

**EDUCATION AND HEALTH
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE ADEQUACY AND APPROPRIATENESS OF
PREVENTION AND TREATMENT SERVICES FOR ALCOHOL AND
ILLCIT DRUG PROBLEMS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT ALBANY
FRIDAY, 20 AUGUST 2010**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Dr J.M. Woollard (Chairman)
Mr P. Abetz (Deputy Chairman)
Ms L.L. Baker
Mr P.B. Watson
Mr I.C. Blayney**

Hearing commenced at 9.07 am**HAMILTON, MS ELIZABETH****Magistrate, Department of the Attorney General, examined:**

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee, I would like to thank you for your interest and your appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into the adequacy and appropriateness of prevention and treatment services for alcohol and illicit drug problems in Western Australia. You have been provided with a copy of the committee's specific terms of reference. I would like to introduce myself, Peter Watson, the member for Albany; my fellow member Ms Lisa Baker; and our research staff, David Worth and John Pollard.

This committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. This hearing is a formal procedure of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house. Even though the committee is not asking witnesses to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. This is a public hearing and Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any documents during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record. Before we proceed to the questions we have for you today, I need to ask you a series of questions. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

Ms Hamilton: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

Ms Hamilton: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet provided with the "Details of Witness" form today?

Ms Hamilton: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today's hearing?

Ms Hamilton: No.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Welcome. This is very informal. We are going all over Western Australia looking at the impact of drugs and alcohol. We have been up north to the Kimberley recently. We have been to a large number of regional centres trying to find out whether there are gaps in the health side of the system and which projects have been successful and which have not. We would like to know how it affects you as a judge in a region such as the Great Southern. Is there anything you would like to say first?

Ms Hamilton: I have been here for not quite five years. For at least three and a half of those, we have had a specific commonwealth-funded drug program run through Palmerston. It is also linked into community corrections services. That is funded by the Drug and Alcohol Office. It does not cover rehabilitation of people with alcohol problems; it is specific to drug problems. I suppose in my experience, the two are more often than not a problem in combination. It is rather difficult when you have people with serious alcohol problems. Unless they are prepared to admit that they use drugs of one kind or another, they cannot access the service. The program that we deliver through that service through the court is the most successful in Western Australia. That is the POP and the

STIR program—pre-sentence opportunity, and the supervised treatment regime. That program is run through a number of regional courts as well as metropolitan courts throughout the state. Most of them follow the same format.

We have a different format here in Albany, in particular, the STIR program. People who are referred to that program are required to come to court every fortnight in the beginning. A report is given to the court on their performance for that fortnight, what their goals might be for the next fortnight and what their long-term goals are. Then the court decides whether to extend their bail or whether to recommend that there be some further program interventions. The person appears and then they go away again for the next fortnight. In Albany, it is held in the court but it is a closed court. The public and the other people who may be appearing in the court that day are not allowed in court. We sit around the bar table; that is, me, a prosecutor, a representative from community and corrective services, the counsellor from the Palmerston organisation and the coordinator of that program. We sit with the accused person in a very informal setting. They generally sit next to me. We just talk about what is going on in their life, what their problems might be, what problems their kids might be having at school or elsewhere, just general stuff. We ask what they like. Do they like gardening? What are they interested in? Do they like fishing? We literally get people to a point where they have enormous trust in that loosely-formed committee.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: What age group are you looking at?

Ms Hamilton: This is adults. People develop a sense of respect for the committee and a real sense of not wanting to disappoint them. The basis of the whole program is trust. You fess up if you used drugs in the last fortnight. You may or may not be pushed off the program if you do. The bottom line is trust. I am often told by counsellors that people go away from those fortnightly meetings saying, “I’m not going to mess up this fortnight. I really don’t want miss to be angry at me. I don’t want to disappoint her. I want her to be proud of me.” It is an intensely personal thing for people.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: How many people do you have in the program at one time?

Ms Hamilton: The most we have ever had at one time is four. At the moment we do not have anyone. We have seen a tailing off, to some extent, of serious drug offending coming before the court. A lot of people dabble. A lot of people are on the pre-sentence opportunity program, which is an eight-week program not involving management through the court but they are simply ordered to do the eight-week program, do the counselling and come back again. Those people do not have seriously entrenched problems. I think we have had only one person on the STIR program who has seriously re-offended. He was our first Indigenous participant in the program, someone who has spent more than half his adult life in custody. In the 20 years up until the point he started the program, he had spent only six months at a time out of jail. That was the longest time he could go for before he would deliberately re-offend and go back in again because he is so institutionalised. He stayed out of jail for about 15 months and is now back in custody. I am convinced, notwithstanding he has re-offended, that his participation in that program has been so profound that he will spend longer and longer periods out of custody. He was a prisoner who, throughout his 20 years, had never participated in work programs in prison. His nickname was Aggro because he was so difficult to deal with. He has the number 13 tattooed on part of his body, which is the number of his cell in Albany Regional Prison. When he goes into custody, if there is anyone in cell 13, they get turfed out by the prison officers and he goes back to occupy his cell.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: That is his home.

Ms Hamilton: Yes, it is his home. He now works in the prison. For the first time ever he is no longer called Aggro by the prison guards. I think that indicates a fundamental change in his attitude. But for that program, it would not have happened.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: How do you qualify? Is it just for being on alcohol?

Ms Hamilton: These people do have alcohol problems but they are on the program because of their drug use. If it was solely related to alcohol, we could not put them on the program; the commonwealth will not fund that.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: If it is violence or anything like that plus drugs, do they still go on it?

Ms Hamilton: Yes, absolutely. We have had some seriously violent people on that program and they are yet to offend.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Could you tell us again what STIR stands for?

Ms Hamilton: It is the supervised treatment intervention regime. It is run through the commonwealth by DAO.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Has there ever been any state funding into this kind of program?

Ms Hamilton: Not into that at all.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Anything like STIR or POP?

Ms Hamilton: Probably only through the Drug Court in Perth, which is run by community corrective services. DAO funds the Wheatbelt community drug and alcohol service to do it. We did introduce it in Katanning and we have had it in Narrogin. It was very, very effective.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Are they state funded ones?

[9.20 am]

Ms Hamilton: No, that is funded through the commonwealth as well. We have not had any that are specifically state funded. However, as a general comment, when dealing with people throughout the Great Southern, particularly when trying to implement programs relating to Indigenous youth, I found that the thing that is sheeted home loud and clear to me all the time is there is not an absence of money. There are huge amounts of funding across the board. The problem is that people sit in their little silos on their bucket of money and will not talk to anybody else. I get people around the table and say, "What are you funded for? Who is funding you? What service delivery are you meant to be doing?" There is so much overlap and nobody is prepared to go into partnership with other agencies because they are frightened of losing control of their bucket of money.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Are these mainly not-for-profits or are these government departments?

Ms Hamilton: Both.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Just to drill down a bit more on why they would not be doing that, is it about that or does it have something to do with accountability regimes that are imposed upon not-for-profits, particularly in how they use their money? I know you are very familiar with this area.

Ms Hamilton: I do not think so. A classic example is that I was invited to speak to a local committee that is made up of the heads of various agencies providing human services here. That committee has been in existence, as far as I can ascertain, for at least five years. I was talking about a program that I supported that was implemented by local Nyoongahs. We sent the first boys out to go through this program at Nowanup at Boxwood Hills. I was telling this particular group about that experience. They were all really enthusiastic, saying, "We can help. We can do this. How do we get involved?" I said to them, "Do you have a list of which agencies are involved in this committee, who funds them, how much your funding is and what it is for?" That committee had been in existence for nearly five years and it had not even drawn up that document. Nobody knew how much money everybody else had and what it was for. It is a human services committee. That is the most fundamental thing to start with if you are going to be working together interagency. Without anyone being game enough to express it, there is a reluctance to engage in some really fruitful and meaningful partnerships. I think it is because people are reluctant to give away their autonomy in a sense.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: What do the police think of the STIR program?

Ms Hamilton: Prosecutors are very, very supportive of it. Anecdotally, it gets back to me that they think I am too soft and that those sorts of programs do not achieve anything. However, after three years I think there is an acknowledgement that it does work. Police officers on the streets would probably have some difficulty in accepting that but from the prosecutors' point of view, they are immensely supportive of the program and agree that it works. My fundamental observation is that there is not a lack of resources; there is a difficulty in getting them pooled together, getting people working together and coordinating all of that sort of stuff. That is probably my biggest difficulty in trying to get programs implemented throughout the Great Southern.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: We have just been up to the Kimberley and heard about the percentage of alcohol and drug-related cases in the courts. What percentage of people who come before you in your court are affected by alcohol or drugs?

Ms Hamilton: It is 95 per cent off the top of my head.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Is that the primary charge?

Ms Hamilton: It would be that their offending arises out of excessive alcohol or drug use or a combination of both. Not so much in Albany but in Katanning and Narrogin, particularly Katanning, juvenile offending is alcohol related. I had a 14-year-old—she is still in Rangeview on remand at the moment—whose school attendance was seven per cent last year. Her school attendance this year is five per cent. She does nothing except sit at home and get drunk or go out with young cousins or uncles or whatever and drink. She does so because she is absolutely bored. She is bored because she is not at school. She has absolutely no motivation of any kind and lives in a house where there would be a minimum of 10 people at any one time. I asked for a report from Youth Justice Services in order to assist in sentencing and I got a report back that said with respect to schooling, they would assist in her supervision and they would assist to see that she had proper homework materials. In terms of the alcohol difficulties, they proposed giving her some DVDs and some PowerPoint formats to take home and watch overnight.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Was this juvenile justice?

Ms Hamilton: It was Youth Justice Services. They had no concept of an Aboriginal girl in an overcrowded house with no adult capable of forbidding her to consume alcohol. She was incredibly bored, not attending school and they expected her to sit down and watch DVDs and PowerPoint formats to overcome her alcohol consumption. I was scathing, just ever so slightly, about that approach.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Do you think Child Protection is doing its job?

Ms Hamilton: I think Child Protection is doing the best it can within a particular policy format. I have said for many years that preventative programs are where the focus ought to be rather than focusing on trying to do something long after the horse has bolted. I think down here Moray McSavich is attempting to put some preventative work in but I do not think it is enough.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: In what way?

Ms Hamilton: I think the focus is still weighted to this intervention with children who are in desperate circumstances. I am not saying that that is inappropriate at all. The department must intervene but I think there needs to be a shift in focus such that it concentrates on preventative and early intervention. Someone has to be brave enough at some point to say, "We're drawing a line in the sand, we are never going to change the behaviour of those people on that side of the line but let's try to change the behaviour of these or let's prevent them developing those particular behavioural patterns."

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Do you get them in preprimary, primary school and kindergarten?

Ms Hamilton: I would have thought you would start as early as you get children in an educational setting. The key to all of this is education. These young people have no future whatsoever if they do not have an education. They have no protective powers if they do not have an education.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: What about the Liquor Control Act? Do you think that should be changed to make things better with alcohol issues?

Ms Hamilton: It probably can in that it stops people having access to alcohol but does that necessarily change behaviour? People just go elsewhere. They get someone else to get it or drive somewhere else where it is available and get it. It is actually about changing behaviour. With young people, generally boredom brings on the alcohol consumption or it is abuse—living in domestic violence situations or sexual abuse—and it is so easy to turn to alcohol. If these kids were at school, they would learn some powerful tools about how to deal with the difficulties of those social environments that they come from and have some degree of motivation to change those environments.

[9.30 am]

Ms L.L. BAKER: I take you back to the sentencing options that you mentioned. Could you talk to us just a little on what options you have available? Are they enough? Should there be more POP or STIR? Should there be other options? What would be your best scenario for that? Firstly, what are they like at the moment and, secondly, what ideas do you have?

Ms Hamilton: For adults, I think it has been put to the Law Reform Commission, in terms of suspended sentences, that magistrates cannot impose conditions on them. We certainly can in the District and Supreme Courts. The magistrates have made a submission to the Law Reform Commission and the Attorney General that we need that as a sentencing tool. Going to juveniles, which is really where my focus is, I do not think we have enough resources, certainly in the Great Southern; and going back to the different agencies, not enough collaboration is going on. The girl I just spoke about comes from Katanning. The Shire of Katanning does have a youth worker. She is putting some good programs in place. Youth Justice Services is not even speaking with her, and she is on the ground in Katanning. I have said to them that I want a report on this young girl. I want to know that the youth worker in Katanning can actually help mentor this child or find a mentor within the Indigenous community to encourage this young girl to go to school. I want this conversation to be going on between these agencies. My reaction is: why are they not doing that already? Again, we go back to this very protective attitude about one's own agency, one's own bucket of money et cetera. There are not enough resources in terms of what is available to me under the act. I see the capacity, especially with Indigenous youth, to be doing some really, really exciting stuff down here.

I have done a program out at Nowanup with some young boys from Mt Barker. That program was totally dreamt up by the Nyoongah community. It had nothing to do with the court. They said to me in January last year, "We want you to come out to this farm. This is the cultural program we want you to implement. We want to put people through the program as a healing process." I thought it was a wonderful idea. I spoke to the Attorney General about it. He was not very enthusiastic at that point. I think he has now come to recognise that these are pretty powerful programs. I think there is some qualified support there. Youth Justice Services did not support it in the format that it was in. I was able to do it because I used the Bail Act to do it. I thought I would sideline Youth Justice Services, put these people on bail and the people who were running the program would be the responsible adults. The parents went out to the farm, saw it beforehand and agreed that they were happy for the children to go. If the parents were not happy, I was not going to send them. There was no money—no funding at all—available for that program. It was an eight-week program. The kids lived in a great big shed that had two little rooms at the back of it. Locals donated beds, bedding, fridges, freezers and all sorts of things. It was all donated. I said to the mothers, "This is what the program is about. If I sign these warrants now, these are the first warrants I will be signing for the next 25 years because it will take them that long to wake up and realise that they do not want to

spend that time in custody. The only way we can pay for this”—that is, pay for their food, petrol, whatever—“is that you will have to sign over 60 per cent of your family assistance payments.” They had a week to think about it. Those mothers came back within a week—they had already been to Centrelink—and they signed over 100 per cent of those payments to each child to the responsible adult and that is how it was funded.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: They do want to help themselves.

Ms Hamilton: They do want to help their children. The reason they were so willing to forgo those payments was because that program was dreamt up by Nyoongahs, it was run by Nyoongahs and it had no bureaucratic interference. We will hopefully get some more children through that program shortly. Many children from the metropolitan area have gone down there, not through the courts but as part of school programs, to do this cultural program on a short-term basis. We are hoping to get some more through the court system out there and some funding will be applied for through Lotteries to assist in that regard. The fundamental thing about that program is trust. I trusted those people to implement that program because they know more about their culture and their children than I will ever know. I did not want to interfere with it in any way. That underpins the success of it. They knew they had the trust of the court. Denis Reynolds, the president of the Children’s Court, has described that program as a model for how we deal with Indigenous youth in the justice system in this state. I know that that model has gone to the federal Attorney-General’s Department as well because someone from the federal Attorney-General’s Department came out to Nowanup and met with me out there. There is enormous support for that, especially when it bears the blessing, if I can use that term, of the president of the Children’s Court, who has said in relation to that and Youth Justice Services that they must become less risk averse. One of the reasons they did not support it was because it had not been assessed by them. They had not gone through all the various assessment processes and ticked all the boxes et cetera.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: What age group were they?

Ms Hamilton: They were aged from 12 to 14. The interesting thing about that is that every single one of them has re-offended but they have re-offended in very different ways to the ways they were offending before. They had been doing burglaries. I describe them as the Great Southern’s premier burglary team. They were on a rampage. The eldest one has offended—he has not yet been convicted—in a very, very violent manner, and the others in a minor way so I am not worried about them. We did try to put mentors in place when they went back to their families. It is one thing to put these children through programs such as this cultural program but unless you have fundamentally changed the nature of their social environment in that time frame or put in place some efforts to change it, you are taking them from something very powerful and positive back into the same negative framework. What that has done in terms of what I see psychologically and emotionally for these kids is that they have learnt about respect, dignity, love, safety and nurture and they know that that is available and it is so different to their family environment.

[9.40 am]

They go back to their family environment and rage and anger floats to the surface pretty rapidly. That is the explanation for the change in the nature of their offending and what has happened to them. However, the young man who is yet to be dealt with by the president of the Children’s Court for all these violent offences is up in the Kimberley on bail at the moment. He is living on a station of an extended family member out of Halls Creek, he is going to TAFE in Halls Creek doing a program that involves the pastoral side of the property and he is doing brilliantly at the moment. Some pretty powerful lessons have been learnt out of that program. One is that you have to trust people to implement their own programs. We have to do something about funding those programs because they are powerful. We have to put in place some serious funding through DCP to mentor change within the social environment we return those children to. We have to understand that those

children will have to deal with some immense psychological and emotional issues when we return them to their social environments.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: How much do you deal with the Perth Drug Court?

Ms Hamilton: We do not have anything to do with the Perth Drug Court. The STIR program operates independently of that. I have appeared as a defence lawyer in the Perth Drug Court on a couple of occasions when Dr Michael King was running it. Some of the STIR programs that are run in other parts of the state are run pretty much along the lines of the Drug Court—bonus points for doing well, negative points for relapse or re-offending and that sort of thing. The program here is fairly different to that.

Ms L.L. BAKER: If you had a magic wand and you could implement or get funding for or get cooperation to deliver one initiative—it does not have to be a new initiative; it can be any initiative—what would be your one little gem or priority? I know it is incredibly cruel to ask you that. You probably have lots of them.

Ms Hamilton: I would go back to the Indigenous programs. Some real efforts are being made throughout the state to set up similar programs in other places. People are linking in with Noel Nannup and Cultural Corridors. The Department of Sport and Recreation is very much behind this push for this type of program. I know that the president of the Children's Court is behind it. I am sure any magistrate who is interested in these sorts of issues would say the same thing but we need more time. Fundamentally, these programs are coming through the courts. While we are not programming them or running them in any way or interfering, it seems as if it is through the power of the court itself that people seem so willing to engage. That is rather sad in a way that it comes down to the courts trying to coordinate all of this. Once the courts get involved, there seems to be a great deal of enthusiasm amongst agencies that were not working together previously to get involved. It is as if there is a "blessing" of the court. People relax and say that they can get involved with this and they will collaborate with each other. I would like more time. I do not see us getting that.

Also, we need to change a bit of a cultural attitude in Corrective Services. It does not say it openly but there is a fundamental belief there that there is a fine line between what is called therapeutic jurisprudence and what it calls case management from the bench. I am always being accused of case management from the bench but I say, "I am doing it because you are not." Again, that comes down to its lack of collaboration with the other agencies.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Do you think the social impact of alcohol has increased in the past 10 years?

Ms Hamilton: That is really hard for me to answer.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: You are saying that 95 per cent of your cases are either alcohol or drug —

Ms Hamilton: Or in combination. In the past 10 years we have seen a significant increase in polysubstance abuse and I think that is reflected in offending rates. I could not say whether there has been a significant increase in alcohol consumption that has led to an increase in offending. I can say that of the people coming before my court, it is generally polysubstance abuse. It is quite rare to see it in isolation. You see a lot of alcohol use with children but when you ask the questions, there will be cannabis. We have seen cannabis use amongst children aged six and eight years old.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Is that in both the Indigenous community and the white community?

Ms Hamilton: It is in the Indigenous community without a doubt. Generally, not so much in the non-Indigenous community but then there is the disproportion in any event in numbers that are coming before me in the Children's Court. The huge proportion is Indigenous youth. Then there is

the disparity between towns. With Albany, I do not see the abuse of alcohol amongst Indigenous youth to the extent that I see it in Katanning or Narrogin.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Is it the case that the authorities are not doing the right thing in Katanning or are there more non-Indigenous people in Katanning?

Ms Hamilton: School attendance is much worse in Katanning and Narrogin than it is here in Albany. Where you have lack of school attendance, lack of parental guidance and lack of anything else to do, you have increased boredom and increased alcohol consumption. We do not see non-attendance rates in Albany as high as I see them in those other towns.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: In your position as magistrate, you have these kids not going to school. Is there a truancy officer to whom you can say, “These kids aren’t going to school. What are you doing about it?”

Ms Hamilton: I say to Youth Justice Services, “This child is coming back in front of me in two weeks or a month”—circuits are a month—“and I want a school attendance report. If that school attendance is not 80 per cent and up, I want to know why. I want to know whether certificates were sent to the school. I want you to have gone around and talked to mum. I want you to talk to DCP. I want DCP to be talking to mum. I want you to be talking to district education. I want you to be telling me why these kids are not going to school.” Inevitably, they come back in Katanning and Narrogin, not so much down here, and say it is due to feuding. I will not give credit to that term because it is used as an excuse and a cop out for all sorts of things in those communities.

[9.50 am]

That is not to say that children are not subject to abuse and bullying by other Indigenous families when they go to school. This is probably a harsh comment on educational establishments that are hard pressed to deal with these kids, but there does not seem to be any real follow up through the education department on why these kids are not going to school. There is the capacity in the act to prosecute parents for not sending children to school but it has never happened. Parents just say they cannot get them to go. I say that it is against the law if they do not and they must make these children go to school. I do not think enough is being done to ensure these children are going to school. They are difficult when they get there because they will be disruptive. It is probably easier not to follow up and get them to go to school.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Do you think the Kimberley alcohol restrictions would work in a place such as Katanning?

Ms Hamilton: It is not that far to drive to Wagin or Narrogin. That is the problem. From what I hear, it worked really well in Fitzroy Crossing but that is not to say that people did not drive to Broome to get alcohol. I think they do have an effect. There is no doubt about that at all. I am not so sure how effective they would be in the Great Southern where we have communities within short distances of each other.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Is there anything else you would like to say that we have not brought up today?

Ms Hamilton: Not really. I think we need a bit more realism and a few more hard-nosed approaches to juvenile issues. DVDs and PowerPoints just do not cut it with me.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: What is the answer? You were saying you have issues with the DVDs and so on.

Ms Hamilton: Supporting Indigenous organisations and communities to come up with their own programs, to leave them alone to implement them, to keep the sticky fingers of bureaucracy well away from them and to trust them to do the right thing.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Some people would say, like the Southern Aboriginal Corporation, that a lot of money was spent and a lot of money was wasted. One family would get in and the other families in the town would not get anything. What is your answer to that?

Ms Hamilton: I do not have an answer to that. I have dealt with many Indigenous organisations over the years. I was manager of criminal law for the Aboriginal Legal Service early on in my legal career so I have a degree of experience in that field. I think we are all being naive if we do not think that that sort of thing happens. However, I still think that there is capacity for programs to be implemented by Nyoongah people—I am talking about the Great Southern—that do not necessarily involve huge amounts of money but involve the need to put some infrastructure supports in place. I think that we can assist in that way without necessarily throwing bucketloads of money at organisations. This happens across the board in any community organisation. There is the capacity to misuse funds. We need to look at support by way of infrastructure and by providing funding for the implementers of the programs themselves—the counsellors, mentors and that sort of thing. I am not necessarily saying that you need to go to an individual organisation and say, “Here is half a million dollars, you go off and organise a program or whatever.” We can say, “We are prepared to fund counsellors and mentors. We are prepared to put in place this infrastructure for these young people at risk or people already within the criminal justice system. We will leave it to you to implement the program.” I do not think that the people I have dealt with will have any difficulty with that approach whatsoever.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Have you had any experience with the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation?

Ms Hamilton: No, I have not. We had hoped to get involved with that. Again, there are so many organisations being funded out there. It is about coordination and collaboration. As I say, give the courts more time so we can have an overview of what is out there and then we can start implementing alternative strategies through the courts for juveniles at risk who are in the system but we just do not know that they exist.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: I have one last question. Sitting in your chair, you see the revolving door and all these five, six or seven-year-olds coming through who are using cannabis. Do you fear for some of these young people for the future? Do you think there is a light at the end of the tunnel?

Ms Hamilton: I would not be doing what I am doing if I did not think there was some light at the end of the tunnel. The light at the end of the tunnel will only become a reality if we start working together and if the various departments start collaborating and working in partnership. If we do not draw that line in the sand and say, “Too late, let’s start here”, I will continue to see the 10-year-olds, 12-year-olds and the 13-year-olds. I have seen their older brother progress from a 14-year-old to an 18-year-old now in Albany Regional Prison with two or three children that he became the biological parent of when he was 14. There is no hope for those kids. DCP has intervened. Unless the line in the sand is drawn and unless there is collaboration, the light will remain a pinprick.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your evidence before the committee today. The transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee’s consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Thank you very much for giving up your time today.

Ms Hamilton: Thank you very much for having me.

Hearing concluded at 9.57 am