

**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 KUNUNURRA
MONDAY, 2 AUGUST 2010**

SESSION FOUR

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 11.36 am**ADDIS, MR RALPH****Chief Executive Officer, Wunan, examined:****TRUST, MR IAN RICHARD****Executive Chair, Wunan, examined:**

The 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. I would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners—past, present and future—of the land on which we are meeting. 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. I would like to introduce myself, Janet Woollard; Mr Ian Blayney; and Dr David Worth, our principal research officer. This committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly. This hearing is a formal procedure of Parliament. As this is a public hearing, Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any document or documents during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record. Before we proceed to your submission and the questions that we have for you today, I need to ask you a series of questions. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

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

The Witnesses: Yes.

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

The Witnesses: Yes.

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

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIRMAN: This inquiry has been going for 12 months. We have had hearings in some regional areas down south and in the metropolitan area but this week we have been focusing on the Kimberley. We are hoping that today you will help us understand your problems and learn of your successes and treatment programs in this area from early childhood through to death. What are the problems? Is it alcohol, cannabis or other drugs? Who is it affecting? Who is helping? What additional help could be given? What are the social and other costs to the community because of problems with those drugs? Would you like to go first, Ian?

Mr Trust: I am not sure about the extent of the cannabis problem here but I know that a lot of people use cannabis. I am talking from an Aboriginal perspective. Alcohol is certainly a big problem. It has been a big problem in the Kimberley, specifically Kununurra, Wyndham and Halls Creek, for many, many years as far as I can remember. I think it is probably the biggest single issue, along with other factors, that contribute to people living a passive, almost dysfunctional, lifestyle. It is probably the biggest single factor that has impacted on the Aboriginal people in this region for many years in that it has destabilised families and inhibited people’s potential to join the workforce and be educated. It is a negative in all sorts of different ways. It is almost ingrained in the culture in the local region; children growing up here think that it is natural to start drinking and become part

of this culture that is created around it. The spin-off from that is that very few kids really perform at school because of the dysfunctional family lifestyle. I am not talking about all Aboriginal families. Probably 60 per cent of the local Aboriginal community is more affected than the other 40 per cent. About 60 per cent are really affected. Foetal alcohol syndrome is probably a big factor for kids who are growing up in that cohort. I was at the Wyndham work camp a few weeks ago. They were telling me that the people coming through the prison system are affected by foetal alcohol syndrome. It is an escalating problem that seems to be getting worse. They tell me that the life expectancy of an Aboriginal man in the East Kimberley is 47 years. Most of that is around lifestyle diseases, and alcohol would be the biggest factor contributing to that.

I do not think bans will solve all the problems but it gives the community breathing space to reassess and come up with strategies for what we can do. It is probably a good place to start. Essentially, the problem is huge in the east Kimberley and the local community. If you go down to some of the Aboriginal living areas on a payday night or when people have money, it is almost like a war zone. People complain about young kids and young girls roaming the streets at night here. That is really just a symptom of them not having a home life. If you go into their homes, you would be lucky to find a stick of furniture in there. It is not too bad in this weather but during the height of the hot weather months in a house where there is no air conditioning, it is too hot to even stay in there. I think that alcohol has a lot to answer for in what has happened around Kununurra. Personally, I am quite keen to support any initiatives to try to arrest the impact of alcohol and drugs. I think the Aboriginal community here would be a lot better off for it.

[11.45 am]

Mr Addis: I have been in the East Kimberley for 15 years, primarily working on Aboriginal projects and strategies—for the past 12 years with Wunan. Wunan's broad objective is to try to create the opportunities and the skills within Aboriginal people and families so that they can reach their potential in life and live a happy and fulfilling life. As we all know, that is not the case for too many people here. Ian talked about the 60 per cent of Aboriginal families in this area facing far greater challenges than is acceptable, I suppose. I would agree with that. That is not to be confused with—I would not say that 60 per cent of people are directly involved in dysfunctional grog and drug use, but the impacts of a smaller group, who are engaged in those sorts of behaviours, on their broader family networks is massive. We see that every day in our programs, which are around education, in kids' engagement in school, around employment primarily for young adults and about providing proper accommodation options for individuals and families so they can take up employment, education and other social opportunities. We see grog and the associated issues as a massive barrier for people in a very practical way, day in, day out. It probably would be—we have got no stats—but greater than half the failures or the drop-out rate from education and employment that we see are pretty much around grog, which might be the person not being able to manage it or it is family pressure that results from the grog and drug cultural dynamic that Ian talked about. Absolutely it is a massive, massive issue that is stopping people moving forward. My observation over 15 years is it is becoming more ingrained, more part of the social system, which is very sad, and we absolutely would support measures to start to manage the impact that grog and drugs have on people's lives and start to move beyond that. I think, in terms of the ganja issue, ganja is probably not as big an issue in the East Kimberley, from what we see, as grog, but certainly in some remote communities our understanding is that about 60 or 70 per cent of adults are users—not just adults. In town, drug testing—if you are trying to run an Aboriginal employment strategy in a business, typically mandatory or even random drug screening tends to knock out 50 per cent to 75 per cent of candidates, which is massive. Obviously it takes three months to —

The CHAIRMAN: What were those statistics?

Mr Addis: Our experience is probably 50 to 70 per cent of candidates for jobs can be knocked out through drug screening. It depends. It is very large—that is not a scientific figure, but it is not five

per cent, as you would expect in a more normal population. By way of other anecdotes we run an engagement program for girls that are struggling to stay with school; it is very intense. It is working with kids at the hard end of —

The CHAIRMAN: Is that the connection program?

Mr Addis: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: We would like to hear a little more about that program.

Mr Addis: A great partnership with MG, Gelganyem and others. Extremely challenged kids—kids, basically, who do not feel they have got a place in the world or a hope for the future—the connection between cash payments, grog and gambling and kids not being able to engage, maintain focus and momentum is absolute. There is a royalties cheque that comes out on a Thursday, so Friday, Saturday and Sunday is just a —

The CHAIRMAN: Would there be many royalties cheques that come to people here?

Mr Addis: It is royalties, or last week, it was the parenting bonus—a parent with five kids gets \$3 500—and every fortnight there is a pension cheque. That has very direct impacts. Kids, basically, are telling our staff, “I can’t be here today because I’ve got to be at home, because if I’m not there before 11 o’clock all that money is going to be gone.”

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: What is that parenting bonus? I thought that was paid weekly or fortnightly or something.

Mr Addis: As I say, I have been away, so I am just catching up, but my understanding is there have been some substantial payments through Centrelink in the last week or so.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Can we go back onto the royalty issue? My understanding is there is not a huge amount of mining in this region. Where do the royalties come from?

Mr Addis: Royalties come from a variety of sources. There is the Pacific Hydro up on the dam. There is mining exploration happening around. There are people in Kununurra who are from a long way from here—not necessarily Miriuwung–Gajerrong people at all. I am not trying to say that royalties are at all a negative, but sometimes the impact of cash payments starts very quickly to convert to a negative for people on the ground.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Absolutely.

Mr Addis: That is something that we struggle with. People do not have the wherewithal, the skills, to manage cash. The cultural dynamic is such that cash gets distributed very rapidly et cetera, et cetera. That is, I think, a key issue that supports the view that grog is something you can have now. That is a big issue around that does impact on grog.

The CHAIRMAN: Is it the way the royalties are paid out? If we were to ask that royalties payment could be less and on a more regular basis, would that help?

Mr Addis: I would not want to particularly single out royalties; it is cash payments per se, and whether that is pensions on a Wednesday or youth allowance on whatever day et cetera, et cetera.

The CHAIRMAN: Are pensions once a fortnight or once a week?

Mr Addis: Once a fortnight.

The CHAIRMAN: Again, with pensions, maybe if that was once a week, would that help?

Mr Addis: You could feed it on a daily basis. The technology is surely there to break down cash transactions as you see it. I do not want to get too far into that discussion, but certainly cash drives grog, and grog drives kids’ struggling. Do you have any other questions on that connections program or the girls program?

The CHAIRMAN: I guess the ages of the children involved and how are you evaluating the success of that program?

Mr Addis: Kids are in it from about 12 to 17. In terms of evaluation, we are struggling to do that. We found that sort of program is pretty severely under-resourced given the clientele and the environment we are trying to work in. Pretty much any resource we have has been devoted to keeping the thing going and backing up the kids. So I have to own up to the fact that we have not done a great deal of evaluation.

The CHAIRMAN: The reason I am asking about the evaluation is because during this last week, when we have gone to several different communities that we have met with, we have been told about programs that have been introduced for a year or two and then the money just is not there. It does sound like the program you have, Connections, is a very good program, but possibly if you do not put something in soon that will look at the evaluation, I would hate for you to be in a position in two or three years' time where you will lose that funding.

Mr Addis: So would we. We have invested quite a bit of resource in developing an evaluation framework that helps us to try to measure how people are going against what is essentially an independence spectrum or framework, but the reality of doing that sort of work, particularly with an extremely fluid client group is it takes a lot of effort and the DEEWs and DETs of this world struggle to build that into project resourcing.

The CHAIRMAN: How many girls are involved and where does the funding come from?

Mr Addis: The funding was originally through DEEWR through a Canberra-driven program with which we had some serious challenges, which we are still negotiating with them about. Essentially, the DEEWR programs tend to have a very black letter approach. They say, "Across the nation we will get such-and-such outcomes."

The CHAIRMAN: This is the Department of Health and Ageing?

Mr Addis: No, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, which is basically too rigid and inflexible to really work with a group of kids like we are working with in the East Kimberley, so we have moved away from that. We now, in partnership with MG, who through OES—I think you have just had Anna and Edna—are backing it significantly, which is fantastic. Gulganyem are putting in some resources. Wunan has backed it fairly significantly—probably more than we had intended—and the Department of Education, through their participation. As well, we have been lucky enough to get some significant philanthropic support—you know, lots of effort to cobble together a resource package that can almost do the job.

The CHAIRMAN: Say in the past six months or 12 months, how many girls?

Mr Addis: Over this calendar year —

The CHAIRMAN: Connections is for girls?

Mr Addis: That is it, yes. Over this year they are expecting to work with 50 girls. At a point in time they are working with 20 to 25, but attendance on a day can be anything from 13 down to two. That is a serious challenge, because it is very hard to justify a significant resource for two girls. We have struggled to come up with any better response to where these girls are at. For instance, the week before last at the start of this term the staff were working with five kids to get them back down south to boarding school. It was a huge effort over a couple of weeks to make sure that is managed through to completion. But it does not help with classroom attendance and so forth, because obviously they are attending school somewhere else. I suppose the bottom line out of all that is that to work effectively with kids that are in families that are seriously struggling with life is incredibly difficult, incredibly resource intensive and points the finger to the need for broader changes, such as grog. In that program, for instance, if we treat grog just as an external influence that we cannot do anything about or if we treat big settling payments as an external influence that we cannot do

anything about et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Housing is another one that directly impacts on kids' ability to engage and stay focused. Those are all external to our program, but they absolutely make it almost impossible for us to be successful and for those kids to be successful. At some point, for the challenges that we face and that the education department faces, and that we all face in Kununurra, to turn around those challenges, you have absolutely got to get some shift on grog, on welfare, on housing, on expectation and responsibilities that families are understanding and living up to. I suppose that is to say one-off responses to specific issues rather than a more coherent approach will not get a great deal of change.

I suppose that brings me to probably what we would say is our key message to you guys, which would be that there are some education and health-based responses, increasingly, and some really quite good ones. I think some of the work OVAHS is doing with support from OES and so forth is fantastic, and that is all great. But I think the perspective has to be rather broader than those sorts of responses and it needs to take in some of those other aspects such as housing and welfare reform, education reform and so forth. We have been fairly heavily involved in the Halls Creek experience where grog bans have been in place—it must be getting on for 18 months, I suppose—and it has absolutely created some breathing space for that community to get on their feet and to get some perspective. But there has been an absence of coherent strategy from the state and the community—from all of us really—to say, okay, we have got some space, we have got some calm, how are we going to help people go forward. Because grog bans in that form are probably unsustainable in the long term, and in the absence of something that helps those people and that community to say, “Where are we going to create a sense of direction, opportunity and hope and support people to move somewhere?” We probably will not achieve as well as we could collectively, if we had a more coherent response.

The CHAIRMAN: What about bans for this area?

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: You said you think they are unsustainable in the long term. Why do you say that?

Mr Addis: I suppose it is a political assessment, but there are people in Halls Creek who want to be able to have a drink, and that is not an illegitimate thing, so the bans in their current form are an imposition on the rights and opportunities for some parts of the community in order to achieve some upside or protection, I suppose, for other parts of the community. If there is no way of shifting away from the need to have that sort of a compromise at some point, I would have thought that would be open to question.

[12.00 noon]

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I would have thought that if people were saying they wanted to make the whole Kimberley dry—one elder we spoke to the other day wanted to ban all takeaway sales—politically, that would be very hard. The level of bans now in places like Halls Creek, in 10 years' time we will look back on them as the first rules we brought in on smoking, which at the time everyone said were draconian. Now they are seen as very mild. I do not think this current level of bans that have been brought in, once they are in, I cannot see them ever being taken away. That is my reading of it.

Mr Addis: All that said, the real issue is how do you build the capability of people in whatever communities to be able to make proper choices —

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: It is like breathing space, as you said.

Mr Addis: Yes, that is right. Even if those bans are there for the long term, we still need to focus on how we make sure that people are better able to make positive life choices and manage their own issues and not get themselves in a pickle, which is where the focus needs to be, absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN: Ian, could I ask you how interested the young people are in their culture and in elder stories?

Mr Trust: It probably depends on where you go. If you go to remote places like Balgo, Ringer Soak and so on, there would probably be a stronger interest, I would think. But it is something again that is fairly relative to the barriers of activities happening there. I think alcohol has had an impact on culture as well in that if you look at the skin group system, going back 40 years ago—probably 30 years ago here in the Kimberley—if you were looking to take a partner within a certain group, you had to abide by certain rules in terms of who you could have a relationship with, depending on that family in your skin group. All that sort of stuff has broken down to a large extent. I was talking to one of the elders here in Kununurra who has been a driving force in terms of organising some of the cultural stuff. He said that families now are not that keen on having their sons go through the law. In fact in some instances he told me that they actually want to get paid for it. A lot of it is not just to do with alcohol. Some of it is to do with exposure to television. A lot of these kids around here have got more affiliation with Michael Jordan and American things than Aboriginal cultural leaders. In places like Halls Creek, my extended family grew up connected with Halls Creek and the Gidja group down there. Most younger people down there, and I suspect it would be the same here, struggle to speak the traditional language anymore. Some of the older people do, but most of the young people probably struggle to speak it fluently. The way that culture is pursued, the Kimberley Land Council, the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre and the Kimberley language service in Halls Creek try to promote things like culture and having people come back to the connection to country and things like that. But generally if you did a longitudinal study to compare young people's involvement in culture, say, 20 years ago, 10 years ago, and now, it is definitely on a downward slide. There are differing factors for it. But growth does play a big negative in regards to that. It is not just the young people's fault. A lot of the elders have an alcohol problem as well. It is hard for young people to respect someone who is living a dysfunctional lifestyle. It has got that flow-on effect. Some of the young people make the point that elders want us to respect them and yet we see them lying outside the pub somewhere drunk on a Friday night. It is a bit of a catch 22 situation where you sort of go round in circles. Personally I am not that involved in the cultural side of things, mainly because of my family history. My family were members of the stolen generation so we lost contact at a deep cultural level during my mother and father's childhood being taken away in the first place. I am not really privy to the activities there, but my extended family are very cultural people. My uncles and aunties are very much part of the law group around Halls Creek. From what they tell me, you can see that it is nowhere near as strong as it used to be.

The CHAIRMAN: A stated objective of the Wunan Foundation is to shift Aboriginal people who are dependant on welfare from 80 per cent to 20 per cent in 20 years. What progress are you making in relation to this? Where are the raw statistics so that again there can be an annual tally on this? Do you have the statistics? Are you looking at this locally or are you looking at this across the Kimberley?

Mr Addis: Wunan's area of interest out of our region is the east Kimberley, so Kununurra down through Halls Creek into the desert—Balgo and so forth. Stats are absolutely very, very hard to come by. The ABS numbers, we all know, are very badly flawed. By and large the accepted benchmark is probably from the Taylor report, four or five years ago and last year, which says roughly 80 per cent of working age Aboriginal people are not in a real job. That is what we have adopted as the proxy for how independent and able to move forward they are under their own steam. Our objective is not narrowly about people getting jobs, it is really about people able to pursue their own goals, dreams and hopes successfully in life, which is much harder to translate into something measurable and tangible. We have had to go for proxies like employment and housing status. In terms of progress, progress from the mid-1980s to 2006 absolutely, against those sorts of indicators, things went backwards both in absolute and relative terms. That is pretty horrendous given the economic development that has happened in the region. Essentially you have seen Aboriginal people left outside the mainstream economic picture and be almost corralled into the whole CDEP and Centrelink picture. That is the 80-odd per cent.

The CHAIRMAN: What is the CDEP?

Mr Addis: CDEP became the replacement for engagement in the pastoral sector and other sectors that previously Aboriginal people had traditionally —

The CHAIRMAN: CDEP stands for?

Mr Addis: Community development employment program, which is “work for the dole” by any other name. That has absolutely had an insidious impact on what people have done. In the last probably four or five years we have started to see much more positive signs. Young people are starting to want to get into the workforce and pursue other options than maybe had been the case in the last couple of decades, which is very encouraging. Argyle has had a big impact. Organisations like Kimberley Group Training, with its traineeships and apprenticeships, have had a very big impact. There are clearly a lot of jobs in the region. Research we have done says job opportunities in the region have been in the order of 1 700 per year for the last five years. We are seeing some forward progress. There is a group of people who are well established in the workforce and have got great life skills and are getting on with life very successfully. Then there is a transition group which is probably the next 20 or 30 per cent of people who are struggling to get onto that pathway. By and large we are seeing people find that going pretty tough. Usually around starting schools are a big challenge. Housing is almost always a big challenge. People have got to wait five years et cetera for Homeswest housing —

The CHAIRMAN: We were told in Broome there are something like 700 or 800 houses needed in eight years for Homeswest housing. What are the numbers like for this area? Do you have any idea?

Mr Addis: It is a bit like how long is a piece of string, but certainly there would be demand for 200 or 300. The waiting list at the moment can be five years but the bulk of placements are priority placements which is health or domestic violence related primarily, which is not a bad thing in itself, but it means that those people who are aspiring to get into the workforce, get their kids in school, get up and get going, there is a very much reduced opportunity for housing for those people. I think that is a real bottleneck that is partially being addressed through the transitional housing program, which is being invested through the east Kimberley package. Where was I going with that? I do not know! That is probably a reasonable thing.

The CHAIRMAN: Ian, could I ask you whether Wunan works with other groups in other states such as Noel Pearson’s Cape York work?

Mr Trust: We are actually doing a trip to the cape early next month to look at some of Noel’s strategies up there in Cape York, especially Aboriginal income management, welfare reform, the Family Responsibilities Commission and some of the projects they have got in regards to education, like Djarragun College on the outskirts of Cairns. Our philosophy is very much similar to Ralph’s in that we think that we have to look at breaking the welfare cycle in terms of people working who are not working, getting a job and supporting them to get there. Our philosophy is very much similar to the Cape York work. I do not know whether they have picked up on the transitional housing model as much as we have over here. From what I gather most of their programs seem to be centred around the remotest communities. There are places like Mossman Gorge, which is not that far from Cairns; but over here you have got a lot of our programs in places like Kununurra and Halls Creek, which are towns. We do have contact with other regionals. It takes in isolated communities as well, but we do try to work around the point of trying to connect people to two opportunities, especially in employment and education. One of the programs that Noel started off, which we ran from over here for a few years, was the work placement scheme. People left Cape York to take up jobs in Victoria and New South Wales. We have adopted that program over here. Some of our people went across to Victoria to take up jobs at an abattoir over there, from one of our communities here. I suppose our program is very much in line with what Noel is trying to do. That is why we are keen to go over there and have a look.

The CHAIRMAN: What about locally with Andrew Forrest; the employment program they have?

Mr Addis: The Australian Employment Covenant. Fundamentally the AEC started from a position of trying to get industry employers to commit a very large number of jobs that are open for Aboriginal people. I think they have been very successful in that. The challenge that I would imagine they are facing, like all the rest of us in this space, is the supply side—how do we build the number of people? We have the skills, the motivation and the wherewithal to take up those opportunities. I do not really see that process having a great deal of attraction here.

The CHAIRMAN: Until you have done the ground work.

[12.15 pm]

Mr Addis: In its current form, I think there is a bit they can add in terms of regions trying to build on the supply side, but at this stage I am not aware of them being that much involved on that front.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I had an interesting experience with them: a school and a mission have been closed just outside of my electorate, and people wanted to buy it to turn it into a training place to train, mostly, Aboriginal people for jobs in mining. I wrote to Rio, BHP and Andrew Forrest and told them that they wanted \$7 million for it and asked whether they were interested in funding all or part of it. I got an interesting letter back from all three of them—it could have been the same letter—that said they invest their money into the areas where they mine. In other words, they were not interested in investing in my area because they do not have any mines there, but we wanted to train Aboriginal people for them to employ. Rio has an office in Geraldton to employ people, but they could not make the connection. The letter could have been written by the same person from each of the three companies. Forrest is up there with his name in lights and hanging around with the Prime Minister and everything like that, but I took away from that—yes, it sort of reads well, but I wonder how much it will achieve. It is headlines, or a nice phrase, as someone said to me one day about something else. It will be interesting to see; I am following it with interest.

Mr Addis: The situation in remote Australia is very different. It is hard yards on the ground with people who are facing some big challenges and who are not going to get around them without intensive support in the vast majority of cases.

The CHAIRMAN: Is Wunan involved with the commonwealth's new ranger project and caring for country project?

Mr Trust: I am not sure if it is connected through the Job Services Australia contract, but generally no. My understanding is that it is really being done through the native title groups, because they are connecting back to country. With my other hat on, I sit on the board of the Indigenous Land Corporation, which has put up some of the money to pay for some of the cost for these rangers. But Wunan, to my knowledge, Ralph, has not been involved in that program.

Mr Addis: Only by a little bit of employment placement into it with clients who want to do that sort of thing. The ranger program seems to be capable of just growing and growing and growing, and therefore building up the number of people working in that sector. The challenge there is, once you have blocked it, there is nothing else. But it does seem to be very successful in getting people engaged, because it is something that people feel comfortable doing and feel interested in. We have talked to some of the people involved in the ranger program about: can we, sort of, structure it so that it becomes a transition point, and can we use the ranger program to get people involved, engaged, up-skilled and stable et cetera, and then create opportunities to move into other sectors where there is jobs growth? But it is early days.

The CHAIRMAN: Kununurra has, possibly, a population of between 6 500 and 9 000, without the 3 000 or 4 000 people who come up and pass through in the summer when they are on holiday. Of those people, 50 per cent are Aboriginal, and in the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal there is a problem with alcohol and cannabis up here. If the government decided it was going to put money into this area, what would be the three priorities?

Mr Addis: Sorry, please clarify—putting money into the area of?

The CHAIRMAN: Money is available; what would be the three priorities for this area?

Mr Addis: Not restricted to health or education responses?

The CHAIRMAN: In relation to the problem you have of the social costs et cetera of alcohol and drugs, where would that money be best spent? We have discussed having a shelter to get children off the street, or where they can go so that they are not abused; we have discussed children either not going to school or having problems at school; we have discussed problems within the immediate family and the impact on the wider family; and we have discussed the fact that often it is housing, and that because so many people are living together there are problems around the alcohol. Of all the problems that are here, if funding was available and you had to choose three things, what would they be? Where would you start first?

Mr Trust: I like the transitional housing idea. Transitional housing basically comes with rules. First off, you choose the people who go in there; they are the people who put their hands up and say, “Look, we want to have a go at getting our kids educated, holding a job, and basically going forward.” I think we need to give those people that opportunity.

The CHAIRMAN: In relation to transitional housing, I have heard that one of problems is that there are certain standards, and so whilst there are kit home houses that can be built within 12 weeks with concrete slabs, the standards make building housing up here very, very expensive. How much does it cost now, and how much could it cost?

Mr Trust: The model up here is that you build a standalone home on a block by itself, which is very expensive. I cannot see why you could not build a block of units, for example, like you do in Perth. They would, obviously, only be suitable for a young family with one child or two children or something, but you could set up a stepping stone-type of arrangement whereby people then step up to a bigger property and so on, like everybody does all around Australia. You are right: in terms of going for a standard, standalone house on a one-third acre block, or whatever they build them on these days, it is very expensive, and the cost of building up here is exorbitant, but there may be some other funding ways of doing it.

Mr Addis: We have had quite a bit to do with housing over the past seven or eight years. It is costing the state between \$350 000 to \$450 000 to build a Homeswest three-by-two, which is a lot. It is not clear to me what opportunities there are to significantly reduce the cost to build. Most of the alternative prefab products and so forth will save some here and there, but by the time you have finished the whole package, I am not sure that you could even talk about a 25 per cent saving or anything. It seems to us that what is really important in terms of the housing investment the state makes, and needs to continue to make, is not what sort of housing is built, it is how do you use the housing to achieve your broader policy goals, which are ultimately to help people to live well and not be so dependent on government. It needs to be lined up more with those broader policy objectives, rather than just it is a house because everybody needs a house sort of thing—we all know that—but there is such a shortfall in housing that that stops being the marginal decision.

I suppose the other key issue is that we absolutely need to have higher expectations of tenants to live well in a house and maintain it as an asset for themselves and the state. Far too much of the money is being invested and housing is deteriorating too quickly, and there are limited consequences for irresponsible behaviours from tenants. Tenants need better support to understand what is expected and to learn some skills to meet those expectations. At some point the state needs to set an expectation and live to it, which I understand is happening; that has to be a key thing, but that is not to say that that is easy.

The CHAIRMAN: Housing is one priority.

Mr Addis: Yes.

Mr Trust: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Transitional housing was the first point.

Mr Trust: And the wraparound supports that go with it. You cannot just put these people in a house and expect them to succeed. There are things like money management, how to use their money, and you have to exercise a bit of tough love. If there is a raging party ongoing in one of your transitional houses, someone has to go over there and knock on the door. Basically, you have to run those things like a private estate would—where there are certain rules for living there. The good thing about the transitional housing model, I think, is that it is a two-way obligation thing: if you do not abide by the rules, then eventually you are going to have to go and find somewhere else to live. The other good thing I think about it is that if you target the right people initially, half of those people should be buying that house. I think the other challenge is looking at joint equity schemes and so on, to try to bring down the cost a bit, and you could then start a bit of a turnover so that the government does not have to fund all the complete new stocks that are being built; they can be built from the sales of some of the houses.

Other programs? I think the other thing is getting more kids into schools. There has to be some focus on the school itself, in terms of how engaged these kids are in actually going through the school system and coming out the other end with skills; that is another challenge that needs to be looked at. There may be mechanisms within the education system now that should be doing that, but Ralph might be able to answer this better because he actually sits on the school board here. My perception is that a lot of Aboriginal kids go through the school here, but there is no real engagement with the education system and they still come out at the other end, after reasonable attendance, still being barely literate.

The CHAIRMAN: That is fine. We will move to Ralph.

Mr Addis: The overall environment does not encourage people to engage with building their own capacity, engaging with the broader community constructively et cetera. To us, that speaks of the need to reform some of the things that drive disengagement and do not support positive engagement, similar to what the Cape York mob are doing around the Family Responsibilities Commission. That is absolutely about how to be more constructively engaged with individuals and families to help you get over some of the problems and challenges and move beyond some of the negative behaviours and so forth that you struggle with, and get involved in a more positive way forward. I think that is a key thing. That is about engagement and reforming things like the way income is provided and managed, so welfare reform to a certain extent, and it absolutely looks into school, housing, drug and alcohol, and domestic violence et cetera. I think that sort of capstone reform is critical to give us a more useful way of engaging with people to start to help them solve their own problems. Without that, I think we are—I do not know how to describe it politely—really chasing our tails. That, together with the primary supports that would allow people to move beyond where they currently are—housing is one, and the broad support services that Ian talked about is another—is needed. We need far clearer expectations of parents around school attendance, so that they know it is absolutely the law of the land that if you have a child, it is your responsibility to have the child at school. At the moment we do not really have that expectation.

The other is managing the impacts of cash. Cash should be a positive thing for people to use to build their lives and their kids' futures, yadda yadda yadda, but in far too many cases it is being used in exactly the opposite way. Probably those three things—namely, housing, school reform, and money reform, I suppose, for want of a better description—should be sitting under some sort of an engagement strategy such as the responsibilities commission.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Is the school getting one of these federal government trade training sections?

Mr Addis: There is some trade stuff going on at the TAFE, which is adjacent to the school, but I am not aware of anything of that nature going into the school.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: If they are side by side, I suppose it could be.

Mr Addis: I would suggest, in terms of my response to your question, that the other thing that I think needs far better support is Aboriginal leadership. The key element to solving some of the issues and finding some solutions is to have people who are skilled, have some authority, and have some support to lead within their community. At the moment, all the power sits within government agencies or organisations, which, by and large, disempowers people who otherwise could be very effective in trying to lead some of this change; that has to be a key thing.

Mr Trust: I think that leadership thing at varied levels is a good point. I think the prevailing sort of local culture here amongst the more disadvantaged families in the Aboriginal community is that it is not cool to succeed. In a lot of these cases, you are talking systemic welfare dependence over two or three generations, and there are hardly any role models. They have never actually seen somebody get up in the morning and go to work, or if they go to work it is CDEP, which is almost like pretend work. As part of the leadership thing, I think that somehow you have to try to influence the Nyoongah values of the local community. We have been talking about transitional housing and getting families to succeed, and I think they will start becoming the role models. People will say, “Billy and Jacqui who were living here, they have their own house, and they have a good job and a nice car; why can’t we do that?” That will, sort of, come with it. More people from the Aboriginal community have to start questioning the status quo and be prepared to say, “Look; this is just not good enough.” With that social culture, I think there is a perception out there that, somehow, if you are Aboriginal within a certain sector of our community—within that 50 to 60 per cent sector I was talking about before—there seems to be an attitude from within that group that the more educated you become and the more successful you become in terms of having a nice house, having a nice car, and your kids being educated, that somehow you are losing your Aboriginality. I think there has to be something around the leadership thing that says, “Look, that is not the case; you can have a PhD or be educated and still attend lore meetings and be a cultural leader.” That is not the case at all at the moment. I think we have to do something about that as well—that perception—and that people think that way.

The CHAIRMAN: I would like to thank both of you for your evidence before the committee today. A 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 28 days from the date of the letter attached to it. 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; however, 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. Ralph and Ian, thank you once again for coming along today.

Hearing concluded at 12.34 pm