

**EDUCATION AND HEALTH
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**AN INQUIRY INTO IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES
FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIANS OF ALL AGES**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2011**

SESSION TWO

Members

**Dr J.M. Woollard (Chairman)
Mr P.B. Watson (Deputy Chairman)
Mr P. Abetz
Ms L.L. Baker
Dr G.G. Jacobs**

Hearing commenced at 10.51 am**SYME, MS STEPHANIE HELEN****Chief Financial Officer, Clontarf Foundation, examined:****NEESHAM, MR GERARD****Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee, I thank you for your interest in and your appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into improving educational outcomes for Western Australians of all ages. I will introduce myself, Janet Woollard; next to me is Graham Jacobs —

Dr G.G. JACOBS: You always have trouble with my name!

The CHAIRMAN: It is because it says “Mr” instead of “Dr”. The other members are Peter Abetz and Lisa Baker, and we have our secretariat, Dr Brian Gordon and also Lucy Roberts. From Hansard today we have Darby Evans.

The Education and Health Standing Committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. This hearing is a formal procedure of Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house. This is a public hearing and Hansard is 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 the questions we have for you today, I need to check whether you have completed the “Details of witness” form?

Ms Syme: Is that the one we did when we arrived?

The CHAIRMAN: I hope so.

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did 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: Sorry, but I have to go through this. Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today’s hearing?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you both very much for coming to meet with us this morning. Brian would have sent to you the terms of reference for this inquiry. They are very broad, but the inquiry is basically to try to see where the failures are in the system and how we can address the failures to improve the educational outcomes for all children. We know that the model that you have introduced has been very successful. Could you please describe the model to us, including its strengths and weaknesses, and how the model can be utilised in other areas—maybe not fully, in terms of a college, but in other schools and communities—so that we can see whether funding could

be made available for the things that are working in the organisation so that we can bring some of those factors on board?

Mr Neesham: First of all, I would like to say that my profession is and was a teacher. I used to teach at-risk young boys back in the 1970s and 1980s and prior to that I taught in government schools, both primary and high school. I went out of teaching in 1983 and, due to good luck or bad luck, at the end of my AFL career I went back into teaching to help a friend out. That led to the start of the Clontarf Foundation. I spent six months teaching at Clontarf Aboriginal College, which is separate from us. We are the Clontarf Foundation and the Clontarf Aboriginal College is owned and run by the Catholic Education Office. We are an independent, charitable body.

When we taught back in the '70s and '80s, the aim was to change the behaviour of difficult boys. Some were in and out of juvenile jails and there was a high percentage of Aboriginal boys among the kids that we dealt with. We tried to basically readjust them to be able to move back into mainstream society. The bottom line of that period of teaching that I was involved in was that we did not change their behaviour; we failed abysmally. In the end, the school that I was teaching at closed down. It was not just that one particular school; I have worked at other schools that have endeavoured to get the same outcomes. In 1999 when I went back to teaching, having freshly come out of the AFL, there was an obvious attraction for boys to turn up to Clontarf Aboriginal College when I was there because I had just been a high-profile sportsman in a sport that they loved. I basically put them on a contract that they had to come to school and, if they did, I would coach them twice a week and we would play some footy. They not only attended, but also voluntarily changed their behaviour, which I witnessed over the course of about two months. This was a religious zeal for them. They actually then changed from being surly, angry boys with very, very low self-esteem to being quite the opposite. I was witnessing this and there were no psychologists, psychiatrists or social workers. We had them 24/7 back when we used the old model and there was a staff ration of one to three. I was with 25 boys and they were changing their behaviour, with just one person. That was the nexus of what happened. I then spoke to the chairman of the Fremantle Football Club who sacked me, Ross Kelly, and told him what I had seen. I got him back in spades because he has been the chairman of the Clontarf Foundation ever since. Without Ross and his amazing business acumen we would not have built what we have built today, which is probably as good a for-profit model as anywhere in the country, but we happen to be a not-for-profit organisation.

We started with 25 boys. We ran our first year in 2000 and we partnered with the schools. We do not do the teaching, the teachers do the teaching. We occupy a demonstrably different space. Football is a vehicle; it is not what we do. There might be an outside perception that we are all about football. We are nothing about football. We are about educational outcomes, attendance at school, retention, behaviour, healthy lifestyles and employment et cetera. That is what we measure. We tested it with 25 boys. We measure every daily attendance. We measure everything we do because Ross is an engineer. It is a pretty good idea to measure things because then you know whether or not it works. That in itself separates us from plenty of people in this space.

Clontarf Aboriginal College, for 14 years prior to us starting, had a retention rate of 15 weeks. Every one and a half terms it was a new school, for 14 years. It had an attendance rate of 47 per cent and never had 40 kids sit down in a seat on any day. It was struggling. It had wonderful people and wonderful teachers and everyone was endeavouring to make it work, but it just did not work because there was something missing. What was missing, in the case of our boys, was men and something they loved doing. At the same time as I was starting up this program, I was taking my boys to a private school called Aquinas where sport is compulsory for every boy in that school. It is part of the culture. You do not pick up your children on a Monday and Wednesday until five o'clock. They get dressed in their uniforms and do soccer or hockey or whatever they do. When I was a teacher in the government school in the '70s sport was compulsory. The only difference between a private school and a government school today is there is no sport; there is no

competition. You do not play in colours and you do not get all the benefits that sport brings. The last benefit a sport brings is an Olympian; that is the least benefit. What sport does is it makes school a great place to attend. Over the 14 years I took my own two sons to school they did not speak about maths once. They said how they were going; what party was at the head of the river; who they were going to barrack for at the athletics; whether they were playing Hale School or Trinity; that they were playing the double blues or their archrivals, Trinity. Even if they were playing in the thirds of footy, they wanted to be there to watch their side. The most obvious mistake that we have made as a nation—not as a state—is that we have not realised that the men have gone out of the school system as teachers and there is no after-school activity by teachers. The school has replaced that with what they call phys. ed. Phys. ed. is not playing in colours, training to achieve to try to get skills, being part of a team and winning and losing. As a society, we are moving to where, I think, we misconstrue why the behaviour of our society is like it is. The behaviour of our society is developed by our schools and our families.

[11.00 am]

We have an ever-growing increase in single parents. I am not critical of that; it is just very hard to do. As a parent who has a wife who looks after our children—my wife is a teacher who stayed home for the whole time we had children—I know how hard we had to work to produce kids who we think are good citizens. To be a single parent trying to do the same, and work, must be a nightmare. There has to be an outcome behaviourally for our society, and we are looking at it now. Whatever will come out of the schools is what our society will look like in the future.

I have never had the opportunity to speak openly about this. We have taken the most at-risk boys in the most at-risk group in Australia and we have turned the ones that we have into the least at-risk—to the best of our ability. Yule Brook had very few boys attending and we have more than tripled the number of boys attending. Yule Brook was a violent and angry school. The 45 Aboriginal boys there now are quiet, calm, confident leaders. They entertained the Governor the other day. One of our boys is a top student. If you want to know my opinion is, our program is aimed at one group, and we deliberately did that when I found some information and saw what I believed worked. We could have applied it to anyone, but we made a conscious decision to apply it to the most at-risk, and we have stuck to that. We have been asked to do it for penguins—I will not go on. We have been asked by everyone that you can imagine over 13 years. In Australia we have grown the program from 25 boys when we started to over 2 500. That is right across Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Victoria. We are about to open eight academies in New South Wales. If it is anything like the other states that we are in, the New South Wales state government will want it to grow as quick as it can. To give you an indication of the difference—Janet, I remember hearing you on the radio when you were on a trip to Broome or Derby and you saw firsthand how bad the situation is from the point of view of alcohol, and foetal alcohol syndrome and all the issues that come with the space.

You would think Broome is a functional joint, because we get off a plane, we go to the Cable Beach Club or the beach or Matso's and we have a pretty good time. But Broome is as dysfunctional as Derby; we just cannot see it. It is not as obvious because in Derby it is just there with nothing else surrounding it; that is, there is not 10 000 people who are functional living there. In Broome, 47 boys attended the high school the year before our program started, with an attendance rate of 55 per cent. Now that is not 55 per cent on the same day, which means you cannot teach because they turn up on different days. It is impossible. That 55 per cent of 47 boys equates to just over 5 000 attendance days. In 2010, we had 113 boys with a 77 per cent attendance, which equates to 16 000 days, or thereabouts, attendance, for teaching purposes. That is one town, and every town looks the same. Halls Creek is the same. Derby is the same. Fitzroy is the same. Maddington is the same. Gosnells is the same. I can go on—Tamworth, Moree, Burke, Brewarrina. What has happened in the space of what we have done in the past 30 years is that these children have not been attending school. We have not known that as a country—it has not been forthwith. The statistics

that have been available to us have been, in my opinion, extremely inaccurate. Hence, you do not know what the outcome will be. We find that 96 per cent of the boys totally disengage from school by, at the latest, year 11. They then have to go to another space. Their next space is parenting. And they are incapable of it, so we produce a bigger cycle of disadvantage because they are less qualified to parent than their parents were, and their parents were less qualified to parent than their grandparents were. The grandparents were functional. In 30 years, there has been a huge uptake of welfare, alcohol, drugs and pornography. Clearly, it is not every Aboriginal person. There are lots of wonderful Aboriginal people. There are lots of very successful Aboriginal people. But the truth is that a very large percentage is in this space now. In Western Australia, we have a 45 per cent penetration in the regional areas, thanks to Brendon Grylls, because he has picked up the program and used his royalties for regions money to allow us to expand through the regions. In the metropolitan area, after 13 years we have a penetration of 13 per cent, which is very low; and that is because it has not been picked up. We have a penetration of 48 per cent in the metropolitan area of Darwin and we started there about seven years after we started in Perth. Currently, we have a penetration in the Northern Territory of nigh on 50 per cent for the regions. If we really want change, we need better penetration—70 per cent right across the board. So there is quite a bit of work to do.

Mr P. ABETZ: What is needed to get that penetration?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Money.

Mr Neesham: Well—money, yes. But you have to have a buy-in from the government. We had a very serious buy-in from Alan Carpenter when we started. We were very lucky. Alan Carpenter held the portfolios of Indigenous, sport and education, and he was a Dockers supporter. My mother's prayers were answered! It was a defining moment and he had a huge impact. The other two people—three actually—who really had an impact were Michael Chaney and Harry Perkins—because we saw that we needed to fund ourselves privately to a certain extent and therefore had to remain impendent and drive for the outcomes as opposed to spending all our time looking at process—and a bloke who I made look good as a footballer, Don Randall. He could not play to save his life! Don and I went to teachers college together and he was the one who opened the doors in Canberra. We fund our program—one-third, one-third and one-third; that is, one-third federal, one-third state or territory and one-third private. It costs us \$6 900 per boy —

Dr G.G. JACOBS: How much?

Mr Neesham: It costs us \$6 900 per boy —

Ms L.L. BAKER: Per year.

Mr Neesham: —per year, thank you. Fully costed, it costs the state anywhere between \$250 000 and \$400 000 to put a boy in jail because of the cost of building and replacing jails. You do not have to keep too many boys out of jail to pay for this program—and it is a much better life.

The CHAIRMAN: You spoke about the take-up being, I think, less than 15 per cent in the metropolitan area —

Mr Neesham: Thirteen per cent.

The CHAIRMAN: Thirteen per cent in the metropolitan area and a much higher take-up in the regions because of Brendon Grylls. You have just said that the funding is three ways—federal, state and private. Are you having more support from the state or federal level or is the problem equally in trying to get the funding from both state and federal government?

Mr Neesham: Glacial.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Which one?

Mr Neesham: Both.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Didn't you get extra funding from the state though?

Mr Neesham: In all sincerity—no. I mean, the state has been great. And the education department has been fabulous. But the truth is, we are not just an education program. Sharyn O'Neill has a budget, and it is very tough for her to handle what she is doing within her budget. We do not fit in anywhere. We have had to keep finding money outside the huge bucket of money that is applied to the Indigenous, but that is applied above the game. The game is over if you have an 18-year-old boy or girl who has been addicted to alcohol for four or five years, and that is where we have been applying the money. We have not gone down to the bottom and changed the attendance rates of these kids. We have not changed their behaviour. We have not got their educational outcomes up. We have not embedded in them a desire to work. We build a capacity in our children that is demonstrably different. I have a paper that sums it up. It is called "The Employment Conundrum". Although I give Andrew Forrest a lot of credit for bringing the concept to the surface, saying that we need 50 000 jobs for Aboriginals is not the solution. The problem is not the jobs. Cable Beach Club wants to employ Aboriginal people—there is no supply.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Not work ready.

Mr Neesham: How can you be work ready if you attend school 47 per cent of the time, you do not have a sleep pattern, and you do not see anyone go to work, so you do not have any concept that you are going to work? At breakfast about two months ago, I was talking to my nephew's son about how we build in the expectancy. We ask the boys: when you go to work, what are you going to do? We have to do that because that is what is required. At two and half years of age, Vincent got up, packed his bag, and his mum said, "What are you doing?" He replied, "I am going to work with dad today." That is when the modelling starts. All behaviour is based on modelling. We model. We do not fly in and fly out. They are nice programs, but they do not work. There are plenty of other programs. As my chairman so rightly said to me in 2001—we were at Sydney Harbour having lunch at Doyles because we had come up against another dozen brick walls and were a bit frustrated—"You need to read a book called 'Inside the Whirlpool'". I asked him what it was about and he said that when you invent something you have a certain amount of time to fill the vacuum before other things turn up. You ask why we are at only 13 per cent in the metropolitan area of Perth. It is because there is "plenty of other". We do not want to say, "Do not have that program; have ours", because if that other program is working, everyone should be happy. In a lot of ways, I am an advocate for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

The CHAIRMAN: The education departments in some states are looking at outcomes in terms of funding. Traditionally schools have been funded at the beginning of the school year—maybe \$6 000 or \$7 000 a student. But, as you are aware, some of those students may only attend school 25 per cent of the time or 50 per cent of the time. However, that funding is signed off at the start of the year and goes through for the whole year. Other states are discussing whether the funding should be based on outcomes. If, for example, it costs \$8 000 per high school student in years 11 and 12 and another \$6 000 for your program, it will cost approximately \$14 000 per student.

[11.15 am]

So, really, the statistics that you provided to us earlier in terms of, I guess, the success in those areas where it was only 25, 30 per cent and you brought those percentages up are very important in terms of being able to put an argument to the government that the money that you are putting into the general education system in these areas is fading—it is only 20 per cent. If it is fading, they are only going for a certain amount of the time, should that money—as they are looking at in other states—if they cannot keep the students there, go towards the type of program?

Mr Neesham: I took my children to school; the teachers did not come and get them. It was my responsibility as a parent to actually take my children to school. I am a teacher and it is impossible for these teachers to deal with this situation. What we are supposed to be doing is helping the teachers—they are good people, they are Australians, they are wonderful, trying their hardest in the

most difficult space. So for me personally, I would not be looking negatively at the situation or in that light, sorry. I understand what you are saying, Janet, in how you fund it. We should have 150 boys eventually in the year in the high school—Broome high is the one example you are using at the minute; we will stick with it—and then the teachers can all teach. It is like you have got a computer and it does not work without this bit of software. That is just as simple as it is—Kevin Rudd was the one who described it that way—because the parents are not in a position to get their children to go to school; it is not the teachers. What happens is because they do not turn up enough and they actually are so poorly behaved when they turn up that it is a nightmare to teach, you have teacher churn. Then what you do, the next stage, is you start finding that you will only get foreign teachers, which actually exacerbates the behavioural issue, to go and fill these roles. That is what is happening.

The CHAIRMAN: Coming back to the funding because we have to look at finances, if you are saying then that it is not a case of saying, “You’re unsuccessful here, put the money here”, you are saying it needs to be both. Therefore, if it was both across the system, would it still—I mean, you are saying approximately 6 000 in the metropolitan area, but that is with 12 per cent. What would it be if the government gave a commitment to roll it out throughout the metropolitan area? Would it still be the 6 000 or —

Mr Neesham: It is \$7 000 per unit cost—\$6 900. In that unit cost we mentor the boy from when he is 10 or 11 or whatever he is all the way through to about 20 because we place them into employment. You may have noticed with your own children that when they leave school, they do not actually leave our home. I wish they would eventually, but they do not. We support them and guide them still from 17, 18, 19, 20 because that is what parents do. Well, if your parents are not taking you to school at 11 or cannot get you to go or have no relationship with you, what chance have they got? How can you conceivably think that they are actually going to go and do the employment? So we take that long role for life. The only thing we are not is religious, if you know what I mean; we are everything similar to that sort of area and our blokes work incredibly passionately and with these boys forever. So we have 25-year-olds come back to us and say, “I want to change jobs” because we are the only thing safe they know.

What I feel the government has to understand is that this behaviour that we are all concerned about—we see on the trains—we have to get below that game and grow that out. The only place you can do it is in the education system, so you want to fix up justice, it is in the schools. You want to fix up health, it is in the school. You want to keep going on and on, everything is fixed up in this space. How that makes it unusual for Sharyn O’Neill is that her job is to do education, not to do all the other jobs but she does not own the other budgets. So that is the conundrum—how do you fit these two? We have been trying to explain to everyone that this is the last fish trap that you can catch them. My experience is it is impossible to take the welfare and income off parents. The reason I tell you that is because some of these boys are already totally independent at six—adults. I will not tell you where, but I was asked by a group of senior Aboriginal people—because I think this meeting is so serious, I hope it is—to build a hostel for them. When we eventually got down to the tintacks to put their boys in—24—I said, “Do you want it here or there or Perth or somewhere we can fly them back in every now and then?” “No, just one kilometre away from our community.” The ages of the 24 boys were between six and 10. They were independent, roaming the streets and they were breaking in because they were very hungry. Of course, they broke into the shops and the outcome of that was that the shop was going to leave and then everyone was going to lose, so it was a real extreme scenario. So when you look at parents, the mums in particular, and go, “How come you’re not sending your kids to school?”, they most often do try and send them but these boys just wander. So that is not going to actually work, is what I am trying to say, in a long-term way. We have a system that attracts them; they actually start coming to school. If they hear the program is starting next term, they will come a term earlier. We have seen that, so they want to belong and they belong to this particular thing because we have got so much covered and they understand.

If we were given the support, we could go and do another eight or nine schools in the metropolitan area; it would actually go very close to 60 or 70 per cent of the boys. That is the truth of it. We are working currently with the education department—they are terrific people, we have had a great relationship with the bureaucrats et cetera—but the will has to come from the top and then understanding that if you want to change in particular our space, you can only be changing one space but it is a whole-of-government ownership; it is not an education department. They administer it.

Mr P. ABETZ: How many schools are there in the Perth metropolitan region where you would think the most at-risk kids are that would benefit most? If there was government funding to provide your program in all those schools, would you have access to enough mentors and so on to make it happen or not?

Mr Neesham: Yes. It is a terrific question, Peter. There is no shortage of really good men who want to work, and in particular in the metropolitan area it is much easier of course to do anything. The men that work for us really are the ones who make it work. We have had that many comments on the quality of the people that work and go back into schools and work with the most at-risk, it is big, it is swimming against the tide. There is probably between six and eight schools for sure that you could do it right now with. Some it is a bit tricky because they have got programs and people own those programs and they feel passionate about them, but quite often they are standalone programs.

The CHAIRMAN: Would you be happy to name those schools?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: And the programs?

Mr Neesham: No, because I do not know enough about them to be critical of them or to even say they are great, so I would prefer to really steer away from that, but there are schools that have programs. The only thing I see as the most vital thing is that no matter what schools there are, everyone must have attendance data. That would take 10 minutes to read through and you would find what is working and what is not working, because that is how long it would take.

Ms Syme: Janet, you asked before about what precludes us from expanding and extending the reach of our foundation. Yes, part of it is financial but part of it also—Gerard alluded to this—is we do not want to go into a space and put our staff into space where they are not welcome. So we work really hard with the existing Aboriginal communities and other communities and also with the school and the relevant education department regional directors. Our approach is very much to engage with those people and let them help us identify where there is a problem and where we might be able to help and we are having those discussions with the relevant directors in the metropolitan area. That is probably why we prefer not to name certain schools at the moment.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Gerard, could you tell me about the program you run with girls and women? Just to preface your response, I absolutely applaud and support you working with young men, because I know that that model works in Africa and other places that have tackled a similar kind of disadvantage. Particularly in the HIV area they were running programs which targeted young girls, it did not work, so they actually realised they had to target young men about their sexual behaviour in order to do that. I am sorry, that is a little bit off the mark, but the issue is of young girls and women.

Mr Neesham: We do not run programs for girls. We have concentrated on the boys. We had two Aboriginal ladies on our board at the beginning. We were going to do cricket, girls' basketball—you know, if you looked at our first strategic plan, it had all those things in it—and we were going to just stay at one school, Clontarf Aboriginal College. We then realised after a period of time that we know what we are doing and let us get out there and do what we have done, so we changed tack. There is a need for girls' programs. We do not know what you would use as the vehicle to change the behaviour. We have seen plenty of programs come and go around us because there is a bit of a vacuum. The boys drive the cycle of disadvantage, the girls do not; they are the

ones left there holding the can. The two Aboriginal ladies that were on our board insisted that we fix the men up and stay to that.

Ms L.L. BAKER: I quite agree.

Mr Neesham: So that is really the space for us. As I said, we have been asked to do all sorts of things over the course of that time. We have just stuck to this is what we do know, it is very special for the Aboriginal boys, this program, they get men, they earn the right to have a lot of fantastic experiences and so, yes, that is just us. We mine iron ore—that is it.

Ms Syme: We do not do gold and silver. Having said that, though, we have got anecdotal evidence to suggest that by having positive impacts on the behaviours and attitudes and decision-making abilities of our boys, it has flow-on effects to their broader families, and also there seems to be a trend that where there are more boys that come to school, there are also more girls that come to school.

Mr Neesham: Yes, so there are impacts, for sure. Our first boys are having their own children and they are educated, so if that trend keeps going, which we expect it to, then that is where the break will eventually come because our boys value education. What has happened with the Indigenous people that I have witnessed, as I said, this is not across-the-board every person, but it seems to be they have misunderstood or not grasped the absolute importance of education. Galarrwuy Yunupingu wrote a fantastic article on Saturday in *The Weekend Australian*, which was so lucid in what he said, and basically everything is about education. Nelson Mandela said it, everyone has said it. Now, somewhere along the line, a portion of our Aboriginal people seemed to not realise how important it is and so they go away on camps or they do not take their kids to school and suddenly it is missed.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Can I just complete that? There is a gap then in the training for young girls and women; I am not saying you should fill it, but I am saying there is a gap.

Mr Neesham: There are programs around. We do not know how successful they are. Some of them have come and gone. We have seen plenty of them across the whole space, but there is a gap, yes, Lisa.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Thank you.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Thank you, Gerard, for your presentation today and thank you, Stephanie, as well. Esperance Senior High School—Esperance is a hometown of mine—you have a presence there and the Clontarf Foundation has a presence there with Glen Symonds and he has great staff running a program there. It is having some good results. You did talk about your retention rates, but have you got any data, Gerard, basically—this is probably what government looks for when it sort of apportions funding—conducted long-term, follows up students, how they fare after leaving your program? Is there any way of trying to put a little bit of data in and around that? Yes, we can show that the attendance rates are good or much, much better—they were terrible before—what about the long-term stuff? You did touch on it a little bit before.

[11.30 am]

The CHAIRMAN: That might be apprenticeships, TAFE courses or going to university.

Mr Neesham: To the best of our ability, we track our boys. First of all, we put them into an apprenticeship and we support them in there. So, when they are not turning up to work, they can ring us, because sometimes it is very hard to ring an Aboriginal. Some of my friends change phones pretty quick; and these boys, in particular, are forever changing their phone numbers. It is just a normal part of what you have to do. We support them. We work as hard as we can to get them through that area. In 2002, we had 22 boys in year 12 at our first academy at Clontarf. They were our first real school leavers, because they had done three years with us, which was the length of that school course out there. Nineteen of them are in a job today and have completed apprenticeships,

and eight or nine of them own a house. We have the statistics just on that cohort of those boys. We exited three boys out of year 12 in 2000. We exited about 225 out of year 12 this year; and they are five-year mentors. And we will exit close to 500 in about three or four years' time out of year 12 every year; they are demonstrably different. Our experience is our boys stay in work. As I said, we do capture it to the best of our ability. But we work with them for two or three years afterwards and they are all in a job. We place 80 per cent in a job or further training within six months of them leaving year 12. We do have plenty of evidence. As I said, everything we do is measurable, because our chairman is an engineer, and that has been the most critical thing we have done. We do not operate in a space that you cannot see such as just saying, "We really think we change the kids' lives" or "They all appear happier". We know whether they get suspended or not, and that will show whether they are happier. We know whether they fight in football matches, which is a space where they can show their anger. We had over 1 000 games of football last year with not one fight.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: That is a good benefit.

Mr Neesham: The culture of the foundation is they play sports like the Brazilians do.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The WAFL cannot boast that.

Mr Neesham: No, and the WAFL probably plays about 300 games. It plays eight games a week for 20 weeks—whatever that is.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I was thinking about the fighting.

Mr Neesham: Yes. I am saying that was a very conscious thing for me at the beginning, because that was the first place to see if they could really maintain their anger in that space; then they are a long way to removing or dissipating their anger, because that is where you are allowed to have a bit of violence.

Ms Syme: That is why it is not just about football; it is about the development of personal skills, teamwork, playing together and turning up every time, and every now and then it is their turn to run the oranges. A lot of the time our guys will play for their own academy. Then, if one academy is belting the other, they will mix it up for the second half.

Mr Neesham: Yes, that is quite interesting.

Ms Syme: Do not get me wrong; they like competing!

Mr Neesham: And they are pretty good. Assumption College is the best school in Australia in football, and boys from our first academy went over there in about 2004. When they came back, we asked them how they went. They said, "First of all, Gerard, can you explain why would a team sing its team song at three-quarter time?" I said I had never heard of that. I asked what was the score, and they said, "We were 83 points up." I said that maybe they were hoping it was the end of the game! They won by 97 points, so there is a lot of talent. The talent already exists, but the boys are not functional enough to use that talent—be that in a job, football, music or anything; it is the total lack of functionality which is the issue, and of course the low self-esteem, the total lack of emotional intelligence and maturity that are not nonexistent. Those sorts of things are what are causing what we see in the paper, where there is an issue down in Armadale or whatever. That has come from somewhere. That boy has to be produced to be like that, and it is our responsibility as a society to change that.

The CHAIRMAN: Gerard, can I take you back again, because I would like to think, if we can get support, how we get the finances. You have talked about the success rate in different areas and children staying on at school. Does that go in your annual report, or where do you document those statistics?

Ms Syme: Yes, we produce an annual report every year. Also, several times a year we submit information to the relevant state government departments, federal government departments and our

key partners get that information. Gerard, Ross and other senior people present regularly to different forums. That information is recorded in all sorts of forms.

The CHAIRMAN: Could we have a copy of those reports?

Mr Neesham: Yes. We have a copy of a certain number of things here that you can read. I think we are the only not-for-profit organisation in Australia that has ever had a Harvard case study done on us. About four or five years ago, they did a case study and they are wanting to do a follow-up to see where we are at the minute. We have had the ruler run over us by all and sundry, as you can well imagine. Our own state auditors have done that, so it is not like we have not been measured. We are totally happy to give you anything that we have got. That is how we operate really. We are out at Burswood and we are really happy for anyone to visit, too. It is quite good to come out and have a look at the head office and see who works in there. We have got a very, very good profit-model business.

Ms Syme: What Gerard means by that — and it frightens me every time he says it! —

Mr Neesham: John Gillam, the head of Bunnings, stood me up badly when I said we are not-for-profit. He said, “You’re not a not-for-profit; your profit is in these kids staying at school. Your profit is in et cetera.” What I mean by that is that Steph has an extremely large, expansive and professional background in the financial sector through mining and all sorts of stuff; she is the chief financial officer. We have a great ex-principal who is chief operations officer. We have a wonderful person with experience at Iluka and other mining companies and other not-for-profits who run our partnerships. We captured our intellectual property seven years ago. We have put it in modules. We train our people before they go into the schools. We guarantee the same outcomes, if not better, by training and having people work with them when they start new academies to make sure that any of the little bumps get sorted out. We are a franchise model. I was going to say before that part of the reason is that you could not keep really good men doing the same thing all the time; they have to be able to aspire and to move up—like anything, whether it is government or education system. Because we have such a broad range of academies our men can aspire. The bloke who used to run Yule Brook now runs five academies out in Alice Springs. He can aspire to become a regional manager, a zone manager or whatever; and that keeps the whole thing fresh, from a business point of view.

Mr P. ABETZ: Do you work exclusively with Aboriginal boys?

Mr Neesham: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: I might ask you in a minute to sum up any issues that maybe we have not covered. It has been really interesting. I certainly was not aware of the enormous scope that you cover, and I can appreciate that it should not just be funded from the Department of Education, because it is not a K–12 or 7–12 program, or whatever it is, that you are running; you are running a much broader program. We will be very interested to look at your reports, because that is the message that needs to get out there in terms of what you have to offer.

Would you like to sum up in the couple of minutes left before I close the meeting, just to alert us to anything that maybe you wanted to cover that you have not, or if there are any other areas that you think we should look into in relation to this?

Mr Neesham: I will sum up a few things that are in my head and Steph can add whatever I miss or whatever she feels is important to make a note of. One of the things we have done deliberately is we have flown under the radar. That has been very deliberate for 13 years—as well as we could. Obviously, we had to step up to the mark for the Queen, and we did good as we could for our state in that area. That has been a deliberate approach, because it has been a very volatile space; so staying out of the public eye as much as we could has been important. We have great partnerships with governments and the private sector. We are endeavouring to convince the private sector that it is better for them to invest in the capacity at the bottom, than to try to retrain somebody who is

untrainable at 18, which is where a lot of the money is going. We are endeavouring to change a very big private sector, which could easily fund this program fully if it put its effort to it. If our own state government was really fully committed, we could quickly get to 60 per cent penetration in our state and make a serious difference to the future of a lot of people. That is not in our corner; that is in the corner of the state government. There are other things that are needed along the lines of which we are working with the government at the moment anyway; for example, we have to have specific classrooms, facilities that go with it, academy rooms and teachers who have to be able to teach this style of kid. There are houses, because of course we cannot go and stick 10 staff in the Pilbara; that is going to cost us an enormous amount of money—it is \$1 million straightaway. We are here for 30, 40 and maybe 50 years. That will be the length, our duration, that we feel we will need to have our program. For us to be there that long, we have to be probably seen as something a bit different than we are being seen. We seem to be a systemic program that is in the bottom, and just like education probably needs the same sort of support. So we need to be able to access housing at a reasonable rate; we need to be able to get long-term budgetary support. It is those sorts of things. This program was started in Western Australia. It is nearly a national program now. It is seen as best practice in the area, which we are very proud of. As Western Australians we are very proud of this, but as Western Australians we are frustrated that we have not finished Western Australia before we finished Victoria—I used to play footy against them and I did not take kindly to them. I would like to think that we could get to the spaces, particularly our own metropolitan area, sooner rather than later.

Ms Syme: I have a couple of things to add. One was about the nature of our program—as an example, our boys and our staff, and how important they are, and how intensive the program is. In many locations our staff will start out when it is still dark in the morning; they will actually pick the boys up from outside wherever they may be staying that night, which is what Gerard alluded to. We probably take our kids to school, and in these communities it does not always happen. That happens from very early in the morning. They will bring them to school. There may be a footy training session, after which there is breakfast; someone will be in charge of chucking the training singlets in the wash and then they are there and they are ready to go to school. After school, there are other activities, often. We have 140-odd staff across the country who are living, breathing and very much a part of these communities. They are there every day. They have holidays in the school holidays, but apart from that they are there Monday to Friday, day in, day out.

Mr Neesham: They live in Halls Creek.

Ms Syme: They are part of the community. They provide some consistency for our boys, and really strong positive male role models. The other thing I suppose I wanted to touch on was about our partnerships with the private sector. They are important for a number of reasons; one is obviously funding, but there is so much more to it than that. It is very much a holistic approach in terms of giving exposures to our boys about different work environments, which most of them have not had before—so going to an office or workshop and just that kind of exposure. It is also about a two-way street. It also gives our partners and the staff of our partners the opportunity to have a positive experience with a teenage Aboriginal boy, which might be the first one they have ever had.

Mr Neesham: Sorry, Steph, can I say, which is the last thing for me, that we have the trust of the Aboriginal people. That is right across the board. That is because we do not go into a community unless they ask us to go in. I go and meet with all of them. They trust us to work with their boys. Of course, like any program, you are going to have a few people—non-Indigenous and Indigenous—who feel a bit uncomfortable about it, but to the vast majority of Aboriginal people that we work with, we are one of the groups that they know will stay. We are there every day; we know their children, their grandchildren, the parents and the old people because we live in it, and we will live in it for 40 years. That is something that we have not been able to do—or we probably did back in a lot of the early interactions, in particular, the missions, where they knew there was safety, a group.

Ms Syme: My final point was just about funding, which Gerard alluded to as well. We plan several years, quite a number of years, in advance. It is a 30 to 50-year life cycle. It is really difficult for us to plan on a two-year or a three-year contract, so any assistance with that kind of thing would be greatly appreciated.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Yes; it has been tried.

Mr Neesham: Every year you do not do it, there is a group of kids who go into the ether. And they come back at some stage; that is what we are seeing.

Ms Syme: But thank you for the opportunity.

Mr Neesham: Thanks very much for the opportunity.

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank 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 10 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 by these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered; however, when you read through the transcript, should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points that you have raised today, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence.

Thank you very much, we will accept that as supplementary information. Thank you once again.

Hearing concluded at 11.46 am
