that it is absolutely necessary for us to gather as much support as we possibly can around someone who is feeling suicidal.

**Mr KASPAREK:** The problem is, I have had a couple of experiences where I have had kids, and I went to services and I suddenly found out that I was absolutely powerless, because I have no position - in fact, anything to share information. I cannot check information with anybody. I cannot go to Miriam and say: 'Excuse me, what do you find Johnny like?' I have problems with Johnny, but I cannot tell Miriam. Nobody wants to know. Where do I go? She cannot tell me; I cannot tell her. You go to family ...

**A Witness:** With permission, you can.

**Mr KASPAREK:** Yes, I know, but I ...

**A Witness:** With permission from the young person you can, but ...

**Mr KASPAREK:** From the young person, yes.

**Ms PURICK:** But you are talking more about legislation, privacy, and the rights and all these sorts of things.

**Mr KASPAREK:** That is right. I have had a kid obviously sexually assaulted. I went to Family Services - this is a few years ago - and they said: 'Well, you do not have the family address'. I said: 'Yes, I have a mobile phone and a box number, that is all they have given me'. 'Yes, but you do not have the road address, so we cannot do anything'. Clonk! And I am going: 'Great!' That is what I mean; there needs to be something in there somehow where, perhaps, we have secure sharing of information, where we can put these things in, because I probably know about kids that ...

**Ms PURICK:** You could share with the school.

**Madam CHAIR:** But, sometimes, if you have evidence of, particularly child sexual abuse ...

**Mr KASPAREK:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** ... rather than triggering that with FACS probably your best response is to trigger the police ...

**Mr KASPAREK:** Yes, but I mean a lot of ...

**Madam CHAIR:** ... then the sexual assault people, because then you will get a better response.

**Mr KASPAREK:** You are not talking about - a lot of it is because you have known the child for three years ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr KASPAREK:** ... there is a change of behaviour, there are changes that are not quite the norm. It is not evidence. It is a feeling, but the chances are she has the other half – well, no, a third – and over there is another whatever it is. Combined, it could possibly have something, but we do not have a means of actually sharing that, and there is nobody there who has that role.

**Madam CHAIR:** The police have certainly done a lot of work and that was evident. We had a session with the Police Commissioner. What it needs is police, schools, FACS – everyone - to come together to go through that role, responsibility, and responses with each other so everyone – there is not one provider, whether it is government or non-government, that does not care about those young kids out there. It is about bringing everyone together to share and be part of dealing with that individual.

**Mr KASPAREK:** My point is that ...

**Ms WALKER:** That was one of the recommendations of the *Growing them strong, together* report last year about the silos of service delivery across the NGOs and government must come together.

**Mr KASPAREK:** Certainly. If we could somehow share information in a secure manner, or whatever it is, then it might have something. A lot of it is not a police matter, a lot of it is just, you know ...

**Ms PURICK:** Intuition.

**Mr KASPAREK:** Yes.

**Ms PURICK:** You spoke about it before, and Stuart mentioned about the pressure on young people. There is always pressure on young people as we have grown up, but how does the college manage the social media aspects? I have had incidents, as you know, in my office, of this person being bullied and this one hates this one and ...

**Mr KASPAREK:** Yes, how do you manage it?

**Ms PURICK:** It is an issue we are still taking up with the department through this committee, is a policy that covers all schools in regard to mobile phones - probably mostly mobile phones, I suspect, because you can do your Facebook on that. How do you think that has contributed to some of these issues?

**Ms McDONALD:** That is an emerging issue and it has to be tackled on a number of fronts. One of the fronts is education. There are a lot of really good sites from the government now where you can give parents advice. I know next year, for our e-News, we will put in these little handy hints. Basically, parents need to have the power to say to their kids: 'Stop it. Get rid of the account'. That is in an ideal world. That is what we would like parents to do.

**Ms PURICK:** Get rid of the Facebook account or phone account?

**Ms McDONALD:** Yes, anything - all the above, whatever. Parents need to be empowered to know they have rights. This is the sort of behaviour that is acceptable, and is not acceptable. This behaviour is now impinging on school issues, school matters. It is a very difficult one to manage, but our recommendation is to the kids and to the parents, if it is happening, to look at the account, block the person, link the account. Then, if it is a school-based matter, we deal with it in a school-based way, but it involves much education and empowerment of kids and parents.

**Ms PURICK:** Does the school have a policy regarding whether the child can have a mobile phone or those kinds of things?

**Ms McDONALD:** Yes, we have just upgraded our policy to be a realistic policy because kids have mobile phones. We are saying they are not to use them in class unless, for example, now the good educational thing to do is film some learning so they might do a role play or something and then they uploaded. It has to be used for appropriate educational purposes during school time and during their breaks they are going to use it anyway. If it is inappropriate, offensive, or anything that is illegal we will remove the phone and contact the parents.

**Ms WALKER:** Marion has just asked if I could call a five minute break. We have been going since 9 am. Everyone can stretch their legs and have a cup of coffee.

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The committee suspended.

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**Madam CHAIR:** Now everyone has had a cup of tea, do you want to continue?

**Ms PURICK:** Do you have any questions for us?

The one thing I was going to comment on, and I know George will, so I can tell him another time, is over the last probably 10 to probably even 20 years, maybe 15 years, when we are talking about empowering the communities and it is all about your community, and the community can be defined in many ways, there are things we can control in life and there are things we cannot control in life. We cannot control what happens at the international level. Terrorists will continue to blow up buildings; we absolutely have no control over it.

You come down into the country, we have absolutely no control over what the federal parliament does, sadly, and we cannot control things nationally, like we cannot control climate, or we cannot control things that happen, and to a certain extent we cannot control even things that happen at the Territory level, because that is partly what we do, but what we can control is what happens in our communities and what happens in our neighbourhoods and so, with the passing of time, in the last 10 to 15 years, and I am not sure what has been the change in our society behind that, we actually do focus a lot more on our personal communities, that is why you have Neighbourhood Watches, that is why you have Landcare groups now that we never had 20, 40 years ago, because you want to control what you can control, and you want to make sure your community is thriving.

The school community is a classic example. You can control your school community, because you have your school council, you set your own rules, whatever they may be. You still have your issues out of the school community and I think maybe the communities we live in are shrinking, figuratively speaking, and I think that is part of the challenge as parliamentarians, and part of everyone's challenge in a community, is we can look after our own communities, like George was alluding to, just scooping up people who we know have got an issue, because we cannot control everything else that is way out there, but we know we can control or try to control our families, try and help our friends, and the young children, stepping into perhaps church groups, that is another family, and extending – that is how I see it.

I do not know what has changed. We heard, for example, from one of the previous witnesses, Professor Tatz, who has done lots of research in the Territory, and what have you, that before 1961-ish, suicide in Aboriginal communities was unheard of. Unheard of, it did not exist. So, something has happened, and not just in the Territory, but his research, I think, was mostly in the Territory, so things are changing as our generation gets older. Yes, and there is more instant communication, there are more drugs and alcohol and all of that sort of stuff, but you have got to ask the question why. So things have changed and we have to keep meeting the challenges, because it is always going to keep changing, I think, and community expectations are changing.

People want more security; they want their community to be looked after, because that is about all that is in our control, and that is why there is probably more expectations on us. Well, I think anyway; as parliamentarians, the types of things people expect us to help them with that, I know, from my mother who was a politician, she never got those kind of inquiries, ever, but I think there is real changing landscape and somewhere in that mix is the suicide issue of people.

**Madam CHAIR:** Just following on with what Kezia said and then we will start. The other day - and it was a classic - I think the media plays a big role in the perception, not just when we talk about social media, but the media in terms of our job. The other day - and I will talk from a purely personal perspective. I interact with Facebook quite a bit and the reason I do it, on any given day, five or six times, I will get a request from a young man in my electorate saying he has suicidal thoughts. So, I tap into Facebook quite a bit to interact with people in my constituency, because they use that a lot. A lot of young kids in the bush have got mobile phones and now we have pretty much great access ...

**Ms PURICK:** Good coverage.

**Madam CHAIR:** ... and good coverage in the bush. If we dare stray off that - which I did - I was listening tentatively to the debate and I switched on a game, the media then makes it out that you are – and trivialising our work, but they do not see the actual work. For us, for me, Facebook is an important tool in my interaction with a lot of young kids because I know ...

**Ms PURICK:** And that heaps of young people like it.

**Madam CHAIR:** ... young people will interact and put stuff on Facebook and it has been useful where a lot of young people talk about drugs and that gets transferred to the police and you can – so it is not a bad tool, but it is how we use that tool and interact with it, but the pressure is on us all the time not to use it as a means to interact, but for me - the story always passes and I think: 'Let it go'.

**Ms PURICK:** I do not particularly use Facebook a lot because I am not very good at it, but previously, and what Marion said, is that when you – what I found out anyway – when you use these games, like there is Farmville and Sportville and goodness knows what else there is out there, it actually engaged – I actually used the farming one, because of my background, to actually talk to a few younger students out there and then it becomes a bit of a competition. They were a bit lost in the wilderness and so it is something they related to because it was farming stuff and then, of course, someone misinterprets it. They think you are just playing it, but you are actually using it a little bit to talk to young people.

**Madam CHAIR:** You know, they are not doing their job and they are trivialising – but if only the ABC reporter who was also on that had seen and watched that and tracked the actual conversation I was having with the young man who was also playing that game, and that is what gets me angry or cranky with the media, is that they tell part of a story and they do not tell the full story.

Social media is an important tool in terms of tracking some of our young people and I think there are negatives and certainly schools - I do not envy the weighing up and the challenge that you have to do with parents - but yeah ...

**Ms PURICK:** Can I just ask a question on a different tack? Someone talked about the lack of community services out here and we know, because working with Sharon, there are needs for drop-in centres, those types of things that young people like, and you said that the student or the child is not going to hop on a bus and go to here or go and see a church or go wherever but, in a broad sense, what we need to do to bring it collectively together - because the rural area in the Top End is only just going to get bigger and bigger with greater pressures. Then, if we say we are going to get Weddell, regardless of how that develops, that is still out this way, so where are our big gaps? We have heard what some of the gaps are, but if you could summarise it; clearly, we would like to have headspace out here.

**??11:44:59PERSON UNKNOWN:** Yes.

**Ms PURICK:** We would like to have a positive learning centre.

**??11:45:02:** Yes.

**??11:45:04** Like your alcohol and drug ...

**IAN:** Yes, but even if we have ...

**Madam CHAIR:** So, if you had a multipurpose centre, I suppose, yes. Sorry, Ian.

**IAN:** Even with those facilities available. There is a facility in Howard Springs, for example, down here. There is another one at Humpty Doo. It is not just the next suburb. You hit the nail on the head when you talked about the rural area getting bigger. It already is bigger ...

**Madam CHAIR:** It is bigger.

**IAN:** ... physically. It is like an expanded suburb.

In Palmerston, for example, to get access to that facility, a kid can jump on his treddly and head down the road, or they can walk down the road because it is only a three or four blocks ...

**Madam CHAIR:** That is it.

**IAN:** Three of four blocks out the back of Howard Springs is a couple of kilometres ...

**Ms PURICK:** Then, some parents are not happy with their children cycling on roads if they are little things.

**IAN:** That is right. So, it is just not the local availability of services, but in the context of local, there is physical access for those services. A kid might only be down the other end of the road, but the other end of the road can be miles away.

**Ms PURICK:** It could be a long road.

**IAN:** Yes.

**Ms CROOK:** I have another one here. There is a lot of stuff happening in town, but there are the buses. The buses have increased a bit, but there is always concerts, especially in the Darwin Festival. And you cannot get home. I think the buses here finish at 6 pm, 6.30 pm.

**Ms PURICK:** It is an ongoing issue which I have taken up, but it ...

**Ms CROOK:** And we have to make sure ...

**Ms PURICK:** It is a big issue all around the Top End – public transport.

**Ms CROOK:** Kids cannot come out here, there is no interaction between the groups. That is why you are getting these subgroups, because there is no – that is ridiculous, that your last bus is 6.30 pm.

**Madam CHAIR:** We have to get some of those activities in the Darwin Festival to come out to the rural area, rather than people from the rural area going in. That is the challenge ...

**Ms CROOK:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** ... turning that around and getting more of those activities to come rural and regional and remote. Do not start Lynne and I again. Our electorates are ...

**Mr McMILLAN:** Marion, Kezia, another part of the answer – one part we have been talking about is locating services in the rural area. The other part of the answer is all the service providers – and, as I said earlier, we partner with some of them to provide the facilities so they can be in the rural area – none of those service providers – if they are health service providers there has to be service agreements and that sort of stuff that is always been in operation. None of them get operational money for rural.

**A Witness:** Are you saying ...

**Madam CHAIR:** For rural.

**Mr McMILLAN:** For rural. They do not get operational money for rural. So, when they put their service plans in, they are still not funded. So, even the people who are coming and doing rural – a day a week at Taminmin for headspace, the Somerville counselling that happens out of our place, or the baby health clinic, or whatever – none of those organisations have operational funds to provide a rural counsellor, or provide a rural headspace worker. They are stretching what they already have. We are constantly doing that with community services at an operational level. Yes, we need location and the facilities to locate from. Some of that stuff is not insurmountable; there are a number of facilities that people can operate from. If you cannot provide operational dollars, then the organisations just have to stretch the people they have got.

So, the person who comes out to Humpty Doo and counsels on Monday and Thursday mornings would normally be in Palmerston counselling. So, that is no appointments for Palmerston Monday and Thursday mornings for that counsellor.

One of the reasons they are going to do some small group stuff is to try to see more people. So, there is going to be some small group budgeting finance stuff done, and some small group parenting stuff done to try to create some capacity. The problem is we are just stretching the operational ...

**Ms PURICK:** The system resources.



**Mr McMILLAN:** ... capacities. I know George said we are only talking about money ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Just doing more with less.

**Mr McMILLAN:** ... money is a reality and, operationally, that is where the rubber really hits the road.

**Ms CROOK:** A lot of the services are at Palmerston, and rural is like you were saying. It is supposed to be in their scope, but they do not have the funds to service here ...

**Ms WALKER:** That is right.

**Ms CROOK:** When you look at your youth little thing, where it has all the services, you think: 'Wow!' Try getting them out here.

**Ms RATAHI:** Exactly right. But, if you have the long-term vision instead of the three or four year parliamentary term – pardon my cynicism in this – the long term of the saving that are going to be generated for the community by that investment of early intervention, it will more than offset itself.

**Madam CHAIR:** Beverley, you not would get an argument out of any of us in things that go beyond political cycles - election cycles. Way before my political career I worked in the health sector, which is where I know Stuart from. A major frustration of health people was things were dependent on politicians and governments being elected. Meanwhile, you have people dying, people getting sicker and chronic illness rising. You can continue that and the list grows stronger.

When Gerry Wood and I were having this discussion about youth suicide, it came on the back of an 11-year-old girl in my electorate committing suicide. I was absolutely gutted by that. I have seen youth suicide; young men and young women commit suicide, but I have not seen a child commit suicide. That made me question what I was doing and what value are we adding to young people's lives.

So, having that discussion with Gerry and putting the motion, which Kezia - you do not realise how many of us are affected by it. Often, we think it is just us and our communities, and then you talk to Kezia; I talk to many of my friends around Darwin and my children's friends. It is not just an Aboriginal issue, which is what I keep saying to people, it is not limited to our communities; it is every child and let us put the politics to one side and look at how we can deal with this.

**Ms CROOK:** Marion, do you know anything about the program that has started with the boxing association and Tamarind House with a psychologist, Miss Eades? Do you know anything about that?

**Madam CHAIR:** She was trying to get that program happening out at Maningrida. We heard from Marilyn there are some really good things with sport and interacting with sport.

The other area I want to explore, because whether a child is Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal or Chinese, creativity and performing arts and drama is something that should be in our schools. We should be encouraging it because if we are ever going to get our young people to interact and explorer this issue it is through our performing arts.

We took evidence from a fantastic young woman from the Darwin Community Art Centre about that. It is something I would like to see us explore with the schools and what has happened with the funding stream that comes into schools with ...

**Ms CROOK:** Marion, was there not a cultural centre planned for Freds Pass? Gerry was pushing that?

**Madam CHAIR:** For the boxing?

**Ms CROOK:** No, for the arts at Freds Pass.

**Ms PURICK:** I do not recall that.

**Madam CHAIR:** We will have to ask Mr Wood to appear before the committee.

**Mr McMILLAN:** There was a media story about it, Sharon, you are right. There was a media story.

I never heard much more than the mention in the *NT News*.

**Ms CROOK:** There have been a couple of things - he has been working on it for about two years.

**Madam CHAIR:** I might talk to him.

**Ms CROOK:** Yes, because he was really pushing for a cultural centre for Freds Pass and it has been in the pipeline. He has had a few meetings.

**Madam CHAIR:** I do not think kids in the rural area are any different from our kids in the bush. The biggest thing is to get our kids in the bush to school. In my own electorate, music and performing arts is - if you can tie that in to school, coming to school and attending and learning, it is no different.

**Ms PURICK:** On schools, with Taminmin, there are always many students when I go there, but is there a chunk who do not go to school? Is that growing or is it average compared to other schools?

**Ms McDONALD:** It is pretty stable. The percentage of kids that are poor attendees is fairly stable.

**Ms PURICK:** What kind of numbers are you talking about? Is it 12 or 50?

**Ms McDONALD:** Out of our 1100 kids there would probably be 25 on a passive roll that for whatever reason, and family dysfunction is probably the main cause of it, and they are ones we keep in constant touch with, but they need the positive learning centres and like the old star centres. They need an alternative type of schooling. Even though we offer, Work Ready and all different things, they need to get socialised back into school, and then gradually transitioned.

**Mr McMILLAN:** We used to say at any point in time there are maybe 100 kids in the rural area that are not at home.

**Ms PURICK:** Are not at home?

**Mr McMILLAN:** So, couch sitting, and moving, and mobile. Lots of those kids are accessing the school because as someone said before, that is the safe place, that is the safe connection, that is security, that is where they do have family, so they are still accessing school, but they do not have any stable home situation. Roughly about 100, which is a bit of a surprising figure.

**Ms CROOK:** It might be even more.

**Mr McMILLAN:** It could be more; I am trying not to over estimate it.

**Ms McDONALD:** We often get mums call us and say: 'I have not seen my kid for three or four days'; and, invariably, within 10 minutes we have got it sorted

**Ms PURICK:** They are at school somewhere.

**Ms McDONALD:** Or someone knows where they are.

**Madam CHAIR:** You often get a parent asking where their child is?

**GROUP:** Yes.

**Mr McMILLAN:** It is not uncommon.

**Ms CROOK:** Marion, do you find kids who would come to school just for the music, or just for the drama lesson, and then they might not attend; but just for the performing arts they will come.

**Ms McDONALD:** And also for electives. My son is one of those, I have to push him out the door on every other day bar on the elective day, and I say: 'You are up dressed very early.' 'Oh it's elective day today.'

**Ms CROOK:** So they can be totally dysfunctional, but they will come to school to play in the band, or just for the art.

**Ms GARSIDE:** We have kids who come for art and won't come for anything else. This year we have our animal science and we have got our dogs and our monitors, and we have had letters from parents thanking us for this, this is why my child likes coming to school. You have to create little niches for all your kids, like the arts.

**Ms McDONALD:** On adoption day, you know the Year 7 adoption day, there was a little boy from a different school who spent all morning telling me how much he hated school and he was never coming, and he was not going to do this, and really angry until we got to the farm and he went: 'Oh!' and that was it, it all changed; it was really good.

**Ms WALKER:** That goes back to what Stuart was saying earlier about pathways for kids, working within expectations and kids with their individual talents, whether it be through the Clontarf program, through the farm program, and the importance of VET. I know that is a very important subject for you, as it is for me because I have a comprehensive -----11:58:37 with an RTO and how important that pathways is. Because it is about giving kids the opportunity to shine; something they are good at. We cannot all be a doctor or a nurse or a lawyer, but there are lots of skills that we need, and it is getting kids on that pathway fuels self-esteem, that sense of worth that I can do something.

**Madam CHAIR:** That is right, and Lyn certainly pushes that, but it is important in terms of that pathway. I would not mind asking Derrick, at some stage, about Litchfield Council. We talk about the shire, your boundary of responsibility, in the provision of service with youth and sports and other services within Litchfield Council.

**Mr TRANTER:** It is not a shire; we do not fall into the requirements under the act to take on responsibilities of certain issues. As a council, we have recreation reserves for the use of the youth, and we support the school with an award at the end of the year for a student to help them as they move forward, and it is an area that they have not stepped into yet. They have sort of stayed with the three Rs for a long time and we are moving to maybe a fourth one next year, which is recycling. So, there could be a need to push for the community to look at those other issues, social issues within the community, and what council can do in that area.

My concern – I have 20-odd years, no 30-odd years up here in the Territory from Health through Corrections and I have seen a lot of – more adult suicide in those years, but more recently the youth side of things. I often wonder - you talk about the schools and the services here, how much little there is, and I know funding is an issue, but on the other end, for every child we save this end, there could be 10 or 20 people at the other side who are not requiring those services to deal with that death, and that is a big cost. When we calculate what that is; so as a child dies, you have the emergency services people that have to deal with the person, the family, everything. It must be huge on the other side, because you would know, that stage three, how do you deal with the families. It must be a massive cost that does not get recorded because it is not related back to the person who suicided.

So, if we can save them there, we are going to save a lot of money on the other side.

**Ms PURICK:** Which is partly Beverley's argument.

**Mr TRANTER:** Yes, so bring it into here and recognise what is causing it here, bring it into this side, and stop it before it gets to that stage. But, certainly, the council is open to people putting up where we should be looking at expanding our services.

**Ms CROOK:** I applied for a grant - I think it was about two days ago -----  
12:02:36 and it was for the computers and he said we needed computers for headspace, drug and alcohol counselling, all this sort of thing and explained what it was for and relating it to the suicide -----12:02:54 and the person in the office says because the grant has to be in by a certain time. Well, to get this grant, you had to have council approval and the response was: 'Okay, we will see if can get this signed off'. This is Mary Walshe, or any councillor, needs to sign that the council approves us applying for these computers. We waited, and then they said: 'No, you have to wait for a council meeting and the response will not be for about six weeks'. By that time, the grant is finished and it is just a matter of someone in the council signing the thing.

Without being too critical of the council; over the years, I have tried to deal with Litchfield Shire Council and there really has not – they have really stuck to this R&R thing to the point of total frustration. They have not opened to look beyond the – they still think the Litchfield Shire is a really quite wealthy place with no

poverty, looks like the – this is how I perceive them - like the emu with his head in the sand, ostrich, you know.

**Madam CHAIR:** No, emu is important because it is Australian.

**Ms CROOK:** It is just frustrating, so I hope in the future maybe if the council can do a bit of research that that can be opened a bit more. I know they have been really good with the skate park and the shade cloth. I think the council is responsible for that and that is fantastic, but the kids have been saying for years now they want lighting at night time. You have 16, 17, 18, even 19-year-olds that use the skate park. It is a simple thing. It is not a lot, but that gives them a social interaction point at night time. You know, things like that.

**Ms PURICK:** And also, it is safer if you have got lighting.

**Ms CROOK:** Yes, but the park closes at six o'clock and that is a lot of money in there. It is just simple; simple things like that gives them that social outlet, you know.

**Madam CHAIR:** I do thank you, Derrick. We have gone to Alice Springs and other places and we have got very little response out of councils to listen. We are hoping that we will get a greater response because that next tier of government certainly has a big role to play.

**Mr TRANTER:** Has a responsibility to it.

**Madam CHAIR:** And a responsibility to it. Just before I invite everyone to have lunch, and while we have the churches - and I thank you for coming to this meeting. I was educated in an environment of my mentors, people who provided that support as a child growing up with a chronic alcoholic father, which was a group of Catholic nuns who provided not just the education - it was education; I suppose it was alcohol education and the awareness of alcohol, and supporting me as a young person through that system.

The role of churches with the schools, is good. Can we have just a quick discussion about what role the churches and the chaplaincies play in the schools out here?

**Ms McDONALD:** We have a chaplaincy program which runs three days a week in the school. Beverley is one day a week in our school. That program has been long established and is very strongly supported by our community. Our feeder schools in the area are also - I think most of them are fed up through that as well. That is a really good support in supporting our wellbeing team. It is a bit of a different approach with the pastoral care approach.

What we have done this year with Beverley, as well, is used the talents of the people we have. A lot of her work has been done through working with kids in an art situation, art classes. One of the guys we have had is a really tall young guy, and has been working with the young boys with really poor social skills and things like that. It is really important to have that facility to just gain that extra advantage for supporting kids in the schools.

**Ms RATAHI:** In fact, we could not have done without the chaplaincy program this year while we are so under-resourced. It is has been sustained ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Filling that gap.

**Ms RATAHI:** Filling that support.

**Ms McDONALD:** Absolutely, yes.

**Mr McMILLAN:** If I could just add thanks for those comments, Miriam. The program we have at Taminmin and at the four primary schools began long before the National Schools Chaplaincy program, before the federal government program. It began out of connection. It began out of some critical incidents that happened in the school, where the church supported the school and the wellbeing structure at the school by providing someone who began at Taminmin because of the church being invited to be part of the MindMatters group that used to meet regularly and talk about what was happening in the school.

It began in a couple of the primary schools out of critical incidents where there had been a death. Student Services was able to provide professionals for a couple of days, but the church was able to provide

some people over a three-week period to continue working - and in one case it was a very young child - with the parents and the other kids in the classrooms, just to provide some pastoral care.

When the National Schools Chaplaincy program came about, the schools already had a relationship. One of the things we have alluded to and talked about in the process of today is that there is so much more legislation, more administration, more that everybody has to do - particularly people like Miriam, the principals in schools, who are just under the gun with the administrative load.

Our chaplaincy program is highly regulated now, which you are, no doubt, aware of. That means a whole lot for the schools and a whole lot for us. Neil is with Marrara. The regulations are just as heavy in a Christian school as they are in a government school. We still have to comply with regulation.

The nature of that relationship and that support, in a sense, is highly regulated now, although there is still a relationship that sits, in some sense, outside of the regulation. An example of that was a parent asking a teacher could I talk to a kid in the school the other day. I am not a chaplain in the school. I oversee the program, but I am not a chaplain in the school. The parent asked if this particular student could have some time with me because he has responded really positively to that relationship and he has a relationship. That sits totally outside all the rules and regs. It was at the principal's discretion and the parent's request. So, relationships with churches - are you still doing that program mentoring kids at Howard Springs primary?

**A person unknown:** Yes.

**Mr McMILLAN:** That is a relationship that church has built up with the primary school, supporting and mentoring young children. That is an early intervention program. That is supporting their wellbeing and their self – well, you guys can talk about it – supporting their self-esteem so that when we get down to the youth end of the deal, kids have that sense of self-esteem.

Those relationships still exist even though we sit in this highly regulated environment. We would like to advocate those types of relationships are important in the way we have been talking about community today.

**IAN:** Yes, as an observation, listening to the input and conversation, there is a continual focus on education where we can bring this into the schools. I find that ironic in a sense, because much of the – well, at the beginning of the conversation early this morning we looked at the senior years being such a stressor as far as the mental wellbeing of youth coming through the system. It is that same system, if you like, that is producing that stress that is then asked to try to deal with that in a situation where, at its basic core, it is supposed to be an academic situation. However, we have curriculum overload where it has expanded and expanded to the point where resources are being thrown into that, but it is still continuing to expand. We have been talking this morning about more things to throw into the mix.

So, ultimately, it is a little like you are looking at a boat and saying: 'Wow, look, it floats. We can shift all this gear on the boat'. You load all this stuff on: 'Look it is still floating; we can shift more gear'. After a while the concept is boats float, they hold things up out of the water so you throw everything in there. Eventually, it is going to sink or break up or whatever; it is just not going to do the job.

I do not necessarily have anything constructive to offer, but it occurred to me one of the things I have been thinking, especially in ...

**A person unknown:** Another boat.

**IAN:** Yes, another boat. ...listening to the last few conversations, perhaps we could look at resourcing more volunteer type organisations and spread the load. Notwithstanding, like we heard about Taminmin before, basically we are looking at not just doubling the department, as it were, between the middle school and senior school, but needing to double the resources, the staffing for those.

If that needs to happen and that could be done, that is great; however, it seems fairly pointless to do that and then say: 'We have finally got things working on an even keel, so let's dump some more on again'. That is just adding to the problem.

If there are means to put funding and education and programs and things in place, but more on a load sharing basis where there is more of a reliance on community organisations rather than throwing all the

burden of responsibility back on the school system, and not only does it spread the load, but you are also dealing with a whole area of society in the community that is interacting at an entirely different level.

There are many that turn up at school that are never going to be talked about at home. It is not going to be talked about in the back yard because they are specifically kids' issues they are dealing with and school is that safe environment where they can deal with that. However, there are many other areas, the family dynamics and things that are not going to turn up there because the parents are not there to defend themselves or vice versa. Whereas, in a church scenario for example, it is not only church organisations but in a church scenario you are dealing with the family as a whole unit, or sometimes different generations in the family; and the same would apply for different community groups, as I said, it is not necessarily just churches, but you are dealing with the community at different levels, so it would not just be a matter of sharing the load, but also making sure that the shared load, the shared resources are more affective, because it is like taking multi-spectrum antibiotic instead of a specialised one.

**Ms GARSIDE:** I think there is probably a place for networking, and if we all got together and we actually looked at the skills we have got as a community that we could probably utilise those skills a lot better than we do, and draw on each other and support each other, and go from there.

**Madam CHAIR:** You are so right. As a local member, I try to facilitate as much as I can a heads of agency meeting on the ground in communities and invite chairpersons and community members just to come together with CEO's, and for countrymen in communities they get to listen to other agencies and say: 'Oh, we did not know that happened.' And agencies suddenly realise: 'Oh, you have got a child-care council; we did not know that, we could use that.' I believe we have lost because of technology, technology is a good thing, do not get me wrong, but we have lost the ability to communicate and talk to each other, to sit down and talk face-to-face, and to share. I believe there are positives and negatives with technology and it can be a good thing, but we must not lose sight of each other and to sit down and talk.

**Ms WALKER:** Nhulunbuy operates quite successfully in terms of trying to get together service providers across North-east Arnhem Land area, a youth inter-agency network and a family inter-agency network, and all the players in that space have an opportunity to come together once a month for information sharing, for networking, getting everyone's email addresses so when there is a you know a youth suicide or some kind of program coming through, everyone knows when and where it is.

The risk of that is that you add yet another layer of meetings into people's days, and the risk is that they just become a bit of a gabfest, what is it that is driving it rather, than just coming together to see one another once a month, but ...

**Ms McDONALD:** So who coordinates that?

**Ms WALKER:** Again, someone has to volunteer to do it, so the Manager for Children and Families drives the youth inter-agency network, and the family inter-agency network is chaired by someone from the Indigenous Coordination Centre. It is a voluntary thing, but my experience is that people find it incredibly valuable.

**Madam CHAIR:** I always think those champions sometimes – but it needs agencies to also agree to it and to step-up, and Lyn is right, I found in some of my areas you do not just want anyone to come and talk in another talkfest; decisions need to be made in communities and in regions and that is what you want, people who are able to have a certain level of delegation and be able to action things.

**Ms WALKER:** One of the things they produce in the family inter-agency network for the North-east Arnhem region is a directory, a *Who's Who?* Simple. Is there a crisis accommodation in Gove? Who runs that now? What is their phone number? And it is all captured there in a document and then it is contingent on that being updated, perhaps annually, but it is an incredibly useful tool.

**Madam CHAIR:** We might wrap-up, if you want to join us in having something to eat before you go. I do thank you for coming this morning and sharing with us, and listening to us, and we will certainly provide information back to participants who have come to this meeting this morning as to that step.

Our report will be finalised by the end of February, and tabled in parliament in March. The report will be finalised in February and put into parliament in March. I was getting there, Russell, thank you. I have the script, right.

There is a reason for that, is that we want it – it is going on what you said, Beverley, it has to get out of political cycles and there are huge implications for the federal government in a lot of this and so we are keen to pull the federal government in this because when you look at the money that comes federally into the Northern Territory, we get – I mean it is insignificant, the amount, and we have got to – when we look per person, per capita, the Northern Territory is actually four times the national average in terms of suicides and those problems, so we certainly need to try to capture as much as the federal government, as much as the Northern Territory government.

But, it will be tabled in March and that is to take it out of those political cycles and, hopefully, we will let you know once the transcript and everything is done. So, thank you.

**ALL WITNESSES:** Thank you.

**Mr WRIGHT:** Can I just make one more comment to you guys? That honestly, like, you know how you look at communities and stuff, you are not going to be able to solve it as government and I think that is part of the entire problem that a); why aren't you fixing this as a government?

**Ms PURICK:** Yes.

**Mr WRIGHT:** And it really needs to be an empowering of everyone and that sense of ; 'Hey, we have all got to take responsibility'. Because I can see that the load on you guys is huge, and on the school, and on other organisations; we cannot be the answer. We can provide an answer and help but, in the end, it really does have to be a community solution and if it is up to government to provide an answer and to meet the need, it is not going to work.

**Madam CHAIR:** No, and we know that. We know that, Neil. I think the answer is strengthening families.

**Mr WRIGHT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** But we have got to strengthen the community ....

**Mr WRIGHT:** Absolutely.

**Madam CHAIR:** ... and those organisations that are working with families to be able to ...

**Mr WRIGHT:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** ... because for all of us the end result is the interest of that child and we are certainly all conscious – I am most conscious that government is not going to solve this but, as parliamentarians, we have a responsibility to put politics to one side. I know with Kezia as the deputy within her area and Peter and both Lynne, myself, and Michael, that we have not; I do not think in any of our deliberations we have brought politics in it, because it is not about blaming one or the other, it is about how do we get the best result for the community that we are all representing.

**Mr WRIGHT:** Thanks for your time today.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you.

The committee closed.

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