



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

COUNCIL OF TERRITORY CO-OPERATION

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Members:

Mr Gerry Wood, MLA, Member for Nelson – CHAIR
Ms Lynne Walker, MLA, Member for Nhulunbuy
Ms Marion Scrymgour, MLA, Member for Arafura

Witnesses:

Department of Housing, Local Government & Regional Services

Mr Ken Davies – Chief Executive
Mr Andrew Kirkman - Executive Director – Remote Housing SIHIP
Mr Mike Chiodo - Deputy Chief Executive – Remote Infrastructure Program Office
Mr John Tobin - Acting Executive Director, Local Government, Regional and
Community Services
Ms Michelle Brown - Acting Executive Director – Service Delivery Coordination Unit
Ms Giovina D'Alessandro - Director - Local Government & Community Services

Northern Land Council

Mr Kim Hill – Chief Executive Officer
Mr Ron Levy – Principal Legal Officer
Ms Shanti Rama – Legal Officer
Mr Syd Stirling – Senior Policy Officer

NAPCAN - Ms Lesley Taylor

Professor Graham Vimpani (*via teleconference*),
Chair – Child Protection External Reporting & Monitoring Committee

SAF,T

Ms Victoria Pollifrone – Advocacy and Policy Manager
Ms Briony Crummy

AMSANT

Mr John Paterson, Chief Executive Officer

Member of the Public representing the Silent Majority - Mr Kenny Wu

CHAIR: ... into Child Protection.

Welcome Lesley Taylor, NT Manager of NAPCAN, which is the National Association for Preventing Child Abuse, I thank you for appearing before us today.

Although the Committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, these hearings are formal proceedings of the Parliament, and consequently they warrant respect as proceedings of the House itself.

While this meeting is public, witnesses have the right to request to be heard in private session. If you wish to be heard in-camera, please advise the Committee prior to commencing your answer. I remind the witness that giving false, or misleading, evidence is a serious matter, and may be regarded as contempt of Parliament.

Today's proceedings are being electronically recorded. Please state your full name and position before commencing your evidence. As soon as practicable following this hearing a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you to proof it. Lesley, do you wish to make an opening statement, or should we move straight into the questions?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: Quite happy for us to move straight into the questions.

CHAIR: Okay. Does anyone like to start off the questions, or will I ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You go for it, Gerry.

CHAIR: Right, Lesley. The Department of Children and Families have brought out a Social Marketing Tender. Is that something you are involved in, and if so, could you explain how you're involved in it?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: Yes. I've been fortunate enough to be part of the group that were successful in winning the tender. That's with Michael, Warren Munday, Captivate, Menzies, and NAPCAN, and NAPCAN's role, specifically in relation to that campaign, is about ensuring that the voices of children and young people is incorporated in all aspects of both the research and the implementation of that campaign.

CHAIR: So what does it mean by 'social marketing', because it's a bit of an 'in' word?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: Well, I've learnt a great deal about social marketing in a very short period of time. So it's more than community education. It's a much broader concept about changing people's attitudes, and changing people's behaviours, which includes some community education components. So it will be a multi-media, as well as a range of different resources. Obviously we don't know what they look like yet. That's part of the consultation process, but that it will be community led, and community driven, with the appointment of community researchers. And I think that makes that quite unique.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: What's this project called?

CHAIR: Department of Communities and Families. It's Social Marketing Tender.

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: Recommendation 146.

Ms WALKER: It's one of the recommendations of the BOI.

CHAIR: So if I ask you to put your other hat on in relation to NAPCAN, and one of the issues you've always been keen to promote is parenting. In these objectives, do we see an emphasis on parenting as part of the social marketing process?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: I certainly see it in a range of different recommendations. Some of the issues around parenting is that we don't even know what that actually is yet, and we certainly haven't got a great deal of research that helps us to understand what that means in a cross cultural context. So people's expectations about how we raise our children can differ quite substantially, and some of it can be very value laden. So what we have to do is to do some significant research into how to do that particularly well, and I believe that Menzies have been working with the Centre for Parenting, a Dr Robyn Mildren has been involved in quite a few different areas of the ... I can just see her presence in a range of different outcomes of these recommendations.

CHAIR: Are you able to sort research, whether some of that work has already been done? I know you mentioned that doctor there, but I would imagine there must be other people who have looked at this, a focus on Aboriginal parenting, which is probably what you're talking about? Or you don't think that's happened before?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: There's actually very, very ... I mean, people talk about parenting and raising children in a range of different modes, but there's not been really much strong evidence to demonstrate that this is what is best practice in relation to that.

CHAIR: Well, I imagine it would apply to lots of cultures, because children are raised differently in different cultures. So will you be looking at a broad ... I mean, we're not just looking at Indigenous children here, we're looking at children right across the board.

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: All children.

CHAIR: Yeah.

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: We do know there is some common, inherent, strengths in all families, that cross all cultural boundaries, and so we can start from that place.

CHAIR: All right. And it's a bit of a fundamental question. Would you think this process will keep children safe?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: If this process keeps going, yes.

CHAIR: So you think one of the issues would be, how long will the government fund it for? Would that be a concern that it's only just on a single cycle, rather than a continuous cycle?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: I mean, there's always a concern in relation to when funds stop. It's quite natural, because it's very difficult in the world that we live in, in relation to social services, to find sustainability. So it's not a business model as such. So with the complexities of the Federal Government, and the State Government, and

those lines of communication sometimes not being as straightforward as you'd like, it can get in the way of good work.

Most of the things that we know that are good practices, if we could just stick to the same thing for long enough, we might be able to see some good outcomes. So it's about choosing the model and sticking to it long term.

CHAIR: Basically you're trying to sell - I put that in a nice form, not sell in a bad way - but you're trying to promote important aspects of making children safe, I think when you read the objectives of the campaign. That's what it's all about, strengthening families, building communities' capacity, implementing the recommendations, *Growing Them Strong*, etcetera, etcetera. But will people be able to understand what's going on, and the reason I say that is I've got a little list here, and I might ask Professor Vimpani later, that we now have a ... we're going through this process of there's a big long list of recommendations, etcetera, and there's different bodies being set up, and when you go through some of the terminology that's being used, is it getting too complicated for something that should be, I'm not saying 'simple', but it should be made a little bit simpler.

For instance, we've got the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee, Kinship Carers, Foster Carers, Family Way Arrangements, Relative Placement, Kinship Relative Placements, Preventive Family Care Payments, Community Care Information System, Aboriginal Community Workers, Remote Aboriginal Family and Community Workers, Family Group Conferencing, Dual Pathway, Targeted Family Support Services, Community Child Safety and Wellbeing Teams, Care Plan, Structured Decision Making Reunification Assessment Tools, Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Services. That's just out of one section of a letter we got from the Department.

Do you think there's a danger with all these recommendations, and documents that are going around, we could lose sight of what we're trying to do?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: I mean, sadly I understood all of those terms. [Laughs] But the complexity of how they work together is going to be an issue. There are so many initiatives, and so many things happening, and helping everybody to understand how they work together is a big piece of work that is critical.

CHAIR: Would you maybe, I don't know whether it would be you, or it might be more Professor Vimpani, but do you think that there perhaps should be, perhaps a review of whether there's too many bodies. In other words, you know, do we need to focus a bit more on pure bodies, and more of that money spent, you might say 'on the ground' rather than this committee, and that committee, and this reports to that committee, and all those sorts of things, or do you think that all these, what we hear, are all actually essentials to make the whole thing work?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: That's very difficult for me to respond to in that the ones I'm involved in I find quite valuable, which are Safety Wellbeing Directors Network, I find it very valuable to have an opportunity with education, health, and housing, all coming together around children. I find those things incredibly valuable and as a non government person I've never been party to those things before, so I find that really quite valuable.

But getting, perhaps from Professor Vimpani, a map of how they work together would be very valuable, because in that list you gave me, some of them are programs, some of them are networks, some of them are activities, so they're not

grouped together particularly well. So some are just straight services, but having that clarified might be really useful for a whole lot of people who perhaps don't spend so much time reading these documents.

CHAIR: So I think one of the issues when this review was first commenced, was the relationship between NGOs and the Northern Territory Government, and I think you said originally those relationships weren't that great. I'd be interested to know whether since all these, you know, I think, how long have we been going for? A year and a half, or so? Whether there's been, do you think, any improvement between the relationship between the NT Government's Department Children and Families, and well, in your case, NAPCAN, but other NGOs?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: I think what we have is a definite commitment. So I'm hearing people are very clear about wanting to make the commitment. Just once the regional model stabilises, I'd be looking for that to create those opportunities for people to get together in the regions, so I was actually, I'm pretty reliant on ... my perception is I'm reliant on the regions to bring those people together around a regional ... closer to the community that they are going to be quite a critical element that I'd be looking for to provide leadership in that area, to understand it, to be more responsive to issues as they arise.

For example, something that I found out about yesterday, just as an example of how to get information from the ground into these networks, so for example, we know that young mums who deliver their baby ... Tennant Creek, young women from Tennant Creek in that region, Barkly Region, who deliver their babies in the Alice Springs Hospital, actually get driven back to Tennant Creek, and dropped off. I think it's about two in the morning, and I don't think there are any taxi services, or facilities at that time, to find their own way back to their community.

So what we need to do is to work out how do those issues get fed into those networks, so that there's information flowing up, not just information flowing down. So it's about processes as well. But I think it is a very complex system. It takes a lot to keep on top of all the systems that have been put in place, and I think that the critical document coming up is *The Investment Framework*, so it's been referred to, but I've never seen it. So *The Investment Framework* will be really, I think, the most critical document that tells us how things are going to change in terms of the way government does business with the non-government sector.

CHAIR: Just following with a question about the Tennant Creek side of things. Surely someone in Alice Springs, before they put someone on a bus, must know where the bus finishes. Is there, I mean, is there a breakdown in ...

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: Well, it has to be looked into.

Ms WALKER: I thought the bus stopped at Tennant Creek Hospital. I mean, this was raised a couple of years ago about the issues there and that, that nobody was left on the street in Tennant Creek, that the bus actually went to the door of the hospital. Although I could be wrong there, Lesley.

CHAIR: So have you just heard of this recently?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: I was aware of it, it's not been a recent issue that's been raised, but it's just been raised again, and I've been able to feed that into ... try to feed that into where that needs to go to. It's about how would people on the ground know where to go to feed that information into the system so that ... because children

aren't divided by their Department, they're actually whole, so it's how do we maintain that focus on children when every Department has a part of the issues around children, but not necessarily full ownership.

CHAIR: The other one was, I suppose, that these ... I think you were concerned that perhaps NGOs weren't as inclusive in the discussions at the beginning. They weren't sort of part of the discussions. Are you more part of the discussions now the Department's having in relation to getting these recommendations up and running?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: Yes, significantly more so, and that's with the help of NTCOSS, of course, in their extended role. So yes. That's been quite a significant increased involvement of NAPCAN in a range of different ways. So it's been quite valuable.

CHAIR: So we have the 100 and whatever it is recommendations. Are there some there that you think still really should be, need to be, given more emphasis, or there hasn't been enough emphasis on yet? Have you got any particular recommendations you feel that we need to sort of put more emphasis on?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: Just some ... I have some real curiosity around that investment framework, which is how the Department funds things into the future, because that will set the scene for a whole range of things. So it's quite a critical ... I think that's one of the critical ones that I'll be looking for to help get a sense of how things are going to be done, and how things are going to be done differently. Because what we still do have is a lack of investment in the non-government sector, so I'm hoping that this framework will provide some real clarity, and a real commitment to how that's going to change, consistently over time.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Do you just want to elaborate a bit more, Lesley, what you were saying, lack of investment in the non-government sector, and in terms of a re ... NGOs in the region.

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: Just services. Just the delivery of services on the ground.

CHAIR: Do you see any improvements? I mean, do you see any changes that have occurred? I know it's only a short time since the recommendations came in, but do you see any positives, or is it still more or less as it was? You talk to NGOs as well, and that. Do you see any positive changes occurring?

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: Certainly one of the most ... the strongest communication we have is through our community workshops, which we run on a calendar basis, quarterly. So we've just come back from running training for mostly the non-government sector, but some government people in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, and Darwin, and just back from Nhulunbuy last week, and there was a real sense of communication with Child Protection that I haven't seen before. So people with the preparedness to have those conversations, and to establish those relationships. That's something that we're promoting quite strongly.

So certainly the approaches are being made, so it'll be interesting how that's sustained when Child Protection does what it does, which is consume so much of your time. Whether that commitment that people have to establishing relationships in their community is maintained when the pressure's on, because of that whole child protection ... it's all consuming.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I just want to ask something quite separate from ... Lesley, I with Lynne, have been part of another Select Committee that's been looking at youth suicide in the Northern Territory. One of the areas that we're ... and time and time again people talk about ... they've been talking about the Education Department, FACS and just the, all of the NGOs, and everyone, working together, and I suppose there seems to be, I don't know ... and we saw it in Alice Springs, didn't we Lynne, there was a whole lot of youth services, like just a saturation of these services, particularly in Alice Springs, dealing with these issues to do with youth, and when we talk about with the suicides, we're seeing suicides emerging amongst eight, ten-year-olds, fourteen-year-olds. I mean, children that you would normally ... that should be in the care and protection, so ... but people seem to be treating these youth at risk, in terms of suicide, as a separate thing from the care of children.

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: And it's not. I think that when that work is done to explore family way placements, and the more informal arrangements that are made, is it that ... because we actually don't know. I think it's been very difficult for the Department to know where children are being placed, and what those arrangements are, and what can happen is that there can be a sense of decisions being made, but if you don't revisit those decisions, children can get lost.

So I think that that will all come out in a range of recommendations involving Kinship Care, involving the Family Way placements, and a whole lot of those other core recommendations, and that group will be exploring where those children are, and working out how to monitor their safety. And I think that SAF,T, the organisation, that will be a primary role that they would be taking on.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: But how do we get the NGO sector, and the government sector, because the silos are there. I mean, it's ... it just seems to be ... we seem to be ... I mean, it's happening in, not so much at the ... I mean, there's a lot of focus on the early years and stuff, and that's important, but there seems to be this big gap, or these silos then once the child gets to this level, and then just trying to get those services. I mean, has NAPCAN looked at, sort of ...

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: The role that we're playing, in particular, with that age group is around a whole of school, and whole of community approach to respectful relationships, which we think will reduce ... we believe, based on the evidence we have, and the evidence we will be gathering while we do the work, is to establish those respectful relationships within families, within relationships with children and young people, starting from preschool, and going right up, so that these principles about looking after each other, and having healthy relationships is an embedded part of their lives, because starting programs later in the school life, it's too late, if children and young people have already become disengaged from that process, so it has to start from the earlier stages about healthy relationships ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yeah. Engaging them.

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: ... and those children actually knowing what a healthy relationship looks like in order to aim for it, I think, is the thing ... when children are being exposed to those kinds of levels of aggression, and violence, in their everyday lives, what you've got is vicarious trauma. You've got children who are seriously being harmed by just living their lives in a community, and that's not something you can target, that's every child is being exposed to that.

And so the investment has to be in every child, not just the vulnerable children, because there's all children, and very rarely will you get investment in universal, because we just want to target the most vulnerable at that edge. Our commitment, and NAPCAN's commitment is not letting kids get into that group in the first place, and the only way to do that is by investing in universal. Things for every child. That every child accesses a playgroup, that every child has access to the best quality childcare, and underpinning all of that is in relation to young people, and levels of depression is that we have to address the housing. And I know that that's, you know, housing isn't even mentioned in ... I'm not even talking about housing, but housing actually increases the risk of a whole range of things, including the sexual assault of children. Straight up. Overcrowding.

So we have to keep remembering that there are bigger issues that impact on families' ability to keep things safe, regardless of the best will in the world, is that we have to address those major issues that impact on children's safety every single day, and of course that leads to the levels of violence. So it's quite cyclical. No easy answer, is there?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I don't know.

CHAIR: Well, look, we don't usually cut our speakers short, but we have to today.

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: Oh sorry.

CHAIR: No, you're right, because we've got to ring up Professor Vimpani. So, look, thanks very much, Lesley. Appreciate that. Especially those last words. They're really important.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I thought it was good.

CHAIR: And hopefully this social marketing will help achieve some of what you're talking about, and hopefully we'll have ongoing funding to make sure it does happen. So thanks for that. If you want to come on this side you're most welcome, so to talk to Vimpani.

Ms Lesley TAYLOR: I think I've had enough.

CHAIR: We're just going to the teleconference now. And then if I press the wrong buttons here.

CHAIR: Hello Professor Graham Vimpani. Gerry Wood, here.

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Hello Gerry. How are you?

CHAIR: I'm well, thank you. Thank you for giving us your time this afternoon.

Professor Graham VIMPANI: That's fine.

CHAIR: Look, we're having our CTC meeting. We have members of the public here today, and some of the media, so I have with me also, Marion Scrymgeour, and Lynne Walker. I think you've heard of them before.

Ms WALKER: Hello Professor Vimpani.

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Hello Marion. Hello Lynne.

CHAIR: We might get into it straight away, if that's okay. And I've got to read the formal bit first, and then we'll go from there, if that's alright. Okay.

I welcome back Professor Graham Vimpani as Chair of the External Monitoring Committee, overseeing the implementation of NT Child Protection and Reform Package. I thank you for appearing before us today.

Although the Committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, these hearings are formal proceedings for the Parliament, and consequently they warrant the same respect as the proceedings of the house itself. I remind the witness that giving false, or misleading, evidence is a serious matter, and may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament.

Whilst this meeting is public, witnesses have the right to request to be heard in private session. If you wish to be heard in-camera please advise the Committee prior to commencing your answer. Today's proceedings are being electronically recorded. Professor Vimpani, please state your full name, and position, before commencing your evidence, and as soon as practical following this meeting the transcript of your evidence will be uploaded to the Committee's website, but not before you have proofed it.

I remind Members that personal opinions should not be sought from public servants, or from Professor, appearing in a professional capacity. So Professor, could you just state your name, and background please?

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Graham Vernon Vimpani. I'm Senior Clinical Advisor in Child Protection for the New South Wales Ministry of Health, part-time, and also Clinical Chair, at Kaleidoscope, Children's Health Network in Newcastle.

CHAIR: Thanks, Graham. I might just ask you a few questions to kick it off. Just to sort of get back to the Terms of Reference to your Committee, which is about reporting to the Parliament through the Minister for Child Protection, twice yearly on the effectiveness of the reform delivered. Are you able to perhaps, you know, I know that you're only reporting twice officially, but could you give us some sort of summary of how do you think the effectiveness of the reform is going at the present time?

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Well, we're in the process of finalising our second report, which I hope we get to the Parliament, through the Minister, by the end of this month. We had a meeting last week, and I wanted to include some of the findings of that meeting in the current report. So that's leading to a little bit of a delay.

In terms of how we think the reforms are going, I think we continue to be impressed by progress across such a wide range of initiatives, and I mean, it's a massive undertaking to try and turn the system around, and make it more efficient, effective, and I think the staff of the Department of Children and Families are doing a great job in continuing to make progress in all those areas.

I think you have a copy of the Chief Executive's Report to us from the most recent meeting, and you'll note from that, that of the 147 recommendations, there are only four that were delayed, where things are not quite on track. One is in relation to Aboriginal child placement issue, and trying to increase the number of Aboriginal foster carers; another one is in relation to the availability of translation, and communication services with Aboriginal families.

Another one relates to looking ahead to the Family Way placements, and trying to ensure that all of the informal arrangements are replaced by properly organised ones with Aboriginal kinship carers, and the final one was around the Fee For Service care arrangements and having, having that looked into. So those four aside, I think everything else is well on track.

I think though that one needs to set the systems reform within a broader, contextual framework, and we need to recognise that the contexts of the Northern Territory poses particular problems for the development of an efficient, and effective, Child Protection system. Not least amongst those issues is geography, and we were given a copy of the Government Services Report that the Productivity Commission produces, which shows that the cost of child protection, per child, in the Northern Territory is over double the costs in any other jurisdiction. You know, we're looking at over \$1,200 per child aged 0-17, being what the Child Protection system costs, whereas the Australian average is around \$600. And that largely, I think, can be attributed to issues of geography, and remoteness, and the fact that so much of the work is dispersed, and it kind of creates difficulties in terms of starting assistance.

I'm going to stop there and let you ask me some more questions.

CHAIR: If you had a look at the staffing issues, because I notice in that report that you are talking about that there are still large numbers of vacancies, and there's also a fairly high turnover of staff still. So have you actually been able to look at that, and see where that could be improved?

Professor Graham VIMPANI: We did have a look at that, and I think the staff turnover issue was kind of made more prominent by the fact that in June of 2011, a number of people who were on contract, finished work, and there's a tendency, or preference, to actually appoint people to permanent positions clearly, rather than contract positions. The overall thing is that for the year, the turnover figures for the whole of 2011 were really significantly influenced by those contracts ending in June. If you actually look at the turnover rates in November and December, they're only around two or three percent, which is a significant improvement. And I mean, I think overall there are more people being recruited than are terminating, so the staff numbers are actually slowly increasing all the time, as far as I can read it.

CHAIR: And do you think that also, I mean, it's a very difficult job, child protection, so is the type of people that are recruited, and also the support of people who are in the Department, are they important areas that should be looked at?

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Well, I think there have been a number of things that have been done and more in train. First of all, I think the process of regionalisation does seem to have been welcomed by staff who are very positive about the impact that's had in terms of their ability to get administrative infrastructure sorted out in a way that may not have been possible before regionalisation. So that's one thing that is going well.

There's a number of other things in train with respect to training, and also the support of managers in their role of managing staff.

CHAIR: Another question, Graham, would be regarding response times. Now there's a proposal to change the response times, and I gather in other states, some states only have two levels of responses: urgent/non-urgent. In the Territory we have three response times. Do you see that as an important issue? Will you support the changes that are recommended to the response times?

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Well, I think, I've seen the changes that are recommended, and in fact, in the consultation that occurred with staff, there was a variation in terms of the response time for children considered "at risk". So as you know, there's been no proposal to change 'the child in danger' response time from one day. The suggestion has been that the middle range level of urgency be changed from three days to five days, and the final level going, I think from ten days, up to ... sorry, going from five days up to 14 days.

I think they're more comparable to what we have in other jurisdictions. Our Children's Services section within the Department of Family and Community Services in New South Wales response times are more comparable to those. But I think one of the things that the staff have said is that we should not, for children under two, should not extend the response time for "at risk" children from there to five days, but to keep it at the existing level of three days, and I think that that's certainly something that I would support.

CHAIR: Perhaps I'll just, as a bit more general questions there, Graham. How many of the NGOs have you met with, and you'll be able to tell who those NGOs were?

Professor Graham VIMPANI: We had an NGO Forum in Katherine, Alice Springs, and most recently in Tennant Creek, in which there have been a number of NGOs represented, and I would find it difficult to say off the top of my head who they have been, but I would have to just hazard a guess to say that we're probably up somewhere between 15 and 20 NGOs, or greater, that we've actually met with. We've also visited a number of services that are provided by NGOs, and then obviously with the service people who work in those services. I would have thought that we've probably met with 15, 20.

And perhaps if I can reassure Marion that we did attempt to visit, at our last meeting, last week, we did attempt to visit three communities, and unfortunately we only succeeded, I would say, in one and a half. We were going to go to Ti Tree, but the airstrip was out, and the only person who got there was a new member of the Committee who went by bus, from Tennant Creek, because that's her base. But the other members of the Committee visited Kalkaraindji, and had a very, I think,

instructive two days, sorry, one day, most of one day visit there. So I hope we'll score better with being able to see more remotes than this next time... we're planning our next meeting up the Top End, and we're planning on visiting the Tiwi Islands and Nhulunbuy.

CHAIR: Thanks, Graham. Graham, just back with the NGOs, what sort of feedback did you get from them in relation to relationships, for instance, with the Department?

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Well I think that the overall response from people is that they are noticing a difference between how things used to be, and how things are moving now. I mean, there are obviously still some difficulties, which seem to vary from DCF office to office, the extent to which office staff have taken on the reform agenda. But, I mean, it's a slow process of achieving the magnitude of change that's being aimed for, and clearly, you know, the culture of some offices is more embracing of change than others. But that's where I think having the Regional Directors who can work very closely with officers is of particular value.

CHAIR: Thanks, Graham. I'll keep looking around for any other questions. So I'll keep going there.

In relation to people on the ground out in the communities, I'm just wondering, and I actually I've just been ... finished speaking to Lesley Taylor, but there's lots of acronyms, and terminology that's used, and I'll just use some of those that were from a letter that we received recently, and it just sort of talks about the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee. Kinship Carers, Foster Carers, Family Way Arrangements, Relative Placement, Kinship Relative Placement, Preventive Family Care Payments, Community Care Information Systems, Aboriginal Community Workers, Remote Aboriginal Family and Community Workers, Family and Group Conferencing, etcetera, etcetera.

Now do people on the ground, do you think, does that confuse them, or do you find that people know which parts of the system fit in with them, or is there a danger things could get a bit more complicated, perhaps, than they need to?

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Look, I think all of these phrases that we use to describe particular programs, I think there can be confusion in the minds of people, I mean, I think ... let me just say that I think child protection is a wicked problem. By wicked I mean that it's not one to which there are simple solutions, and there's a whole range of different strategies that are necessary to kind of address the problem, and we kind of put labels on those things.

I think one of the things that emerged in a review of Family Support Services that was under taken by Bachelor College recently that I've been sent, but I don't know that the other members of the Committee have as yet seen it. They flagged this issue of literacy. We've got a bit of echo at the moment. Can you still hear?

CHAIR: We can hear you fine there, Graham.

Professor Graham VIMPANI: The issue of literacy in Aboriginal communities, and the ability of people whose first language is not English to actually understand all the terms that we white fellas use. And I think that is an issue. It's something that we constantly need to keep our finger on the pulse of, and I mean, I would hope that we, by running some of these terms past Aboriginal people, that we actually have on our Committee, we might actually be able to look at ways we can perhaps simplify

some of them. I'm not sure how feasible that is, but it's certainly something we should strive for, because I do think that, quote, "The Welfare", unquote, must seem like a multi-headed monster to some people who are dealing with different programs within that umbrella.

CHAIR: Well, there's a few of us who are outside of some of these bureaucracies that find it difficult to understand what's being put forward, so it must be hard for sometimes people on the ground.

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Not only them. We were talking last week about SIHIP, I think it was, which is a housing program that I actually managed to find out what it was from, I think it was in the *Closing the Gap* report, but it was not a term that I'd heard before.

CHAIR: Oh well, look, I think we all struggle, unless we're in the business, with a lot of the terminology. Look, just under another point, Graham. I don't know whether you've come across this, but we've written to the Minister in regards to something that was raised at a public hearing some time ago, and if I could just read you the paragraph out of the letter, so you understand where it's coming from.

It said, "At the public hearing Members of the CTC raised with Clare Gardner-Barnes, Chief Executive of the Department, the emerging issue of children in care being moved from larger communities, outstations, homelands, or more remote areas. The CTC asked for specific information about how many cases involving such moves had occurred, and the locations that children were moved to. In response the Department advisor was not able to provide this information as their reporting systems could not generate a report due to inadequacy of its IT reporting systems."

I'm just wondering, Graham, have you actually heard that as well, and have you raised that at all with the Department?

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Well, not that particular issue, but the issue of the reporting systems, yes, certainly we've raised that. I mean, I think all jurisdictions actually struggle with their child protection reporting systems, and I was intrigued to note in that report on government services, that New South Wales, in several of the tables, had no data at all, because of the inadequacy of their reporting system.

So the Territory's existence of a blank spot in terms of some pieces of information that we'd like to have available, they're not alone, and I know work is progressing on the development of information systems, and there's quite clearly a number of KPIs that will need to be reported against. Once the strategic plan is finalised, information systems will need to be certain they can provide that information.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Professor Vimpani, it's Marion Scrymgour here. Just following on, or expanding on the question that Mr Wood just asked. Is it, I mean, apart from the information system, is it also in your opinion ... and I don't know whether the external monitoring group has had a look ... I was just reading through the Report of Government Services, and the report that was done, but I also noticed the report from the Department ... or the categorisation of Aboriginal foster carers in the Northern Territory versus Aboriginal Kinship Carers, and whether the Department, in terms of the placement of these children, aren't putting them in, because apparently when it's Kinship Carers, or a child is transferred, as I understand to a Kinship Carer, no data, or information is collected on behalf of, you know, in relation to that level of care. Have you ...

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Is this the Family Way placements? I think I did see reference to what you're talking about with respect to the Family Way placements, where there's no data available.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: But does it follow on from, I mean, in terms of these placements, are these children being taken from the main community into these outstations ... when they're removed from these main communities and then taken to these outstations, do their categories go from 'placements from foster carers' to 'placements with kinship carers'?

Professor Graham VIMPANI: I can't answer that question. The issue of children being removed to remoter communities is not something we've discussed. What's concerned our Committee has been the converse, as it were, children being transferred to Darwin from other places in order to be placed with Kinship, or foster caring. But I think if you want some clarity around the difficulties of Family Way placements being adequately recorded, I think that's an issue for the Department.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: And they are questions that we've put to the Department, but I thought that this would be in the purview, or would be part of the review that the Child Protection External Monitoring Report Committee would be looking at as part of some of the Terms of Reference that ...

Professor Graham VIMPANI: I'd certainly be happy to take that on board as an issue, which we might explore with the Department, but I don't know that there's any more, at the moment, there's nothing more that I can say than what I've noted in the report, that it's been difficult to gather data on Family Way placements, but we'll try and get some greater clarity around why that is the case, and if there's something that can be done to address it.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You touch on it very briefly in terms of children being removed from remote communities, and placed in Darwin with non-Aboriginal families, but we've also asked the reverse question of children that have been taken from remote communities, but placed in homelands, or outstations.

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Yeah. No. Leave us to ... I mean, I'll endeavour to look into that with the Department.

CHAIR: Any other questions there, Marion?

Ms WALKER: I've just got a question. Professor Vimpani, it's Lynne Walker here. I guess just seeking a comment from you, given the announcement from Victoria last week, around 90 recommendations to reform and overhaul Victoria's child protection system. I mean, there's similar things to the Northern Territory. Difficulties with out of home care, an overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the system within Victoria, a shortage of foster carers, and links between alcohol and child abuse, and so the Victorian Government has announced something like 61 million dollars, and that would include recruiting over four years an extra 42 child protection workers. That's going to impact on the Northern Territory in that environment when we're trying to recruit.

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Yes. Indeed.

CHAIR: All right. I might just ask ... thanks, Graham. Look, there's been some discussion in the media about Life Without Barriers taking over some of the

roles in assessment of foster carers. What do you know about that particular change in Alice Springs?

Professor VIMPANI: Well, I know that there's been negotiations with a number of NGOs to increase their role in foster care. I mean, I don't know the circumstances that have been reported in relation to the communication, or concerns that there wasn't sufficient communication between Life Without Barriers, some carers that they visited. I think that's a matter I would refer you to the Department for a response on.

But I think... what is happening in the Northern Territory is not different to what's happening in other jurisdictions. I know, for example, in New South Wales that Life Without Barriers take this role with screening carers in terms of their suitability for having children and, I mean, I think the bottom line is the last thing we want to see is a child who's been moved as a result of maltreatment, being placed with a carer who is unable to provide a safe environment for that child so that you end up in an abuse in care situation. That's the last thing we want to see happening. And I think this aspect of the child protection work and the screening of carers is something that can be delegated to a well equipped and well staffed NGO.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That was in relation to, Professor Vimpani, to Recommendation 77 of the Board of the Inquiry, that government made the clear policy commitment to the implementation of the outsourcing of significant elements of the out of home care. So there was tenders... tenders went out on 6 October, applications closed on 2 November and that tender was awarded on 12 December to Life Without Barriers, who have the task of going through and assessing up to 170 applicants wishing to become foster carers.

Professor VIMPANI: Yes. You'll notice from the report detailing where progress is at with the 147 recommendations, but there are a number of other NGOs who have been allocated funding as well. You've got, I take it, the A3 spreadsheet...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yeah.

Professor VIMPANI: ... with all the information on it.

CHAIR: That's right. Yeah. You have to make it A3 so you can read it, Graham.

Professor VIMPANI: Yeah.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: And that issue that was raised about the foster carers and the changes is part of that?

Professor VIMPANI: Yeah.

CHAIR: Well, I think you've pretty well covered all... you've given us the recommendations that you still have... or the BOI recommendations you still have some concerns about. Is there anything else that you think needs to be looked at in regards to recommendations that we as a CTC should be keeping an eye on?

Professor Graham VIMPANI: Well, I think... I mean, I think the continuing issue of housing is something that we need to keep our eye on. I think we were told that in Tennant Creek there was a shortage of 400 houses and at the moment there are 24 to 26 people, up to 24 to 26 people trying to live in three bedroom houses and

that's clearly untenable. And I notice in the most recent allocation of funding for housing from the Commonwealth that none went to Tennant Creek although there was some refurbishment of existing houses in Tennant Creek and funding went to a number of other communities. But I mean, there was ... real concern was expressed to us because of the likely growth of the population in Tennant Creek with quite a high birth rate, and already we're starting from a place that we are behind, and I guess what we would like to see is a housing strategy for these communities which are going to address the deficit between what exists now and what should exist. Sorry, I cut across you, Marion.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yeah. Oh, I think, Professor, when the committee comes up, maybe have a session with Ken Davies and the Department of Housing in terms of the SIHIP program.

In relation to Tennant Creek that the allocation was actually four new houses, but Julalikari Aboriginal Co-operation decided rather than spend the money on new housing that they would probably get better bang for their bucks, so to speak, and cover more houses. So they made a decision to go away from rather than building new infrastructure but to upgrade and refurbish existing infrastructure and add on to that. So that's caused all sorts of problems but that was one that was made, local decision that was made on the ground. It still doesn't mean we walk away from Tennant Creek, but the ask is huge is in terms of housing.

CHAIR: Yeah, we've never heard of 400 houses before, that's the first...

Professor VIMPANI: That was the figure that was quoted to us last week.

CHAIR: Yeah, that's half the SIHIP program for the whole of the Northern Territory, so I'm not sure that figure... I'd have to go and check where that figure came from, but we also were trying to ask the Julalikari Council there as to why they didn't spend their infrastructure money on new houses, because at that time the government decided to use a different fund of money for houses from... a different fund, sorry, to finance infrastructure and they could have used that money for new houses. But I'm not sure of what the policy of that Council in that area was, but it didn't happen. So there were some other, I think, influences on the decisions about new houses that we didn't have any control over. So I just hadn't heard of the 400 houses.

We did visit Tennant Creek, we had a meeting with the people there, and it obviously was a decision of the people down there, so it is a surprise to hear 400 houses.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: And who made the decision... who put up the 400 houses or the need for 400 houses, Graham?

Professor VIMPANI: From the Council. I haven't got their... a woman from the Council, but I don't have her name.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The Barkly Shire?

Professor VIMPANI: No. From the community, I think.

CHAIR: Julalikari Council.

Professor VIMPANI: Julalikari, yeah.

CHAIR: Yeah.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Okay.

CHAIR: Alright. Well, look, we will try and investigate that, yes. But alright. Look, I think you're dead right about housing is important and Lesley Taylor from NAPCAN before you came on, Graham, said exactly the same thing, and that's an issue that's obviously trying to be addressed, but it's a huge issue and a very costly issue. But you're right, with overcrowding it just makes it very difficult to achieve the things we're trying to achieve.

Professor VIMPANI: Yeah. The other... so perhaps one other thing, and that is a concern that we on the committee had about the lack in many communities of alcohol management plans and there was concern expressed to us, for example, that the ready availability of full strength beer in Tennant Creek, that there are some settlements in, I don't know whether in the Northern Territory but certainly in Western Australia and Fitzroy Crossing being one of them, where community elders, particularly the women, took a very firm stand against the availability of full strength beer, and that community, I understand, only has light beer for sale. If people want full strength they have to drive some distance to get it.

And I say this particularly in relation to the other concern that we had expressed to us in Tennant Creek about the number of young children, younger than five in some instances, who roam the streets at night by themselves or in groups, and clearly their parents... we question as to where their parents might be and there were many instances of the separation of parents and the children in that sort of way that one supposes is related to the parent's alcohol consumption.

CHAIR: I was told also it's similar in Alice Springs too, for young children to be roaming the streets at 2.00 and 3.00 in the morning. I mean, besides having a curfew which is an alternative put around, Graham, is the other solution to... I mean, do we say that these parents are neglecting their children and therefore that is a form of child abuse and that we need to find some other way to look after these children? I mean, it's a difficult area to...

Professor VIMPANI: It's a very difficult issue because you've not only got the issue of alcohol, you've also got the issue of overcrowded housing. So where can people go? And you can understand why some of these difficulties arise. But the solutions, solutions are a lot more complex, I think. You know, sometimes our solutions create more problems, than the problem we're trying to fix. And somebody was... there's an example of this that the release of Centrelink payments on five days of the week rather just on a Thursday has created problems whereby it's not just being cashed on one day, but it's now spread out across the week because of humbugging that goes on.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: What was that?

Professor VIMPANI: That Centrelink payments, we were told that the Centrelink payments are now not only paid out on a Thursday but across the week, which means that the cash is available...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I haven't heard that one before.

Professor VIMPANI: ... and that as a result of humbugging that drunkenness is more of a problem on more days than it used to be.

CHAIR: Well, yeah. Look, we haven't heard of that, but that's not to say that's not the case. But certainly something we might be able to find out a little bit more about.

Professor VIMPANI: Yeah.

CHAIR: I don't know... have we got any other questions?

Ms WALKER: Not from me, thanks.

CHAIR: Have you anything else you might like to say, Graham, at all?

Professor VIMPANI: Well, look, we've covered a fair bit of ground. I mean, I think it's interesting the two reports that came out in the January, the government services report and the child protection report that actual workload at the Department of Children and Families is having to confront and, I mean, I think the other thing that was particularly impressive, that the work going on investigating those notifications and the proportion that had been substantiated has increased quite considerably from 2008/2009 with around 14 percent of notifications substantiated up to 25 percent. And given the difficulties within the system I think that's actually quite remarkable, the remarkable statistical support for the impact of some of the reforms.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: When you look at that, Professor Vimpani, the number of substantiations, that's right, having... I mean, if you look from '10, I mean, over '10 and '11, those numbers of those 706 or 39.5 were for neglect and 5.1 percent were for sexual abuse. So I mean, the neglect... if you look at then the corresponding Australian average, yeah, which is 27.2 percent you get to see... I mean, that's right, I think the job that's facing the Child Protection Department is a significant one, you know, the challenge to try and get those notices out there.

Professor VIMPANI: Yes.

CHAIR: Alright. Look, I think we've run out of questions there. Look, thank you very much for giving up your time, Graham, we appreciate that. Could you tell us when you might next be in the Territory?

Professor VIMPANI: Yes. Our next meeting is... we're having at the end of June, June 27 to 29. And as I said we're planning to go to Tiwi and Nhulunbuy and then back to Darwin, so may be an opportunity to meet with you again.

CHAIR: Yes, that might be... if we can do that that would be good. But we're probably coming to our... the end of our CTC for the year because this is the final year of this Assembly, but I think we'd still be happy to meet with you even it... we weren't able to put everything into our final report, but I think it's still important that we keep up to date with what's going on and it's fairly... not fairly, a very important part of what's happening in the Northern Territory in regards to protection of children, so thank you Professor Graham, and we appreciate you giving us your time.

Professor VIMPANI: Thanks.

Ms WALKER: Thanks Graham.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Thank you.

CHAIR: Well, we'll have about ten minutes or so perhaps. Alright.

Alright, we might get started. And I'll do the official bit first. Okay. Welcome to this Public Hearing in the Council Territory Co-operation for Child Protection. Victoria Pollifrone, Advocacy and Policy Manager, and Briony Crummy, is that correct? I thank you for appearing before us today.

Although the Committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, these hearings are formal proceedings of the Parliament; consequently they warrant the same respect as the procedures of the House itself. Whilst this meeting is public, witnesses have the right to request to be heard in private session. If you wish to be heard in-camera, please advise the Committee prior to commencing your answer.

I remind a witness that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and it may be regarded as contempt of Parliament. Today's proceedings are electronically recorded. Please state your full name and position before commencing evidence. As soon as practicable following this hearing the transcript of your evidence will be provided to you to proof it. Would either of you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yes. My name is Victoria Pollifrone and I'm Policy and Advocacy Manager with SAF,T. I have been asked to speak on behalf of Josie Crawshaw, the CEO of the peak body for Aboriginal Children Youth and Families. And before I go on too much more I'd like to acknowledge that we're meeting on the traditional lands of the Larrakia People, we recognise and respect their past and present cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship to country.

As you've noted we have Briony Crummy with us as well, and I'll let Briony introduce herself.

Ms Briony CRUMMY: I'm Briony Crummy, I am currently working in SAF,T for a 16 week placement.

CHAIR: I might introduce our other good gentleman up here, Mr John Paterson.

Mr John PATERSON: Mr Chairman, Committee Members, John Paterson, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Medical Service Alliance Northern Territory.

CHAIR: Alright. I probably... should I read it all again or just...

Secretary Ms Helen CAMPBELL: I think we can...

CHAIR: We might do that later. Yeah. We've just done the formal opening statement about...

Secretary Ms Helen CAMPBELL: SAF,T.

CHAIR: ... the Committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, these hearings are formal proceedings of the Parliament, consequently they warrant the same respect of the proceedings of the House itself.

Whilst this meeting is in public, witnesses have the right to request to be heard in private session. If you wish to be heard in-camera please advise the Committee prior to commencing your answer. I remind the witness that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of Parliament.

And today's proceedings are being electronically recorded and as soon as practicable following this hearing a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you to proof it. So John, would you just like to state your name and your position just for the record there?

Mr John PATERSON: John Paterson, Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Medical Service Alliance Northern Territory.

CHAIR: Okay. Well, we're going to probably direct some of our questioning first to SAF,T and we can mix them up at times, but we'll work down that path first. Thanks.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: As you're probably all well aware, sadly Josie can't be here in person today due to attending to a personal family matter. I'm not quite sure how things normally run, but I actually have her words to read out to the Committee.

CHAIR: Yeah, that's okay.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yeah.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: And perhaps on the conclusion of that if you've got questions I will take them on notice and we will get back to you on them, if that's okay.

CHAIR: Alright. And if you can answer them you can let...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yeah. Sure. Yeah.

CHAIR: Yeah. That's okay.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Council of Territory Co-operation today. Our fledging organisation was one of the key recommendations of the 2010 Board of Inquiry and has operated since July last year. Our brand, which I have a copy of on our Manifesto, was developed and endorsed at the inaugural meeting of our Management Board in September last year.

SAF,T stands for Strong Aboriginal Families Together. Our organisation's focus is reflected in our motto, 'through little one's eyes', and also depicted in our logo featuring a functional Aboriginal family centred within the iris of a child's eye.

We're grateful to the NT government and in particular to Minister Kon Vatskalis for the support we've received to date and for the historic opportunity to develop a peak organisation tasked with developing an innovative new approach to the delivery of services and outcomes to Aboriginal children and their families.

The principal purpose of the peak body is to increase the influence of Aboriginal decision making and evidence based approaches in the design and implementation of policies, programs and services targeting Aboriginal children and

young people in the NT through the commitment to a child centred rights based approach.

One of our great strengths is that our Management Board is made up of 13 Aboriginal community leaders from across the Northern Territory. The Board met in September and December last year to consider the constitution, governance and future direction of the organisation. And last week we became fully incorporated in our own right. In January this year we hosted a meeting in Darwin of our panel of experts comprised of local, national and international child protection experts. They made a series of high level recommendations to assist in guiding and informing our development which will be referred to the Board when they next meet in April before implementation. One of those experts is actually present here today, Lesley Taylor from NAPCAN.

The panel echoed the views expressed to me by co-author of the Board of Inquiry Professor Muriel Bamblett on my recent visit to the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, or VACCA, that being, the Territory is so unique in terms of the massive challenges presented in this sector that in order to promote tangible longer term change our model for service delivery must be equally unique to address the challenge.

SAF,T has been tasked with re-establishing Aboriginal child care agencies or ACCAs in the NT, in the Darwin region and central Australia. In response to that mandate, and as recommended by our Management Board and supported by our expert panel, SAF,T is developing a service arm which we will auspice during its development phase. Rather than adopt the narrower term of ACCAs, we prefer the term Aboriginal Children Youth and Families Support Services, or ACYFSS.

It is expected that our ACYFSSs will include parenting and family support programs including family preservation and counselling support services and family reunification services, placement and cultural support for children in out of home care, support and assistance for kinship carers and family way placements, cross cultural awareness advice and training to non-Aboriginal carers and agencies, recruitment, training and support of Aboriginal foster carers, advocacy and referrals for Aboriginal families caught up in the child protection system.

With regard to the sweeping changes and reforms under way in the NT, I acknowledge the extraordinary pressure and competing priorities of the Department of Children and Families in meeting the 147 Board of Inquiry recommendations, and commend the efforts of the many hardworking and committed staff. I therefore regret reporting to the Council that our progress has been significantly hindered by a delay of more than five months in the signing of our Service Level Agreements with our funding body.

This has impeded my ability to recruit staff and build organisational capacity and regrettably has resulted in our timeframes for deliverables being pushed further out. I would particularly like to note the support and patience of our auspicings body, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT, or AMSANT headed by John Paterson, in the lengthy interim period when funds were not released. Without that support and that solidarity our organisation's journey would have faltered before it had even begun.

On another matter related to our dealings with the Department, for several months I have requested data from the Department of Families and Children related to Aboriginal children in the child protection system and arrangements around their

removal from family and community into out of home care placements. In the first instance they referred us to the 2011 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare figures rather than release information directly. Those official 2001 figures indicate that there are 501 Aboriginal children living in out of home care arrangements in the Territory. From feedback received from other Aboriginal organisations and NGOs this figure would seem to be a substantial under estimation.

In response to an approach made to the Minister in October last year, we were offered the opportunity to engage with DCF on the collaborative research project to establish among other things, how many Aboriginal children are in kinship in family way placements and information on the origins of the children taken into care. This proposal has since stalled and it's unclear how, or even whether this initiative is being progressed.

In the longer term, one of the fundamental tools underpinning our own effective and sustainable response to vulnerable children and families will be the capacity to gather, store, access and analyse information. Incorrect, inaccessible or incomplete information will compromise the capacity of our organisation to effectively respond to the needs of children and families at risk.

As the lead Aboriginal agency in this sector it is my view that SAF,T should be afforded the same information retrieval powers as the Children's Commissioner. It is deeply disturbing and disappointing that our organisation has not been promptly provided with information that would aid the development of our own services and the allocation of our resources. Effective inter-agency collaboration between the peak body, the Child Protection Authority and other government and non-government agencies is critical to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable Aboriginal children and families.

Regarding remote service delivery, for countless number of years I've heard references to needing to adopt a "whole of government" approach and to "break down the silos", now the buzz term seems to be the need for an "integration of services". I agree with Tim Reddell, the Deputy Coordinator General of Remote Service Delivery who is was in Darwin from Canberra last week for an integrated family services meeting. Despite a great deal of time, effort and expense being invested into the design and implementation of a more effective and coordinated service response, in reality very little has changed at the coal face.

Moving on to one of the most pressing issues affecting Aboriginal youth in the NT, I sit on the Child Death Review Committee and our organisation recently made a submission to the Parliamentary Select Committee in to youth suicide. I share the concern of the Children's Commissioner that Aboriginal children as young as eleven are committing suicide at an unprecedented rate in communities where family violence is rife.

Last month the *Melbourne Age* and other national media referred to the NT as the youth suicide capital of the Western world. Our daughters and granddaughters account for 40 percent of all suicides of children under the age of 17, which is unheard of, and coincides with increased substance abuse and a staggering rise in the number of Aboriginal women admitted to hospital as a result of a violent assault. The fact that our women are being hospitalised for serious injury from domestic violence at 80 times the rate of others is heartbreaking. Research has shown that exposure to violence greatly increases the risk of a person taking their own life and emphasises the need for government to focus on culturally appropriate preventative support services and healing programs to address trauma.

Six years ago when the Howard government launched the emergency intervention in the Northern Territory to combat child abuse and neglect, the number of girls committing suicide was significantly lower. The NTER has drawn national attention to the level of poverty and deprivation in some of our remote Aboriginal communities, but despite \$2 billion and a name change, can our children youth and families really look forward to Stronger Futures?

I often hear references to the fact that Aboriginal people have the most and the least of everything. We have the most problems related to community and domestic violence, substance abuse, poverty and disadvantage, we have the least access to good nutrition, health, education, job opportunities and housing. Our children are removed and their families subjected to bureaucratic income management if their children do not attend school, yet anecdotal evidence constantly suggests that the number of children in out of home care who do not attend school is equally poor.

Aboriginal children in the NT make up almost 90 percent of out of home care placements. Whilst recognition of the importance of culture to Aboriginal children is the cornerstone of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principal or ACPP, in all Australian jurisdictions, including the NT, the fact is, - that most Aboriginal children are neither cared for by Aboriginal carers or placed by Aboriginal community controlled out of home care agencies.

The risk of these children being dislocated from family culture and community is significant, and we welcome the work being undertaken by the Indigenous Policy Unit of the Department related to the ACPP and the development of the new guide. Two thirds of NT Aboriginal children in out of home care are placed with non-Aboriginal carers, but only a third of them have Cultural Care Plans. This means the majority of them have little or no links to culture, community, or country let alone family. In fact we know that fewer than half of the children in care in the Northern Territory even have a Care Plan that is compliant with the Care and Protection of Children Act, let alone a cultural care plan.

We call on the Government to ensure that the Department is properly resourced to provide updates on their progress to address this backlog of outstanding Care Plans and Cultural Care Plans.

Like most other States and Territories, in the NT interim and temporary protection arrangements are the most commonly issued type of order enabling children to be taken in to care without a court order. A sample of these cases reviewed by the Children's Commissioner last year indicated that more than 70 percent of children on TPAs are not returned to their parents care when the order expires. Yet there is no advocacy service in the NT to assist parents to navigate their way through a baffling child protection system.

Right now, hundreds of Aboriginal children are affectively lost in the system without identity, without family and without a voice. Since my appointment in July, numerous Aboriginal people from across the NT have expressed their fears to me that we are witnessing another "Stolen Generation". Stolen may be an emotionally charged term but I believe their fears are well-founded.

Families are the core of an Aboriginal child's cultural care. Tracing a family of Aboriginal children in out of home care for six months or longer is crucial but often complex and time consuming. Currently there is no government or non-government agency in the Northern Territory that is resourced to consistently and adequately

address this need. We call for bipartisan support to ensure the maintenance of family links occurs in every placement of an Aboriginal child or young person in out of home care for six months or longer.

The structure of the child protection system and how it works is a mystery to many Aboriginal parents and families, particularly in remote regions. There is also a lack of bicultural education and knowledge about parenting strategies and appropriate care environments in many Aboriginal communities. To achieve the best possible outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and their families, growing and delivering a sustainable best practised Aboriginal community controlled out of home care and family support service for the NT is vital. Aboriginal community control has proved to be the most effective way of providing comprehensive primary health in the NT and the many success stories in the sector support the fact that this is the best way to achieve positive sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal people. It will not be simple or a short achievement, but I believe SAF,T's accomplishments over the past seven months are a good solid starting point to build upon for the future.

Ms WALKER: Just for the Chair, could I request...

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms WALKER: ... would it be possible, Victoria, to have that statement tabled for us...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yes. Sure.

Ms WALKER: ... rather than waiting for Hansard, which will take a while?

CHAIR: Thanks.

Ms WALKER: Thank you.

CHAIR: Well, thank you very much for that detailed, very detailed opening statement. That's appreciated. I might just open it up now for Members if they have any questions. Well, I might get it rolling.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You can go first.

CHAIR: Okay. You spoke about a five month delay in funds in relation to recruitment. Can you perhaps give us a little bit more about that? Was...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Well, without funding security it's very difficult to attract and recruit staff. We have our Service Delivery Manager commencing next month but certainly that initial argy bargy over the Service Delivery Agreement was problematic and it's something that we could have done without. To have the security of funding and the Agreements signed off months before it actually was would have allowed the process to be in train beforehand.

CHAIR: How many staff are you expecting to have full time working in SAF,T?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Eventually it will be eight...

CHAIR: Right. And how many working...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: ... as a starting point.

CHAIR: How many working now?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: And at the moment there's four of us.

CHAIR: Okay. So were you given a budget? How did SAF,T operate at the beginning?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yes, we were given a budget. But even the parameters of the budget were unclear to us from the beginning with our negotiations. We were never given anything in writing about the funding as far as the amounts are concerned, but after several meetings it was established that the peak body would be provided with \$500,000 and the establishment of the ACCAs would be funded to the tune of \$1 million for the... for each. That is the one in the Darwin region and the one in Central Australia.

CHAIR: So you were given a budget, you had to acquit how you were going to spend that budget? So did you have to put an application in for what you were going to use the money for?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yes, we did.

CHAIR: And then you get approved a budget to do that?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: That's right.

CHAIR: So where did the sticking point come? At what stage did... you couldn't... you're saying you couldn't employ above the four people that you've got now because you didn't have a Service Agreement?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yes. Without that funding security and the money in the bank we were relying on funds providing by our auspicing body. I think we clocked up over \$200,000 at their expense before funding was released.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That was the agreement though, wasn't it, John? Sorry. That AMSANT would auspice that, and then they would be reimbursed once they'd gone. So wasn't that the agreement though?

Mr John PATERSON: Yeah. It wasn't the ideal approach, I guess. And we would have preferred the money up front because we had access into... we were putting our own programs and initiatives at risk by having to borrow money from those other programs to help fund some of the work that SAF,T had to get on and commence the business. So it wasn't the ideal approach. There wasn't any concern, I knew once they did get the money that we would get reimbursed accordingly, so yeah, it was just what came first and...

CHAIR: So you have been reimbursed?

Mr John PATERSON: Yes.

CHAIR: I just wanted to make sure of that, in case they ... So where are we at now in relation to funding?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: The money's in the bank and it's all systems go.

CHAIR: Alright. So that, even though there was a delay at least you're back on track now?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yes. Yeah, definitely back on track. But it's just meant that the Service Delivery Manager is starting next month, because that's a very senior position and it required an extensive head hunting exercise to actually get somebody with the expertise. And the person we're putting on has 13 years of expertise in ACCAs. You just don't come up against those people overnight, so it does take quite a while to source them. And if we had have had that financial security earlier, I'm sure that her appointment would have been a couple of months in advance before next month.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: What will be her... I suppose... I'm saying her because you say it's a female. What would be the main duties? So service what, coordinator or...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: She'll be developing the actual service arm that we're auspicing and that will allow the delivery of actual services and programs to Aboriginal children youth and families.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Okay.

Mr John PATERSON: It will be the ACCA, yeah.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Commonly called ACCAs.

Mr John PATERSON: So you're establishing the...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: ACCAs.

Mr John PATERSON: ... what do you call it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The Aboriginal Child and...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Which we refer to as ACCA's.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... Child and Youth I think you're saying, Aboriginal Child Youth Family Support Services.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yeah, Aboriginal child, youth and family support services. Yeah.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: So you're the peak, you're looking at establishing these centres across the regions?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Well, at this stage we've only been funded and mandated to cover the Darwin region and Alice Springs region. But the model that we're developing is an optimistic one and we hope that that it will eventually have Territory wide reach.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: How many staff will be in the Darwin and Alice Springs? I mean, I take the CEO's statement that she was part of the Child Death Review Committee, and she talked about the youth suicides or the number of suicides, particularly amongst young women that was part of the Child Death Review ... that they'd had a look at some of those suicides across the Northern Territory. How

many... so you'll have staff in Darwin, staff in Alice Springs and what will be... so they'll go out and travel?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: The actual model, the service delivery model is still being developed and that's certainly something that we can get back to you if... as far as how that will function.

Ms WALKER: So without that service delivery model developed to date, and I understand obviously some difficulties you've had with the start up, does that account for why there were these... in the report that you read delays around establishing initiatives. Like, you talked on behalf of Josie about the... how the capacity of the organisation was compromised, about the difficulty around information retrieval powers, is this sort of why that's been difficult?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: No, I'm not sure why it's difficult to get information.

Ms WALKER: I'm just trying to understand the governance arrangement.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: I just think that the Department has so much on that we're quite a way down the list of priorities and we completely understand that the train has left the station and it's charging along.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: But if you've got 80 percent in the child protection system who are Indigenous...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yeah.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... and you're the Aboriginal peak, you're the body that's been established to look at this issue, why is it then difficult to get that information?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yes. That's certainly... our position is that it... when we're talking about child protection in the Northern Territory we're pretty well talking about Aboriginal kids. This is our Territory and we have a right to access information that supports development, and certainly it will allow us to more effectively resource policies and programs because otherwise you just... you're doing busy work.

Ms WALKER: Of course. And if one of the many findings from the BOI report was about ineffective inter-agency collaboration, and we've got this occurring again right now, I'm very concerned.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yes. That's right. And that... the note about Tim Reddell commenting himself after all his many years' experience at such a high level at the Commonwealth level to... for him to admit that he doesn't see a lot of change at the coal face is a bit of a concern. But all the more need to develop a fresh approach and to empower Aboriginal community control of organisations.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: So who said that they haven't seen any change? Sorry.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: His name's Tim Reddell, and his position is the Deputy Coordinator General of Remote Service Delivery...

Secretary Ms Helen CAMPBELL: For the Commonwealth, Marion.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: For the Commonwealth.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, that's not surprising he made that comment then.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yeah.

CHAIR: Well, we've never... we haven't... have we met him?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I'm just being facetious, sorry.

CHAIR: Just about the... you're saying that the information that you require is not accessible. Was there a formal request or did you... I mean, I'm not saying you shouldn't have expected it to happen, but was there a request that you be able to access data?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yes. We made a formal request and initiated a meeting and ended up taking it up at the highest level and as a result of that meeting with the Minister the Department offered to engage in a collaborative project with us to get to the bottom of the answers that we were seeking. It may well be underway, but sort of lost in translation somewhere. But it just seems to me that the information that we asked for would have been critical to the functioning of their own agency, let alone ours.

CHAIR: Well, you may have heard before that the Department and Professor Vimpani said actually something similar about I think it was in New South Wales, that some of the information tracking methods either don't exist or are very poor.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: And it's a concern of Josie's that CCIS seems to be – that's the database system that the agency inherited from Health – that it seems to be certainly lacking, and it's not part of the reforms that are underway.

CHAIR: We've written a letter to the Minister regarding that statement that was made at one of our hearings in regards to that inability to get information, especially where young children are taken to ... placed in Homelands or outstations or remote areas. So I think that's certainly we need to keep pushing, but obviously, I'm not a technical person, but Professor Vimpani said there's problems in other states. You'd think it would be, you know, maybe a bit ahead of sometimes when it comes to IT. So yeah, it's something that's really important.

I'm not sure myself but listening to what you said is how you could do the job that you're trying to do without that information or without reliable information. So even if you haven't got that information, what are you ... how are you coping without that information?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: We're engaged in inter-jurisdictional study at the moment where we've actually gone to visit places that have runs on the board, like VACCA in Victoria, AFSS in Adelaide and Jorginup in WA.

CHAIR: Is Victoria a good place at the moment? I read some of that and I thought, oh. So the Northern Territory wasn't quite as bad as what ... I'm not saying it wasn't good but obviously things in Victoria aren't particularly good either.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: The issue of children in the system not having Cultural Care Plans is one that was recently raised by Professor Muriel Bamlett and

she basically gave it to the government between the eyes and said you're going to face a class action if you don't link these kids up to where they come from.

CHAIR: And she's in Victoria?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yeah, she's co-author of the BOI.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: She was one of the authors.

CHAIR: That's right. Yeah. So anyway, look, I think that's an area that we're just going to have to keep pushing and it might take a bit of work yet.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, until the service delivery model... that... I'm still sort of trying to struggle with what the level of information is that you've been requiring from the Department... it's not about individual kids, is it?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: No. Not individual kids and we're certainly not after names and addresses.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yeah. So what's... yeah. Because it's privacy and confidentiality issues attached there. So what's the...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yeah.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... what's the... what is it... what's the information that you can't get from the Department that's hindering your progress?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Well, how many kinship and Aboriginal carers do you have on your books? And the children that are in out...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We've been trying to find that out too.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: The children that are in out of home care...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yeah.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: ... Where do they come from? What communities do they come from?, What are the reasons that they're coming into care? I mean, this is basic stuff so we can see, well, where are the hot spots and what needs to happen in these communities for this to stop happening.

I know through one of our Board members, Sophia Garrkali Gurruiwiwi that children in Galiwin'ku, where she comes from, there's a massive percentage of them that are failure to thrive children, and it comes back to that issue I caught the tail end of when I walked in here. Sophia is a third generation person who has grown up in overcrowded conditions where they have houses with no refrigeration, where they have no food security. So these little kiddies out there are not necessarily starving due to poor parenting, they're starving because there certainly isn't enough food to go around.

Sophia was extremely excited that her husband had won a raffle and she'd... they'd won a boat and he was able to go out and go fishing and do some fishing with the family. The issues facing our Aboriginal family are so immense and you feel like you cut one head off one problem and ten sprout up in the same place. But those basic infrastructure needs must be addressed.

And the other issue that I heard also when I walked in about neglect, is a real concern to SAF,T because we can't be taking punitive measures against families who are living in poverty and disadvantage. And in the United States recently at least two of the States – and I sent this through to the legislative reform people headed up by Barbara Bradshaw - have actually legislated to stop the removal of children for neglect when it is to do with poverty and disadvantage.

CHAIR: Well I think the danger of making general statements is not always everybody is in poverty or neglect... poverty, just like not all Aboriginal families are living in overcrowded conditions. So I suppose we need to be careful that we don't... we're not saying there isn't the problems, but I suppose there are other... there are families who are not in that situation, so I think that we need to deal with each case on its merits, of course. The kids that are roaming the street in Tennant Creek might come out, for all I know, reasonably good family, but just mum and dad are doing something else perhaps and not worried about the kids. So we don't know. But I understand where you're coming from. But I think sometimes...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, housing's a major thing but...

CHAIR: We know that. Yeah. Yeah.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... we've got to face the facts... I mean, substance abuse is still a critical issue amongst that lot, you know.

CHAIR: But there are... no, that's right. But that substance... there's kids on the street in Palmerston late at night and I'm not sure that overcrowding is the issue there. All I'm saying is that it's a complicated issue and there's probably several... many reasons why it's occurring. But I would have thought that in the end the protection of the child, the safety of the child is the priority.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, I mean, if you look at that in terms of the safety of the child, and then you say... I mean, in terms of placements, and I notice the recommendation... or with the Board of Inquiry and they were saying... looked at one of the recommendations in terms of that the Aboriginal child placement principles and the Aboriginal children's placements, so taking them... and then if a child is in an environment that... where they are at risk the Department is then obligated, well, they have a responsibility to remove that child and place that child in an environment where they aren't at risk. So what is happening between SAF,T and AMSANT with the Department to develop that policy... or to look at that, because I'm just trying to find where it said that there should be a review of that child placement principle because I... there it is. It is the Board of Inquiry number 6, oh, it's amber so it means it's currently behind schedule.

Ms WALKER: Surprise, surprise.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You'd think that that would be an important thing to look at.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: I think one of the problems... I mean, to actually try to look at the Aboriginal child placement principle and develop the guidelines and encourage, the practice of that is one thing, but if you've got half the kids in out of home care with no Care Plans and only a third of them with Cultural Care Plans, we're not even looking at their extended families. We don't even know if they've got aunties and family that can look after that. That's basic information we need for the

best outcome for the child to keep them on country and in community. If we're just removing them without having those basic checks and balances in place then the best outcome for the child is not necessarily happening. So certainly that backlog must be cleared. And it must be something that happens with every child that goes into care, for six months or more, they must get those Care Plans and those Cultural Care Plans sorted.

CHAIR: I suppose a question I'd ask, and I'm just looking for the figures, the number of Aboriginal children that are not in an Aboriginal care situation. It's...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: It's two thirds of them.

CHAIR: That's right.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: And there's 501 of them altogether.

CHAIR: That's right. Yeah. Now I might... and you can tell me if I'm wrong here, but I'm just looking on the surface of the figures that... just looking at the figures the question would be then is there a shortage of Aboriginal carers?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Absolutely. Yes, there is.

CHAIR: And why is there a shortage of Aboriginal carers? Is it because people did live in overcrowded houses, or they're not suitable? So has anyone looked at the reasons why there is a shortage?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: This is something that we have in common with most other States and Territories, it may have something to do with the fact that it's culturally... it's foreign to Aboriginal families to look after someone else's kids because they regard those kids as belonging to someone else's mob, and it's... but it's certainly something that we need to address. We need to look at how we're going to recruit and attract carers to look after their own children.

Yorganop in Western Australia have had some real successes in that area. We met with them in Perth and they're very happy to provide us with their model and their organisational structure and any information that we need to progress that in the Northern Territory. So I don't know. I mean, there are some wonderful people and organisations that have been involved in this area for a very long time. There are other NGOs that have been swimming against the stream for a very long time.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: And then there are families that are tied, Mr Chair, doing this, because they've had no support for a long time.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yeah. But we're hopeful that as an Aboriginal community controlled organisation, if we approach this in the right way that we will succeed where others have failed.

CHAIR: Can I ask then, how does... I was reading this the other day, how does the Aboriginal Policy Work Unit fit in with you?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: The Department's...

CHAIR: This is under the... is the Department of Children Affairs has set up an Aboriginal Policy Work Unit and it has a principal Aboriginal practice advisor. How do

they... because I always wonder whether we trip over one another sometimes with too many people doing the one job. How do they work in relation to your role?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: We've met with members of the Aboriginal Policy Unit twice and certainly they've got the ACPP that they're working on. They're also working, to the best of my knowledge, on trying to look at ways of setting up a family finding unit, which I think as Josie mentioned, we consider it's critical that that backlog of children is cleared.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Who heads that, do you know?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: It's headed by Nicky Thomas, the Aboriginal Policy Unit. So we know that there's long overdue and good work being done there, and certainly we're more than happy to work with them.

CHAIR: So when I see this person called Principal Aboriginal Practice Advisor, one of his or her responsibilities is to consult with a broad range of stakeholders, which you are one, on Board of Inquiry recommendations. Now I realise this person I think came on on 5 December 2011, so if you have complaints and issues that you... you've raised some issues, are you able to use that person to take up some of the issues that you believe are important? I mean, I'm just trying to work out where this person fits in that you've actually mentioned in this page.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yes.

CHAIR: So I'm just trying to follow the links.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yes. There seems to be a bit of a convoluted route in terms of our dealings with the Department. We've certainly made some inroads in to that. We deal with... most of the time we deal we deal with Jo Townsend who we've found to be helpful and pragmatic, and she's actually set up an informal working group with the Department that includes Nicole Thomas from the Aboriginal Policy Unit to...

CHAIR: When you're saying formal working group, is that the official Aboriginal Policy Work Unit?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: No. It's just...

CHAIR: It's different.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: ... it's just an informal reference group that has some senior managers on there to ensure that... so that we're on the same page, we know what they're doing and they know what we're doing. But a lot of the times... look, to be completely honest I don't get answers to emails and from basic questions, like we were sent a family from the Department who had their children moved at 11 o'clock the previous evening in the rain, all of them, ranging from 12 down to seven months or something. And we're not even set up to deliver services yet. But they landed on our doorstep and we're looking for someone to stand in their corner with them basically.

CHAIR: But is that your role? Is that what you're expected to do?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: It is something that is going to be our role to a certain extent, but we're very much aware of the fact that it can't be our core

business because we just won't get anything else done. We'll get swamped with it, and then things will become adversarial. So we'd far prefer to develop a partnership with, for instance, NAAJA where one of their workers came in to SAF,T once a week and all we did was facilitate meetings with them to progress their issues.

But you know, as an example of how it can be a little bit difficult to get to the bottom of things, that family that was looking for advocacy and they then rang back just recently last week. I email and say what is going on here and try to get to the bottom of things. But if you don't get answers to emails it just becomes unnecessarily obstructive to...

CHAIR: Who would you have emailed for answers?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: I emailed Lorraine Williams and then I referred it to Jo Townsend.

CHAIR: So you didn't get any answer to that email?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: No. And that's not an uncommon occurrence with my dealings with the Department.

CHAIR: Is there... well, I should ask then, is there a good relationship or is there a bit of an antagonism between you?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: I don't think there's an antagonism. I just think... I actually truly believe that they are so up to their neck in it, struggling to meet these recommendations that we're probably a bit like a March fly on their bum or something, like that - it's just a case, oh God, it's SAF,T again, can somebody deal with it, and sometimes things fly under the radar and yeah, it's... I don't think it's deliberate, and I don't think we have an unhealthy relationship. I think it's just that we're a bit sort of... we're quite a way down their list of priorities.

CHAIR: Well, it's a wonder that this Aboriginal Policy Unit can't also take up some of those issues because it's clearly got a role to play in making sure you operate well. It's just participation in SAF,T, it's just consultation engagement with Aboriginal Policy groups, continued engagement with SAF,T. You get mentioned quite a bit, so I'd be interested to know what this Unit does. I'm not saying that they don't do good things, but I'm trying to work out how it all fits together. And you'd think when reading this you'd think things should work pretty well.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yeah.

CHAIR: Yeah.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Hopefully with a bit more time that will develop. Yes.

CHAIR: Yeah. How do you get on with other NGOs? Like we've got NAPCAN down there, and we've got Kentish Day Care down there, how do you get on with other groups?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yeah, pretty good. We... I mean, a lot of people don't understand the complexities and the time involved in actually setting up an organisation from absolute scratch, from Ground Zero. Josie came in and was appointed in July and with no staff and no telephone and, you know, it's basically

starting that journey from that point. Getting the Board together, getting the... all the internal policies, all that boring stuff around that basic day-to-day running of the organisation has to be done from scratch.

The Constitution, we were fortunate enough to have a recommendation given to us by a working group at our inaugural meeting, Priscilla Collins from NAAJA recommended some young fellows at Blake Dawson in Sydney to help us to do that, so they did that for us. And that went to the Board for final sign off in December. But all of those sorts of things take time.

So we certainly have crossed paths frequently at different meetings and working groups with other NGOs and recognise the value of their work. And as I mentioned, Lesley is actually on our expert panel and so it's just a matter of as we find our feet we'll be able to work a little bit more consistently and collaboratively with some of those other organisations.

CHAIR: I know we're running out of time here, I'm just wondering whether we should ask John a few questions, we've got him sitting there. He's been around a while, he's got other things on his plate these days, nothing to do with this particular matter. How do you fit in to the situation now, John? How does AMSANT work in relation to what's happening now?

Mr John PATERSON: Mr Chairman, since the CEO has come on... was appointed and obviously as explained by Victoria, the challenges of recruiting well qualified staff to assist in the further development, the establishment of the new organisation, early in the piece, I was providing whatever level of support that the CEO needed. Once she got that capacity and staff on board I wanted to allow them to take control and take the empowerment and move and be organised... forward with their Board, which is now incorporated and it will be... SAF,T is now incorporated as of last week. And that's really good news. A great step forward.

This is all about an Aboriginal community controlled organisation taking the baton now and from weaning us off, not to say that we still have participation in the peak advisory groups that Victoria has referred to. So we'll still continue to play a representative role there. We have AMSANT, a couple of AMSANT representatives on the SAF,T Board so there's that conduit there that's coming... that's being fed in from a primary health care service delivery perspective. So we'll play a more of a back office supporting role for SAF,T, hopefully there'll be a transition, we want to sit down now and work out a transition arrangement or plan that hopefully will come in to affect from 1 July this year. That they will become their own unit, they'll manage their own Funding Agreement with the Department and you get those other staff to really practice and make those decisions. Because I still sign off as the... AMSANT still has responsibility of auspicing SAF,T, I still approve the CEO's travel requests, purchase orders, all those financial needs that the organisation requires. So...

CHAIR: So what will happen to you after July?

Mr John PATERSON: We'll continue to play a representative role on those peak organisations. Like I say, I'm not a member of SAF,T Board but we've got AMSANT members there. But there's certainly an opportunity for AMSANT to play a role on the peak, what was it called again? The advisory group.

CHAIR: And what services would you still provide?

Mr John PATERSON: Well, that's to be negotiated. Victoria and I just this morning had a bit of a chat about what sort of back office... those back office sort of services that SAF,T may require AMSANT to continue to supply them. I'm talking about IT, whether they still want us to manage the finances on their behalf, whether they want us to still be the head lease...

CHAIR: Lessee or...

Mr John PATERSON: Lessee. Yeah. Of the office. Or whether they want to just take the whole lot and manage that on... become totally autonomous and get on with the business and AMSANT's not going to be fussed either way.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Can I just ask a couple of... when... just... I've been trying to work through, I'm sorry, but I mean, we had... the Northern Territory landscapes... I mean, we've had an ACCA up here before, I mean, we had KARU both in Darwin and also Alice Springs. Why is it taking so long to actually get the whole issue set up? I mean, what are the barriers? We heard some, like there was five months in terms of that funding coming through, but it can't just be the funding? I mean, it's... we've had an ACCA here, like it's been here before, it's an entity, and AMSANT is a peak organisation that represents a number of members that develop this stuff, so what has been... why has it been progressively slow? Is it the expectation from the government as being that there's a blank piece of paper and they didn't really provide direction?

Mr John PATERSON: I think Victoria's outlined it well in her earlier presentation. It was that delay in the funding agreement being agreed to, then, I mean, the preparatory, the background, the work that led to be required for Josie to get this interim Board in place, to give her and the staff guidance. I didn't think it was AMSANT's... I mean, we were there to provide advice and support, whatever support the CEO needed. I... and I didn't want to step on their toes, I think this is an opportunity for them to establish themselves, take that ownership, empower themselves and get on with the business. And it takes time, you know. I mean, as you'd be well aware, I mean, getting people, particularly board representatives, getting them to meetings, given all their community commitments and other priorities that they have. In organising those, getting the draft constitution developed, thankfully with pro bono, hopefully, lawyers helping the Board work through that. Getting it incorporated, which we now have. There's been... I guess it's that delay, that very early delay that sort of just has not continued and we just haven't been able to make up the ground.

CHAIR: I'm just wondering, did anyone get in touch with Professor Vimpani in relation to the...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Josie made a presentation to the External Monitoring Committee in December.

CHAIR: Right.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: And Frank Hytten is actually also a member of our expert panel. So they're aware of some of the hiccups. But just getting back to your question, Marion, are you referring to KARU, the former AACA that was in...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yeah.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yeah.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I'm not saying model it on KARU...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: No. No.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... but I'm just saying there was an AACA here.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Yeah. There was. Yeah.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: So we've had a model of...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: I think that... it choked on a lack of resourcing, and organisational structure I think. Don't quote me, but I think it was about \$180,000 a year that they were receiving in funding. And they were also eventually...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I came out of the health sector, so...

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Oh okay.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... I know that landscape.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: And they also were subject to becoming quite adversarial in their dealings with other agencies due to becoming involved in quite personal advocacy matters on behalf of families. So that is...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: What's going to be different here though?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: As far as that's concerned, I mean, we're aware of the expectation of families, and we know that in many cases they may be justifiably baffled and concerned about why they're embroiled in this and why their kids have been removed, and we know that culturally there's just going to be an expectation that we'll fix it. Which is why we're keen to develop a model where we can provide some support in terms of an in house referral to an appointment, a legal person to actually have a chat to them about where they're at with things and whether the Department is following things under the Act.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: So will you become an organisation where children are referred to you and you case manage or no?

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Eventually yes. That's on our Manifesto... I can give you this copy

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yeah, if we could. And then we can, yeah. Thanks Victoria.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: ... we've got an indication of what our plans are, how things will roll out over the next three years, and certainly in the Yorginup model, this year is the first year that they're taking on the case management of their kids in and out of home care. But I think for the past 17 years they've acted as the interface between the Department and the carers. So they've recruited their carers and they've had great success at that and they have dealt with the carers, trained the carers, followed up on them and supported them in every way, but the actual case management still listed with the statutory authority. But as I said this didn't happen overnight... they've grown to the point where this year that is their baby as well.

So we'll be taking steps towards that because we see the need and we think that it would be... it would allow the best outcomes for children and families.

CHAIR: Alright. We're just about out of time. Have you got any other questions? Alright. We've got a fair bit to absorb there. Thank you for bringing those matters to our attention and thank you for the statement that you gave earlier. We'll have to look at some of those things and if we think that the government needs to do some adjustments or there needs to be some improvements so certainly we'll be recommending things like that as well.

As I've said before we're probably getting down to the last CTC meetings now because our life finishes with the end of this Assembly, and this is the election year, so hopefully...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yeah.

CHAIR: Yeah. Hopefully it does continue later on in the year but we'll have to do our report so they're ready for Parliament, so you'll certainly be included in that report as well. So look, thank you very much for coming today and giving up your time, we appreciate it. Thank you.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Thank you.

Ms WALKER: Thank you.

Ms Victoria POLLIFRONE: Thank you very much.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Lynne has to go. She really has to, she's got to get on a plane.

Ms WALKER: I've got a plane.

CHAIR: That's a minor problem. Thanks Lynne.

Secretary Ms CAMPBELL: I believe there might have been someone who wanted to ask just a couple of questions.

CHAIR: Yeah. Did someone want to ask some questions as well? You can come to the front seat if you'd like to. Yes. Thank you. And if anyone else would like to come and raise some issues, you're most welcome. Just, I'll get you to...

Mr Kenny WU: Oh I was going to...

CHAIR: ... give your name anyway.

Mr Kenny WU: Ken Wu. I'm a freelance human rights advocate.

CHAIR: Right.

Mr Kenny WU: And I was going to ask the people that were just here for them to answer the question, I don't think you would be in a position to answer the questions, Gerry.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: What's the question?

CHAIR: What's the question anyway, and then we'll be able to see. What question would you...

Mr Kenny WU: Alright. I'd like to give you a brief background to the question otherwise it won't make sense to ... sense, the question by itself necessarily. My concern is about you asked a few questions earlier at the beginning about the turnover of staff and what I was concerned with was finding out from them what was the turnover and any program or promotion development of minority groups such as indigenous workers into senior positions in management.

The reason why I ask that, and I know from my own experience sitting on Commonwealth promotions appeal committees that I find people in positions from these minority groups they tend to be stereotyped, and in child protection I'm just wondering, because a forum for the Indigenous people I was privileged to be invited to go to attend, some of the people there expressed their concern that a lot of the senior positions were not given to Indigenous people, they were kept at the lower levels to do what they referred to as the dirty work, of giving the bad news to the indigenous people, parents, that their children were going to be taken away from them for a while. So...

CHAIR: What we can do, because those people wouldn't have been able to answer that, that's a Departmental question and we don't have the Department on to be questioned today. We can take that question, we've got it on Hansard, and we can... if you give us your contact number we can get an official response back for you. That'd be... we certainly should be able to do that. Yeah, those people you were speaking to are really an agency, if you can call it that, they're not really the Department that would be able to answer that here.

Mr Kenny WU: Yeah. Fair enough. Yeah. My contact details are on the attendance register.

CHAIR: Oh right. Okay. Yeah. Any other... anything else there you'd like to raise?

Mr Kenny WU: Yeah. And the other thing is we are... the independents and impartiality of the Child Protection External Monitoring Report Committee, I can't really comment on them as I haven't read any of the reports assuming they're available to the public, but my concern is about how independent the Members are on the Committee because it depends on, from my perspective, is how many Members are from the Department itself, whether they're in the majority or not, and how many are people representing parents or other interested parties that would test the independence because history shows that what news media exposes and people like yourself has MLAs making comments about practices or decision making in government departments is that when people internally have to investigate their own departments there's a tendency, especially internal audits I know from experience, is that if you find anything too damaging about your own department either you're instructed to water it down or it's too damaging, just to leave it out, conveniently leave it out. So this Committee...

CHAIR: Yeah. We can get you a list of those people. You may have been here earlier, Professor Vimpani comes from Newcastle, he's the Chair, I don't think there's very many...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There's no-one from the Department.

CHAIR: ... members from the Department, not at all. There are a number of local people and there are a number of interstate people. And I don't think... and I think you're right, I haven't got the names in front of me, I don't think the Committee has any Departmental people on it at all.

Mr Kenny WU: Well, that's good.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: They were a panel of... they're a panel of experts, so people with expertise, and it's headed by Professor Vimpani.

CHAIR: And it's got eight members.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The only input the department has to that external, that's why they're called an External Monitoring Committee, the only input the Department has is they provide all the secretariat support. So they don't have any influence whatsoever in terms of any of the recommendations or reports. Their whole... the reason they were set up is to make sure that the Department is actually implementing all of the recommendations from the *Growing Them Strong* report. So it's the external watchdog.

CHAIR: We can send you the... I've got part of the terms of reference for that Committee, how it's set up, and we can send you the list of...

Secretary Ms Helen CAMPBELL: Current membership.

CHAIR: ... the current membership of it.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yeah.

CHAIR: Yeah.

Mr Kenny WU: Fair enough. Right. Are there reports available to the public to study or are they internal, they're to...

CHAIR: They have to report twice a year to Parliament and if it's reporting to Parliament then that's a public report. So he said that they're about to release their next...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: They're going to release, yeah.

CHAIR: Yeah. So keep an ear out for there will be one released I would imagine, it's just about... hopefully released in the next sittings of Parliament. Now I'm not sure of that so we can't guarantee that, but, and it says here the government will report to Parliament through the Minister for Child Protection twice yearly on the effectiveness of the reform delivered. So...

Secretary Ms Helen CAMPBELL: And the other thing Alison was pointing out is there's a website for the Department of Children and Families which has got a lot of this information on there, and provides regular updates of the Committees.

CHAIR: Ta.

Secretary Ms Helen CAMPBELL: That are under it.

CHAIR: Thanks Helen. Yeah.

Mr Kenny WU: Yeah. Thanks for having these formed off... this is the first time I've attended one here and I've found it very interesting, especially the questions you and Marion have been asking so it's... it was just... but unfortunately I couldn't hear what they were saying with their backs to me and I've got a hearing disability, so I'll be interested in reading a transcript when it comes out.

CHAIR: Okay. Right.

Mr WU: Yeah. Right. Thanks a lot.

CHAIR: Thanks very much.

Secretary Ms Helen CAMPBELL: Thank you.

CHAIR: So do we have anyone else? Okay. Next time. Alright. Well anyway, thank you fellow Members and members of the public, and all our staff for doing all this hard work today. And I officially close the CTC Hearing. Thank you.