

# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

**2021–22 BUDGET ESTIMATES**



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
MONDAY, 18 OCTOBER 2021**

**SESSION ONE  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES —  
CHILD PROTECTION; COMMUNITY SERVICES**

## **Members**

**Hon Peter Collier (Chair)  
Hon Samantha Rowe (Deputy Chair)  
Hon Jackie Jarvis  
Hon Nick Goiran  
Hon Dr Brad Pettitt**

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**Hearing commenced at 2.00 pm**

**Ms SAMANTHA ROWE**

**Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Child Protection; Community Services, examined:**

**Mr MICHAEL ROWE**

**Director General, examined:**

**Ms RACHAEL GREEN**

**Deputy Director General, Community Services, examined:**

**Mr MATTHEW RICHARDSON**

**Director, Management Accounting and Financial Analysis, examined:**

**Mr PHIL PAYNE**

**Executive Director, Regulation and Quality, examined:**

**Mr MICHAEL CREVOLA**

**Chief Finance Officer, examined:**

**Mr MARK BURGESS**

**Caretaker, Specialist Child Protection Unit, examined:**

**Mr GLENN MACE**

**Executive Director, Service Delivery, Community Services, examined:**

**Ms CARON IRWIN**

**Assistant Director General, Strategy and Partnerships, examined:**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to today's hearings. The Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations acknowledges and honours the traditional owners of the ancestral lands upon which we meet today, the Whadjuk Noongar people, and pays its respects to their elders, both past and present. Can the witnesses confirm whether they have read, understood and signed a document titled, "Information for Witnesses"?

**The WITNESSES:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Let it be known that it was a collective yes.

Your testimony before the committee must be complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The committee will place the uncorrected transcript of your evidence on the internet a few days after the hearing. When the transcript is finalised, the uncorrected version will be replaced by the finalised version. This is a public hearing, but the committee can elect to hear evidence in private. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question.

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Members to my left—that is, members of the Legislative Council—before asking your question, I ask that you provide the relevant page and paragraph numbers, or whether it is in a generic sense, from the budget papers. We have two hours for this hearing, so can I just ask members if you could keep your questions succinct and that way we will give as many members as much time as we possibly can.

Having said that, parliamentary secretary, do you have an opening statement or do you just want to go straight into it?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** No.

**The CHAIR:** Fine. Good. The members of the committee get first dibs. Is there anyone on the committee who would like to ask a question first?

**Hon JACKIE JARVIS:** Parliamentary secretary, I am interested in the funding for access to regional child care, so page 516 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. I notice there is a statement there about providing \$4.8 million towards retaining childcare workers in the regions and establishing a sustainable model to support regional child care. Obviously, child care would normally be under the remit of the commonwealth government, so I am just interested to understand what the \$4.8 million provides for and how it fits in with the usual commonwealth funding of childcare services.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Thanks, member. Obviously, the value of early childhood education and the care sector is incredibly important to our community. They provide vital services and they lay the foundations for children's lifelong development. The Department of Communities approves and monitors education and care services through the education and care regulatory unit. That assesses applications for provider approvals and service approvals, it assesses education and care services against the national quality standard, and it supports and promotes continuous quality improvements in education and care services. It also investigates incidents and complaints, and monitors and enforces compliance. It also seeks to protect children from harm, stop unlawful conduct, ensure compliance with the law and raise awareness of legislative requirements by publishing enforcement actions and also using other compliance tools. Our government has spent \$5.1 million on an election commitment, which underscores the initiatives that are designed to improve access to early childhood education into the regions, to make it more accessible, but also more affordable. There will be \$4.1 million to support the viability of regional early education by working with regional providers to either deliver advice, support resources to services or a clustering model, which will provide overarching governance structure, providing that backbone support, and allowing the service to focus on the day-to-day operations of the centre. There is also \$1 million towards retaining childcare workers in regional WA through the establishment of a capped grant fund. It is \$250 000 per annum to local government authorities in regional areas to fund, attract and retain people to the area. This commitment is going to help improve access to child care in regions, such as the Pilbara, the goldfields—Esperance and the Kimberley area, which have significant waiting lists and also challenges attracting staff and retaining staff. I think that covers off your question.

**Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT:** My question refers also to budget paper No 2, volume 2, and paragraph 6.2, which is also on page 516. It is in relation to the \$18 million for the delivery of the Boorloo Bidee Mia facility. My question is: how many beds are currently operational at this facility, and when that \$18 million delivery is complete, how many will be available on site?

[2.10 pm]

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Thanks, member, for your question in relation to Boorloo Bidee Mia. As you would be aware, it is one of the first low-barrier homelessness services of its kind. It is really

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important to make the distinction that it is offering medium-term accommodation as opposed to crisis care accommodation. It is looking after some of the most complex individuals. Many have experienced many traumas, abuse, addiction and/or mental illness, so there are quite a lot of complexities around the people who are looking to use this facility. The referral process differs from, say, a walk-in or drop-in shelter model. It seeks to provide that longer term accommodation together with the individualised supports and wraparound services that these individuals actually need to be able to transition into permanent and long-term independent living. To ensure that that happens and that the facility is managed appropriately, referrals are processed through community service groups engaged in the homelessness integrated action group. That referral model assists in ensuring that the right mix of people are carefully selected.

While currently operational and servicing clients, Boorloo Bidee Mia is still undergoing final building works to enable development of the full service capacity. The number of residents will increase as the service matures over time. It is really important to understand that the occupation of the service is scaled up through a gradual process. It has to be done with a view to maintaining appropriate safety, not just for the residents but also for the staff. The Wungening Aboriginal Corporation and the Noongar Mia were jointly awarded a \$6.7 million grant to be able to implement this service delivery so that it is culturally sensitive and an informed response. The grant will be utilised to cover the operational and staffing expenses in addition to the therapeutic service model, which is aimed at addressing those associated addiction and mental health concerns that can lead to chronic homelessness. The safety and wellbeing of staff and residents will always remain a priority, but this facility is specifically designed as a low-barrier homelessness service, meaning that residents will at times display very challenging behaviours, like I said, linked to trauma, mental health, drug and alcohol addiction. The staff who are there are trained to understand and work safely with those behavioural challenges, including whatever proactive approaches that might need to be used in terms of crisis intervention, preventing escalation, or de-escalation where possible. What I can tell you, member, is that within the first weeks of operation, Boorloo Bidee Mia already transitioned two clients into longer term housing accommodation. But it takes time, because we are dealing with very complex individuals with very complex needs.

**Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT:** Could I ask a follow-up; is that possible?

**The CHAIR:** Absolutely; go for it. I forgot to mention at the start that the format will be a little different this year. If any other members feel that they want to follow on from a line of questioning, they can do so, but we really need to keep the questions quite succinct.

**Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT:** Thank you. That was very helpful. I guess the nub of my question is a bit around that I appreciate that a facility like this needs to be managed carefully for it to be successful. If it ends up that it is not appropriate on the site where Boorloo Bidee Mia is trying to provide these 100 beds, is there an option within the budget to have the 100 provided for at other sites so that that 100-bed commitment is ultimately maintained within the budget, if it cannot be done on site?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Member, this facility—Boorloo Bidee Mia—is a transitional accommodation site, so we do not envisage that we will need to move the beds, but it will take time to mature and develop to see it at full capacity.

**The CHAIR:** If you would like the director general to respond as well, you are more than welcome.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Thank you, chair.

Member, what might also be helpful is that the government has announced \$35 million as a commitment to building the two Common Ground facilities, which you may be aware of. That is a model of permanent, supportive housing for people who have been chronically homeless or

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sleeping rough and also for people who are on low incomes. The building is purpose built. Its key features also have those wraparound services that are tailored to help people with those complex needs. I think it has 160 apartments for people in need.

**Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT:** My next set of questions was going to be around Common Ground, but you have kind of probably got to where I was. Where I am going is, there is a little bit of concern. They are really good projects that I fully support, but my concern is that the budgets around them are not sufficient to meet the expectations of those. Certainly, the budget commitment for both Common Ground—according to paragraph 6.1 on page 516, it talks around the fact it has been increased to \$73.5 million. My reading of that is that it is still very ambitious in terms of being able to deliver those kinds of facilities with those kinds of services for that kind of money. I guess the question relates to Boorloo Bidee Mia and actually delivering what is promised within those budgets. Probably part of the question is: for future budget years, are there plans for top-ups for those, or if you cannot meet the expectation that there be 100 beds or those projects being delivered, or is there money coming from elsewhere? I just have concerns around deliverability.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Thanks, member, for your question. There is definitely sufficient money in the budget to be able to fund these projects. I think it is important also to recognise that we are spending unprecedented amounts of money in the space of homelessness and in housing. Over the next four years, it is a total of \$2.5 billion towards social housing and homelessness. We have created a 10-year strategy on homelessness and that has been supported by the sector and different stakeholders and it is evidence based. But, obviously, that takes time. It is a 10-year plan and we are dealing with some of the most vulnerable people in our community, as you would appreciate and understand, with very complex needs. We are certainly spending record amounts of money to make sure that we can sufficiently assist people in need. Crisis care is one piece of the puzzle, if you like, but we need to make sure that we are servicing these individuals so that they can actually go on and transition into independent living.

I might, chair, defer to the director general to add a few comments.

**Mr ROWE:** Thank you very much. We are confident that there is sufficient money in the budget for both the Boorloo Bidee Mia facility and for the Common Ground facilities that are yet to be constructed. In relation to that, obviously, we are going through the detail now in terms of the project definition and matters like that, but we are confident there is sufficient money in the budget for both those initiatives to be successful.

**The CHAIR:** Hon Steve Martin, do you have a follow-up question?

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** I do, but I am unsure of the process. This is my first appearance at estimates.

**The CHAIR:** You can ask this question—just a quick one.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** It is on this particular line item, if I can, and I guess we will get the same response that Hon Dr Brad Pettitt got. I appreciate the parliamentary secretary's response, but how many are there today? I appreciate that might change tomorrow and the day after, but do we actually have a number at the facility today?

[2.20 pm]

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Member, what page and line item are you on?

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** It is the same line item on page 516, paragraph 6.2 of budget paper No 2. How many are at the Boorloo Bidee Mia facility today, or at the most recent date that a number can be ascertained?

**The CHAIR:** A point in time, I guess. You can take that on notice if you like.

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**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Member, we do not have that information with us. I am sure that you can appreciate that every day it might be a different scenario of who is coming in and out, so I do not have that.

**The CHAIR:** We will take that on notice. It is a point in time, and we will make it as of today's date if the member is happy with that. Is the honourable member happy with that?

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** Delighted.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

*[Supplementary Information No A1.]*

**The CHAIR:** Can I just assume, before I move on to Hon Nick Goiran, that all members are intending to ask questions today? I am just looking at the time allocation. Yes. Is Hon Nick Goiran acting in his shadow capacity?

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** You have the call.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Parliamentary secretary, my questions relate to some of the answers that were provided by the minister prior to today's hearing, the first of which relates to children in the care of the CEO whose whereabouts are unknown. The answer that was provided prior to today's hearing indicated that in the last financial year, there were 82 children in the care of the CEO whose whereabouts were unknown at any particular time during that financial year. Have these children been found?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Thanks, member, for the question. Obviously, you are aware that children come into care for a whole range of complex reasons. The department continues to monitor children in that situation very closely, at times working with police to secure their safety. While a child's location is unknown or the young person is unwilling to disclose their location, they actually may still be in contact with their caseworker or other safety networks that keep contact with them, such as through social media or through attendance at school. Their safety and wellbeing is monitored by their caseworker and they are able to access those same supports as other children in care. What I might do is ask Glenn to expand on that.

**Mr MACE:** What I can say is that as at 30 September, there were 12 children who were recorded as their placement being unknown. This is an increase since August 2021 when there were 11 children who were recorded as unknown. Communities case managers are, in fact, in regular contact with 10 of those children. At this point in time, there are just two children who we have not been able to make contact with.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Parliamentary secretary, my question related to the 82 children in care whose whereabouts were identified by the minister as unknown in the last financial year. My question was: have they been found?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Mr Mace.

**Mr MACE:** Of the 80 children that are referred to —

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Eighty-two.

**Mr MACE:** Of the 82, there are two children we have not been able to contact.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** So, the two whose whereabouts are currently unknown and who are not in contact with their caseworker, two of the 82 from the last financial year; is that right?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** We would need to check the specifics on that.

*[Supplementary Information No A2.]*

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**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Parliamentary secretary, can I suggest to you that it is not possible that both of the two that are missing at the moment are part of the cohort of 82 referred to previously, because in a question that you answered to me recently, you indicated that, as at 31 August this year, there were two children whose whereabouts or living arrangements had been recorded as unknown. Those two were also not in regular contact with their caseworker. The date that was provided in terms of the point in time was 31 August. One of those children's whereabouts was unknown for 40 days, so plainly that child was lost in the current financial year, not in the last financial year. If that information can be taken on notice. It troubles me greatly that this information is not known to the witnesses today. This was a matter that was taken on notice. This is children in the care of the CEO of the state, and it concerns me that their whereabouts are not known as at this point in time. I would have expected that the witnesses would know that information as at today. That said, parliamentary secretary—I assume this will also need to be taken on notice, unless you correct me otherwise—the other child had been missing for 84 days as at 31 August. Are these the two children that are currently said to still be missing?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, we would need to check.  
[*Supplementary Information No A3.*]

**The CHAIR:** Is this still the same line of questioning?

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Yes. In response to that same answer to questions prior to the hearing, parliamentary secretary, apparently the child that had been missing for the longest period of time had been missing for 322 days. This is in response to question 1(e) prior to the hearing. What is not apparent from the answer that has been provided is when that point of time began. The 322 days might have been continuing to accumulate as at 30 June, and then subsequently the child was found, or the 322 days were entirely during that financial year. Is that information readily available today?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, we do not have that detail with us today.

**The CHAIR:** Will you be able to provide that detail?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Yes.  
[*Supplementary Information No A4.*]

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Further to this, parliamentary secretary, in response to 1(d), the minister indicated that the information is not recorded centrally—that is, in regard to whether children remained in regular contact with their caseworker. I had asked about the 82 children that were missing. There was an indication just moments ago that all are in regular contact. At the moment, the number is 12, as at 30 September, as indicated by the witness. Ten of the 12 are in regular contact with their caseworker, but two are not. My question is: how was that information able to be provided, but the answer provided prior to the hearing indicates that this information is not available and that gathering this data would require significant resources?

[2.30 pm]

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, are you asking about the specific child? Can you just elaborate a bit more on your question?

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** The question was: how many of the children remained in regular contact with their caseworker? This was a follow-on question to the 82. There were 82 whose whereabouts were unknown; I want to know, of those 82, how many are in regular contact with their caseworker? The point you alluded to earlier was that children sometimes vote with their feet. That is understood; in child protection, that has always been the case. But the important thing is that the CEO, who has responsibility for these more than 5 000 children in care, knows where they are or that one of his employees is in regular contact. Apparently, that information is not recorded centrally and would

require a lot of time and resources, so no information was provided. Yet moments ago we found out that there were two of them, so the information is available, it would appear.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I think the answer is that if you are asking about an individual case file, then we can go back and get that for you, but the department has to go through each case file to get that information, so it is quite a task.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** So that would be the 82 files?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** But you are only asking about one—is that right?

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** No, I am asking about the 82 children that were lost by the department of child protection, the Department of Communities, at some point during the last financial year, some of whom I accept were in regular contact with their caseworker. I am trying to identify how many of the 82 were in regular contact, which whilst undesirable, is acceptable and understandable, in contrast with the number who are simply lost, including the two who are missing at the moment.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, it might be better if we just take that on notice for you.

*[Supplementary Information No A5.]*

**The CHAIR:** We will move on from there. Hon Jackie Jarvis has a follow-up question.

**Hon JACKIE JARVIS:** When we are talking about children in the care of the CEO, I assume we are talking about anyone under the age of 18—is that correct?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Yes.

**Hon JACKIE JARVIS:** Maybe as part of the question on notice, if we could perhaps have the age of the young people. If we are getting a question on notice about the number in care, I think it would be good to have a breakdown by age or age grouping, if possible. I am just trying to ascertain if these are older teenagers who are perhaps couch surfing with friends, or if these are young children.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Maybe if we modify Hon Nick Goiran's question to include the ages. Is that appropriate?

**The CHAIR:** We will include it in A5; it will include the age as well.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** I would just like to clarify the question. As at 31 August, the age range for the ones missing was 13 to 17. In response to the question from the member, are we getting the age range for the 82 for the last financial year, or are we getting the current cohort, or both?

**Hon JACKIE JARVIS:** Member, are you saying that the question you asked originally was about the 82?

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** It was about the 82; yes.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** It is for the 82.

**The CHAIR:** To clarify, it is for the 82. We might come back to that.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I refer to budget paper No 2, volume 2, page 514, and I have a couple of questions in and around "Election Commitments". Parliamentary secretary, you kindly provided me with a response with regard to small commitments in the questions prior to hearings. You provided a breakdown of the organisations that have received funding, but I am wondering if you can take this on notice: I would like to know what funding is being provided for each of those organisations? I appreciate you probably will not be able to provide that now, but if I could have that on notice, that would be helpful.

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**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I am advised that we provided that answer during the lower house estimates, so, yes, we can take that on notice and get it.

[*Supplementary Information No A6.*]

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** The next question relates to “Empowering Communities (Neighbourhood Centres)”, again under “Election Commitments”. Can I get some clarity in relation to the \$4.2 million that is attached to this particular program? I am just really wanting some clarity here. It is my understanding that this particularly relates to a small number of neighbourhood centres that had been unsuccessful in the tender process but are now being transitioned into the empowering communities program; is that correct?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** The election commitment was made to provide funding to 30 June 2025 for the remaining nine service providers under the community and neighbourhood development services program to transition to the empowering communities program, so, yes.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** You said nine service providers?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Yes.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I think that is right, and one of them has three other centres within it, so that would make 12, because I understood that there were 12. Thank you for that.

With regard to that, is there a time frame for those nine service providers to transition across? I note that funding is not allocated in 2021–22, but I have in my memory that funding was provided in the midyear review, which might be the reason why there is no funding attached to 2021–22. If you can clarify that, and also the time frame the department expects that the remaining service providers will transition across? I suppose that is two questions in one.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, I am advised that there is funding. If you look at page 514, under “Ongoing Initiatives”, “Community Neighbourhood and Development Services”, you can see that there is an amount for 2021–22.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** That is the funding that I thought, so that is the midyear review. That equates to why it is not there. Thank you for clarifying that.

Does the department have a time frame for when the remaining service providers will transition across; is it expected from sometime this year or next year?

[2.40 pm]

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Member, the expectation is that the transition will occur by 30 June 2022.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Thank you. Further to that, the funding that is in the forward estimates under the election commitment—at this stage you might not be able to because they have not all transitioned yet, but are you able to provide a breakdown of funding allocated to each of those service providers that they are anticipated to receive?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** We do not have that with us, but once that is done, we can provide it.

[*Supplementary Information No A7.*]

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Can I have another?

**The CHAIR:** You are fine.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I am just not quite sure how much I am allocated.

**The CHAIR:** Until I say stop!

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Until you say so. Okay; fair enough. We will keep going then.

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**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** It is up to the chair.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I go to page 518. I will say that it is a bit unclear as to where I can put this question, so I am going to put it here and I am hopeful that you will be able to answer it. It relates to “Relationship to Government Goals” and —

Access to quality services that enables active participation in the Western Australian community by individuals and families.

It is here that I am seeking some clarification with regard to the Early Years Initiative. I ask it here in the context of it is not specifically related to child care, but it is, as I understand, an initiative that is part-funded by the department along with Minderoo and Telethon Kids Institute. My understanding is that the Minister for Community Services released a statement back in 2018 identifying that there would be four locations or four communities that would be selected to be part of this initiative, and that the first one was in the central great southern and that the remaining communities would be announced in 2019. I have not been able to find a statement from the minister since 2018, so can you advise whether all four communities have been identified; and have they been announced by the minister?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** The Early Years Initiative will see community leaders, government, researchers, business and philanthropic organisations collaborate to improve learning health and development outcomes for children from conception to the age of four. The first Early Years Initiative partnered community is the central great southern, as you said, consisting of the Shires of Katanning, Broomehill–Tambellup, Kojonup and Gnowangerup. The second partner community is Armadale west. Negotiations with two other potential partner communities in the north of the state are currently underway and will be announced soon. The local community governance is now in place in the central great southern and Armadale west and locally based community engagement officers are being recruited.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** In regards to Armadale west, when did that one come into being if the minister did not provide an announcement with regard to that one?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, the board endorsed the initiative in March 2021.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Thank you. You have indicated that central great southern was 2018, Armadale was 2021 and two are, well, work in progress. Can I just ask why there has been such a delay, given that the minister indicated that they would be announced in 2019?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I am advised that it is quite a lot up-front work to be able to work with these communities to make sure that they want to have these in place.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** So the minister was being ambitious by suggesting 2019? I am trying to get clarity, because the minister has said 2019; you are now saying that there is a lot of work involved. I accept that, in part.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Two have been established, and there is ongoing work —

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Yes, but you said that four were going to be established by 2019.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Member, it is probably worth noting, too, that we have had COVID—the pandemic.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I know you are going to say COVID, but it was going to be announced in 2019.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** But that is something that has to be considered.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I am just trying to get some clarity here in relation to it.

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**The CHAIR:** Okay, we just need to move on from here, so can we get that clarity and then we will move on to Hon James Hayward. I will come back to you in a moment, Hon Donna Faragher.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Sure.

**The CHAIR:** Have you got anything more to respond to that?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** No.

**The CHAIR:** I will come back to you at any opportunity at the end, members.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** I refer to page 132 of BP3, the line item called “Cost and Demand Updates—Child Protection”. Can the minister or head of departments explain why there is no additional funding in 2020–21 and why the forward estimates show an additional spend of \$55 million in 2024–25, and do these cost increases include considerations for workers’ compensation payments?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Sorry, member; can you just give the page number again?

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** Certainly. Page 132 of BP3, and it is the third dot point under “Other Spending”; it is the third point after that, “Cost and Demand Updates—Child Protection”.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Member, I am sorry it has taken so long. I am advised the first part of your question, the table that you are referencing, only shows changes in spending, so there is still spending but there has been no change in spending.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** Does it not show an increase of \$55 million in the out years?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** That is considered new spending; it is not a change.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** And that is my question. So, we do not have increased spending immediately, in the first few, but we do have a fairly significant increase in spending in the out years. Why is there a requirement to increase the spending in the out years and not do it immediately or in the following financial year?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Thanks, member. I will ask Matt to elaborate on that for you.

**The CHAIR:** The director of management—is that correct?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Yes.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Thank you, chair. Thank you, member, for the question. As the parliamentary secretary explained, this table in budget paper No 3 shows only the changes in spending. That first column that you were referring to is the prior financial year. So, the way that the child protection cost and demand funding works is we may adjust the prior year within the year, if necessary, as a result of kids coming into care or increased costs. In this year, and particularly with a late budget, there was not a need through the CDM to adjust last year’s spending. What we do see across the forward estimates are changes to the prior forecast spending on cost of demand. Normally, as is often the case, those final years show the largest increase because we have not factored in any previous projections on either cost growth or demand growth in those years. Rather than some small updates to forecast, which we see in the first and subsequent years, in the final years we see the population on the prior year’s base, plus adjustment to the forecast.

[2.50 pm]

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** I have also asked some questions previously about staff who were on stress leave or had indicated stress as being part of the reason for them to be away from work. From memory, the number was around 30, and there were some details about staff who had been injured et cetera. What is the shape of the department and its child protection workers in terms of being able to meet the demand that is out there now? I am hearing back that they are under a lot of stress

and pressure. I am interested in terms of how the department is coping with that and whether there has been an escalation in staff taking workers' compensation or leave.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I will ask the DG to make a few comments.

**Mr ROWE:** Thank you very much for the question. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge that our child protection frontline workers work incredibly hard under often very stressful situations. I think they do a tremendous job. We are working very hard to try to improve the recruitment process we have in the organisation to make sure that we have sufficient workers, and we have put an active effort into that space this year. We are hopeful to see some more frontline workers on the ground. We are working very hard to make sure that our work health and safety standards are appropriate in the organisation and our staff are well looked after.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** How many staff are you currently under strength? You indicated that you had improved and hope to be able to fill more positions—get people on the ground. How many are we short now?

**Mr ROWE:** Our total child protection workforce is around 1 100 or thereabouts. The vacancies we are running at are about 100 at the moment.

**The CHAIR:** Just to follow up on that one, are you able to identify within the agency whether a worker is on actual stress leave?

**Mr ROWE:** I am pretty sure that I am correct in saying that there is not a classification that we have in the system called "stress leave", per se. Staff will take personal leave for a range of circumstances. When we think about work health and safety, however, say if people are on workers' compensation—I will double check the number there. We have six staff currently under workers' compensation arrangements that fall into that category of child protection workers. None of those claims relates to workload pressures.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** My follow-up question is about the need versus the amount of people. No doubt the 1 100 or 1 000 workers do an exceptional job. Recently, I attended Fitzroy Crossing, where there is a significant problem with young people. The feedback on the ground was that the department's workers were not available at times of crisis when needed. I am interested in that, and I might sneak in the second part of it.

I understand, not necessarily in Fitzroy Crossing, that some workers have been taking children home with them when there are no other options. Is that considered an acceptable option?

**The CHAIR:** I guess we need confirmation of that first, and then whether it is acceptable.

**Mr ROWE:** In relation to Fitzroy Crossing in particular, we have an arrangement whereby, if there are concerns about children's welfare at night, they can contact the department—this is often the police—and then we would have someone on call who would be available. However, that is in relation to child protection matters. You will appreciate that under the legislation, certain thresholds have to be met for that to be considered. Typically, the police are the frontline responders in relation to issues that can happen overnight, but we are available if we are needed and if the matter is a child protection matter.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** It has been indicated to me that some child protection workers have been having to take children home with them. Is that an acceptable practice?

**Mr ROWE:** That can happen from time to time, where, as a last resort, our workers take children home. But that is only if they are registered carers and it is absolutely a last resort; it is not something that we encourage.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A letter of clarification about this part of the transcript can be accessed on the committee webpage.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** I will return to page 516, paragraph 6.2 of budget paper No 2, regarding the facility at Boorloo Bidee Mia, if I may. I would like to ask about the referral process. I believe the residents in the Lord Street and Pioneer Park tent cities were the original target audience, if you like, for that new facility in Wellington Street. Is that the exclusive referral process at the moment?

**Mr ROWE:** In general terms, it is not exclusive to those people who were part of the Pioneer Park experience. It is available for Aboriginal people who are referred through a process that is supported by our agency and others. We work across a multi-organisation approach to determine which people might be best placed to use that facility. That is the basis for the referral exercise. My understanding is that group meets quite regularly.

[3.00 pm]

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** So there are tenants at the facility from other than Pioneer Park and Lord Street?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** We cannot confirm that, but our understanding is that referrals are taken from other places, not just Lord Street.

**The CHAIR:** Can you get that information? Is that information available or not?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I am not sure that we can.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Can we give it a go?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No A8.*]

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** I have a question regarding the planning for 300 Wellington Street. When did the department become aware of the plan to use that as the solution to those two particular tent city issues earlier in the year?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** In December–January, people from Lord Street were placed into hotels—the member may remember. In terms of the date around when 300 Wellington was available, we do not have that information on us.

**The CHAIR:** Are you able to get that information? Did you want that information, member?

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No A9.*]

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** Just one more question, parliamentary secretary, if I may, regarding the process for the leasing of 300 Wellington Street. Can the parliamentary secretary confirm whether there was an increase in the price of the lease between when the department first contacted the owners to arrange that lease and the subsequent sale of that to a new owner and then the use of that facility?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** We would have to check that information for the member.

[*Supplementary Information No A10.*]

**Hon SANDRA CARR:** Can the parliamentary secretary outline how the items listed under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 517—namely, paragraphs 10.1 and 10.2—will help maintain and expand significant improvements in child protection outcomes?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Obviously—the member may not be aware—Aboriginal children make up about 57 per cent of children in care in WA, and although child safety is always the first priority of the government and the department, we know that we can make inroads by reducing the number of Aboriginal children who are taken into care. That requires a concerted effort, which has to be done in partnership with Aboriginal people, the Aboriginal community, and organisations, and those

efforts will deliver results. WA has recorded the lowest annual rate of children coming into care in more than 20 years. It also has the lowest rate of Aboriginal children coming into care since 2004.

They are good improvements. It takes a long time, but it is still an improvement. The total number of children that are in care dropped by 154 during the 2020–21 year, from 5 498 to 5 344. Some of those can be credited to the commitment to early intervention. We have invested \$112.5 million towards early intervention in Child Protection. One of those programs that is being delivered is the Aboriginal In-Home Support Service, and that provides really practical support in the home to Aboriginal families to address issues around safety, keeping children safely in the home and, of course, re-unifying those children with their families, where possible and where safe to do so.

As at 31 March this year, of the referrals made to the Aboriginal In-Home Support Service between April 2019 and March 2020, 91 per cent of those children were kept safely at home 12 months later. That is a really significant milestone. In May this year, the minister announced a further \$10.3 million to be invested in a two-year expansion of that Aboriginal In-Home Support Service, which is being led by the Wungening Aboriginal Corporation. So we are starting to see some real wins, I suppose, if you like, with working with Aboriginal communities and individuals to try and keep the children at home when it is safe to do so.

**Hon LORNA HARPER:** Parliamentary secretary, another question on child protection is I refer to page 517, the significant issues impacting the agency, paragraph 10.3, in the budget. Can you explain more about how the expansion of the Home Stretch program will offer young people transitioning from out-of-home care enhanced access to the supports and services they need to succeed?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Thanks, member, for your question. The budget contains \$37.2 million in funding to permanently establish the Home Stretch program, which supports young people in the child protection system, for three more years across WA. The Home Stretch pilot has been supporting young people transitioning from out-of-home care to independence by extending their leave-care supports. It is a really significant investment that will scale up this support into a permanent program, which will end up assisting hundreds of children in care until the age of 21. That is really significant. It has got the support of different stakeholders. Anglicare are really supportive, as are WACOSS, because they can see the benefits of extending that program.

The extension of leaving care will support young people to build on significant work that has already been undertaken, and it also addresses some of the issues that were raised through the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It will support these young people because a lot of these young people are already vulnerable and are disadvantaged, so it is really important that they are giving those supports to be able to live independently.

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** My question is related to budget paper No 2, volume 2, part 8, page 511. It is in the table there, “Ministerial Responsibilities”; it is in reference to “Earlier Intervention and Family Support Services”. By way of explanation, there have recently been multiple media reports and anecdotes of youth crime and antisocial behaviour in the town of Fitzroy Crossing, and I have heard firsthand from the Kimberley district superintendent of the difficulties police are currently facing. My question is: what early intervention programs or social services does the Department of Communities provide to address the risk factors of youth crime in Fitzroy Crossing?

[3.10 pm]

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, for the department of child protection, when we talk about early intervention, it is about stopping children coming into the department’s care. I think what you might be referring to might fall under maybe the Department of Justice portfolio or maybe the department of youth.

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**The CHAIR:** Honourable member, is it a line item that you are referring to there?

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** I am trying to confirm if the Department of Communities has any early intervention programs. I understand the Department of Justice has a night patrol program. The Department of Communities, which entails child protection, housing, the prevention of family and domestic violence, remote Aboriginal communities, young people, children and families, should, in my opinion, have an early intervention program. I am just confirming if the Department of Communities has a program.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Chair, I am going to refer to Matt.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Thanks, member, for the question. You are right that the Department of Communities does have an early intervention program; in fact, we have several. As the parliamentary secretary representing the minister talked about, predominantly our programs seek to provide a service to stop children coming into the care of the state. So, it is more focused on what we can do to provide the wraparound, the cohesive family support service, rather than the kind of general social side. If I can direct the member's attention to page 523 in budget paper No 2, there is a breakdown there of what we call our early intervention and family support services. The member will see that we spend a little bit close to \$93 million per annum on a range of early intervention and support programs. Some of those involve particular support for youth, such as youth counselling. Some of those involve the coordination of services, like our Target 120 program, which is designed to put together health, mental health, education and child protection services to really support a number of children who are at very high risk of coming into care of the state or, indeed, come into the justice system. We also have our family support networks, and those services are more about providing support to the family of the children, rather than the children themselves, although, of course, the children do benefit. Because we do have a whole raft of programs, I am not sure how helpful it will be to go through them all. I think we can provide something of an overview later, if you like, or I can keep providing a high-level overview. It really depends on what would be useful in this hearing.

**The CHAIR:** Hon Wilson Tucker, did you want some further information on that?

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** Yes. A fairly high-level breakdown is okay in this case. Can that be put that on notice?

**The CHAIR:** Absolutely—and capture within that not just specific to child protection but also the interagency programs that you are talking about. I know for a fact that the Department of Education's early intervention programs will be captured and meet exactly what you are talking about. If that could be included in the response, I would appreciate that.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** We can only provide for Community Services.

**The CHAIR:** This is the one where there is a duplication. Mr Richardson mentioned there is that collaboration between the various departments.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Okay.

[*Supplementary Information No A11.*]

**The CHAIR:** Hon Wilson Tucker, do you have any more questions?

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** Yes, I have a follow-up question, still on Fitzroy Crossing but a slightly different line of questioning. In your last annual report, 2019–20, there is mention of a Fitzroy Crossing service hub and shopfront as the Department of Communities' first integrated service centre, co-designed with local organisations. Can you please provide an update on the progress of the service hub and when we can expect similar service hubs to open in other regional locations?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Chair, I am going to ask Rachael to make some comments.

**Ms GREEN:** Myself and the director general visited the Fitzroy Crossing hub maybe about six weeks ago. It was fabulous to see the staff and to see exactly where the hub is, which is just outside the IGA in that particular shopping centre. It is an open facility where people can walk in and see us for a range of supports and services. We will take any learnings from that. It is relatively new. The community are just getting used to it. Our staff are getting used to it. The fact that it is staffed by Aboriginal local community members is a real positive. Like I say, we will be learning from those as we do co-locations of our teams and open offices; where we put all our services together. We are just taking the lessons from those at the moment.

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** Thank you for that explanation. Just to confirm: the hub is open and fully staffed?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Yes.

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** How many staff does the Department of Communities have in Fitzroy Crossing?

**The CHAIR:** You may need to take that one on notice, do you?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** We will have to take that on notice, member.  
[*Supplementary Information No A12.*]

**Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD:** Parliamentary secretary, my questioning is following on from Hon Dr Brad Pettitt with regards to Boorloo Bidee Mia. It is paragraph 6.2 on page 516 of budget paper No 2. I was trying to get a bit more information and clarification with regard to what is meant by “culturally informed responses where appropriate”? Can you expand upon that?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** What page?

**Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD:** Paragraph 6.2 on page 516 of budget paper No 2.

[3.20 pm]

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Thank you, member, for your question. The name Boorloo Bidee Mia means “Perth pathway to housing” in Whadjuk Noongar language. The facility has been designed in partnership with Wungening and Noongar Mia to ensure that it meets the needs of Aboriginal residents. We are delivering the service through an ACCO partnership because, unfortunately, we know that Aboriginal Western Australians are significantly over-represented when it comes to those who are sleeping rough. Within, I think, the first few weeks of operation, the facility has already been able to transition two clients into longer term accommodation. The service that is provided is available to adults of any gender and it has rooms that are suitable for both singles and for couples as well. It obviously has services that will look after people or provide support in relation to family and domestic violence, to assist those who are coming in, and also if they have any alcohol and other drugs issues, or mental health issues, and different cultural supports will be in place. It is, I suppose, more than just a facility and shelter; it is a building that is community based and it is an environment that is going to support those residents who are coming in to be able to address some of those underlying issues that they are experiencing that has led them to end up being homeless or rough sleepers.

**Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD:** Parliamentary secretary, can I ask: are there other cultures involved and other services provided for other cultures?

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**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, the services that are provided are universal for all cultures, but the percentage of homeless people who are unfortunately over-represented are Aboriginal—it is over 57 per cent.<sup>2</sup> But it is universally represented.

**Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD:** At page 516, paragraph 6.1, with regard to the Common Ground facilities and the services provided there, are they similar? It is 6.1, which indicates increasing the capacity of Common Ground facilities. My question just is with regard to the services that are provided there as well.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Thanks, member. In December 2019, the government announced \$35 million as a commitment to building two Common Ground facilities as part of the \$222 million housing and homelessness investment package. Common Ground is a model of permanent supported housing for people who have been chronically homeless or sleeping rough, or people who are on low incomes. The building is purpose-built, with key features being wraparound support services, which are tailored to help with those very complex needs that we have spoken about. Recognising the increased need for this type of accommodation in both the City of Perth and the City of Mandurah, the government significantly increased its investment in Common Ground. The state and federal government commitments to Common Ground facilities in WA is now a total of \$73.5 million, which includes \$8 million of commonwealth funding through the Perth City Deal, and that funding is going to deliver over 160 apartments for people in need of accommodation both in East Perth and in Mandurah.

I can also add, member, that an operational funding model will be developed based on information from existing Common Grounds and testing this with a short-listed group of community housing organisations and community service organisations, including Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

**Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD:** Can I just ask, for clarification, is that support with regard to drugs and alcohol, and domestic violence as well?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, it is a range of wraparound services, so, yes, it includes those.

**Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD:** Thank you.

**Hon JACKIE JARVIS:** Just in a follow-up to Hon Steve Martin's question that I know we took on notice, I am just trying to get some clarity around it. I believe that the question was about Boorloo Bidee Mia and where the homeless people were before they were placed there. I think we had a question along the lines of—please correct me if I am wrong—where were these people resident before they moved into the facility? My concern is that we are essentially asking a question about where the homeless people were last homeless. Is that the question that was taken on notice? I just want to get some clarity.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I do not believe that that is what the question was.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** I can perhaps give some clarification as the asker of the question, chair.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, we can do that. I shall take it from your learned experience, member.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** Thank you. The question was asked around whether the referral process is limited strictly to the Pioneer Park or Lord Street residents, if that is the appropriate term, because they were identifiable. I was inquiring if there are other homeless people outside those two strict boundaries.

**The CHAIR:** Does that assist you, Hon Jackie Jarvis?

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<sup>2</sup> A letter of clarification about this part of the transcript can be accessed on the committee webpage.

**Hon JACKIE JARVIS:** Yes. I think it was more about the terminology about where people were resident when we were talking about the cohort of homeless people. I understand the context of the question.

**Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT:** My question is about Common Ground as well. I refer to paragraph 6.1 on page 516. I am following up on Hon Martin Richard's question. I understand that through that process of identifying the Mandurah and Perth ones, there were applications put in by other areas. I am aware of the Fremantle one, being the previous mayor there. Are there any likely budget allocations for hybrid models using local service providers within other areas using the Common Ground model, even if it is not strictly a Common Ground project?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I will ask Caron Irwin to answer.

**Ms IRWIN:** Thank you for the question. I think that as part of the *All paths lead to a home* strategy, we are looking at a range of models, so if there is an evidence-based model that has been shown to work, we would be interested in having a look at it and having a discussion about such a model, yes.

**Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT:** Could I have one more follow-up on that? I think that is a good general answer. I guess that also what has come to mind is that we have seen models along those lines. The other ones are 50 Lives 50 Homes and the Fremantle version, which was 20 Lives 20 Homes. The Fremantle one was largely funded through private sector philanthropy. Those projects were largely billed as successes and as having good outcomes, but they are not budgeted as ongoing projects. Is there any intended budget for enabling those projects or are we going to rely on the private sector to deliver those?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I am going to ask Caron to make some comments.

**Ms IRWIN:** I think you will find that under the strategy *All paths lead to a home*, the predication for all the funding is the Housing First model using the very good learnings from the 50 Lives 50 Homes and the 20 Lives 20 Homes model. That Housing First model underpins the investment that we do across the board in Communities in preventing homelessness or solving homelessness.

[3.30 pm]

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Parliamentary secretary, if I can get you to turn to the "Answers to questions prior to hearing", number 11 indicated that as at 30 June, there were 1 043.8 full-time equivalent child protection workers. How many of them hold case loads?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I will ask Rachael Green to answer the question.

**Ms GREEN:** There are 900.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** So, 900 hold case loads. Are they all caseworkers or are some of them team leaders?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** They are not team leaders.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** So, they are all caseworkers?

**Ms GREEN:** They are caseworkers and senior caseworkers.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Caseworkers and senior caseworkers, the combination of those two makes 900 who hold case loads at the present time?

**The CHAIR:** We will just get some clarity behind that one.

**Ms GREEN:** Yes, child protection workers.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** I think the response that came back—I do not know whether it was recorded by Hansard—was, "Yes, child protection workers."

**Ms GREEN:** And senior child protection workers.

**The CHAIR:** Can we just not have interjections. Ms Green, what was the response to that one again?

**Ms GREEN:** Child protection workers and senior child protection workers.

**Hon JACKIE JARVIS:** I note that Hansard is having trouble hearing some of the public servants, who are perhaps not as loud as members of Parliament.

**The CHAIR:** It is probably my fault as well. I need to give the call first. I was just waiting for the parliamentary secretary. We will go back to Hon Nick Goiran.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Parliamentary secretary, we will come back full circle. The answer that was provided prior to today's hearing is that there are 1 043.8 FTE child protection workers—that is the descriptor that is used—as at 30 June. My question was: how many of them have case loads? The initial response that came back was 900. I asked if they were caseworkers. Then we got a response indicating they were caseworkers and senior caseworkers. The final response that came back was that they are child protection workers. We know that they are all child protection workers because they are all part of a subset of 1 043.8. I am trying to ascertain how many of them have case loads. If it is 900, are they described, those 900, as caseworkers and senior caseworkers? If they are not, that is fine; I just need to know what the description of those 900 people is.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, the titles are interchangeable.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** The titles are interchangeable. What titles are they?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** A child protection worker is classified the same as a caseworker.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** When, in the response prior to today's hearing, the minister advised the committee that there were 1 043.8 FTE child protection workers as at 30 June 2021, by that definition, that would mean that all 1 043.8 FTE have case loads, yet the response that was provided earlier was that there were 900.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** There is an explanation. I will ask Rachael to elaborate on that.

**Ms GREEN:** The difference is between some of our specialist positions that might well be part of a case consultation but do are not actually referred to as the case manager—so like specialist and practice development officers. I was just trying think of what the SPDO terminology was. We have a range of different child protection workers who might well be part of the casework but do not actually manage the case, and that is the difference between the two figures.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Parliamentary secretary, are any of the 900 who hold case loads team leaders?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** No, honourable member.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Parliamentary secretary, what is the legal instrument that governs the case loads of these 900 child protection workers with case loads?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, it is the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission order 2007.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Is it recommended that caseworkers hold no more than 15 cases?

**The CHAIR:** There was a bit of nodding at the back.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** The upper limit is 15, with up to 18 cases in certain circumstances.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** I think “exceptional circumstances” is the phrase that is used. Does that legal instrument apply to team leaders?

**The CHAIR:** Do we need some clarification on that one—or are you all right?

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**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, we might need to take that on notice.  
[*Supplementary Information No A13.*]

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Are the team leaders part of the 1 043.8 FTE that existed as at 30 June?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** No, they are not, honourable member.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** You will come back to the committee with respect to whether the legal instrument—that is, the industrial relations order of 2007—applies to team leaders. In one of the answers that was provided prior to today’s hearing, there was an indication that in the last financial year, one team leader had 58 cases over and above those being handled by the caseworkers. Earlier, there was an answer provided that indicated that team leaders are not part of the cohort of 900 that hold case loads. How, then, is it the case that a team leader could have 58 cases?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Chair, I will ask Rachael to answer that.

**Ms GREEN:** Between July and August, the midwest Gascoyne experienced an unexpectedly high period of staff turnover, with 24 per cent of their positions vacant supporting the child protection functions alone. To address these concerns, the midwest Gascoyne completed a recruitment, but, in the meantime, whilst we were waiting for recruitment to come on and new staff to be able to do their induction to be able to carry cases, the team leader had 58 cases from the monitored list that she was managing.

[3.40 pm]

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** In that instance, where the person had 58 cases, that was over and above the cases that were being supervised by the team leader. How many caseworkers was the team leader overseeing at the time?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, we need to take that on notice.  
[*Supplementary Information No A14.*]

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I go to page 538 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. Under “Grants and Subsidies” there is a line item “Parenting Community Funding”. Could you provide an explanation as to what that funding is for and why it does not continue across the forward estimates?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Sorry, honourable member, can you repeat the line item?

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Page 538, under “Grants and Subsidies” there is a line item “Parenting Community Funding”—about halfway down.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I will ask Matt Richardson to answer that question for the honourable member.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** I thank the member for the question. The table the member refers to is our “Net Appropriation Determination” table. This actually shows all the income coming into the Department of Communities from other sources. This line referred to is funding that we received from the Child and Adolescent Health Service. That comes to us to help us run the Parenting Support Service Parenting Line. The funding that appears in the table at the moment is what is agreed through the current memorandum of understanding. That memorandum of understanding ceases on 30 June 2022. That is not to say that we will not enter into a new memorandum of understanding for future years, but that has not yet been determined.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Thank you. Is that the Ngala Parenting Line?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** We do not know, sorry, member. We do not have it.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Okay, could we take that part on notice just to clarify that?  
[*Supplementary Information No A15.*]

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**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** As part of that, with regard to the MOU, is that an MOU between the Child and Adolescent Health Service, the Department of Communities and the organisation, if it is Ngala? Perhaps that will also need to be taken on notice.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Member, we will take that one on notice.  
[*Supplementary Information No A16.*]

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Can we just go back to budget paper No 2, volume 2, page 518. I again refer to the section relating to access to quality services. I want to ask a couple of more questions about the early years initiative that I asked about before. I just want some clarity. Given that this was first announced back in 2018 for a 10-year initiative, and given that there have now been delays for whatever reason with regard to the four communities, will this have an impact on the length of that initiative because it was scheduled for 10 years as I understand it?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, I am advised that no decision has been made, but I imagine that if it does not start on time, we will be flexible.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Can I ask that we take that on notice, because I understand it is an agreement between the government, Minderoo and TKI. I presume that there is a memorandum of understanding or something similar to that with regard to this. I would like some clarification with regard to the 10-year agreement. Perhaps the parliamentary secretary can take this on notice as well: how much funding has been spent to date on the initiative?

**The CHAIR:** Can we take the first one first, for clarification.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** We will take that one on notice—the first part.  
[*Supplementary Information No A17.*]

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I further question is: how much money has spent on the initiative to date?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I am advised that the contribution that the department makes is in kind, but we do not have the breakdown of that sort of detail with us. In terms of what Minderoo has spent, obviously, we cannot answer that.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Can I clarify that? The press statement that the minister released in 2018 said that the government is investing \$24.6 million over 10 years using existing funding. Are you saying that is in-kind funding, not funding per se, from the department? If it is in-kind funding, what is being provided by the department? Could I have a breakdown of that? I appreciate that that would need to be taken on notice, because \$24.6 million is quite a lot of in-kind funding.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Member, I think it is going to have to be taken on notice. Examples of repurposed funding can include communities, education, WA Country Health Service staff members dedicated to the project and child health supports, but I think we can take that on notice.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Given it is \$24.6 million, could I have a breakdown of that in-kind funding—how the government has arrived at \$24.6 million?  
[*Supplementary Information No A18.*]

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** This can perhaps be taken on notice: with regard to the central great southern site, given that it has been in place since 2018, can you please provide a breakdown of what work actually has been undertaken and what on-ground activity has occurred? I am happy to have that taken on notice.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** We need to take that on notice.  
[*Supplementary Information No A19.*]

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**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** I have a couple of questions that I expect will need to be taken on notice. Earlier in our session there was talk about the need for child protection workers to take a child home. Could we know how many times in the past 12 months that has occurred?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** We do not have that sort of information centrally; obviously, there are thousands of case files.

**The CHAIR:** Can I clarify that: you do not know when an employee takes a child home?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** At a district level, they would know, but, centrally no; it is only in very rare circumstances that that occurs.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** For clarification, does that mean that that cannot be provided on notice; is that what you are saying?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I think that is just too much work; I am sorry, member.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** We had some discussion about early intervention programs and a figure of around \$90 million. Do you know how many individuals or at-risk young people are captured by those programs?

[3.50 pm]

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, 12 500 respectively.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** Just the final one, if I may. In terms of KPIs around how money is spent and its results, does the department do any looking at other jurisdictions and doing any comparisons? Is any of that work done? How do we know from year to year that the department is getting better value out of what it is doing than it did the previous year?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I am going to ask Caron Irwin to answer.

**Ms IRWIN:** There is an annual report called the *Report on government services*, which is compiled by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and it compares key performance indicators and key efficiency indicators in child protection across all jurisdictions, and it includes the notes and the caveats about what you can compare and what you cannot compare, because accounting rules differ slightly across those jurisdictions. Those reports are publicly available.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** Thank you. So how we are performing?

**The CHAIR:** I might refer you to the report.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** You are welcome to grab the report. I do not know if you were in here earlier, honourable member, but our figures around child protection have actually reduced—the first time in, like, 20 years. As you can well appreciate, the department is dealing with incredibly vulnerable young people with sometimes very complex needs and there has been significant investment to make sure that we are supporting them in the best way that we can. You know, it is a slow process, but the fact that the numbers are reducing in terms of the number of children that we are seeing in care and the number of Aboriginal children that we are seeing in care, that is a good thing.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** I am referring to a question that I submitted prior to the hearing; I would like some extra details. It refers to page 519, service 2, of budget paper No 2, volume 2, about a drop-off in funding to homelessness support services. I assume that homelessness support services does not mean capital spend, so it is recurrent spending. One of the responses was a fixed-term contribution towards homelessness in the Perth CBD of \$2.5 million will be coming to an end. Can you outline what the \$2.5 million was spent on, please?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I am going to ask Matt to answer that question for us.

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**Mr RICHARDSON:** The \$2.15 million referred to has not yet been spent, so it is an allocation of funding received through the current budget process. It is available for Communities to spend in this year and the following year, 2022–23, and it does not continue into 2023–24. We have not yet worked through the finer details of where that will be spent on homelessness, but we have approval to spend it on homelessness in Perth CBD.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** On the same question, it also mentions a decrease in expenditure associated with Boorloo Bidee Mia of \$2.957 million, reflecting a decrease in activity after the initial establishment working costs are completed. Given we are in a building phase of that facility, what cut in ongoing recurrent spending of \$2.957 million would occur in the out years?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I defer to Mr Richardson.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** May I just confirm that your question there was about what sorts of costs are decreasing over the life of the current grant agreement?

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** I will just check that my assumption is right—that “homelessness support services”, that line item, is not capital spend; it is actually ongoing spending I assume for staff and so on.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** That is correct.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** Your response to my question submitted prior to the hearing was that the Boorloo Bidee Mia facility will require \$2.957 million less funding in the out years once the facility is established. I am trying to understand what that cut in services would be if it is not capital?

**Mr RICHARDSON:** There are several different costs associated with the set-up. The initial ramp-up of cases of clients within Boorloo Bidee Mia for example in the first year, I can tell the member, we have budgeted for \$761 000 for consultants to help establish culturally safe living arrangements and the intake pathways. While we do not include the capital costs of the fit-out of the building, we do include costs in there to do with the average running. We have, for example, costs with setting up a security card access system. We include that in the first years, but that tapers off towards the second year. We also have some costs associated with insurance in the start-up or the initial phase that then also tapers off. We do not expect a provision for that to be as high in later years as in earlier years.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** The entire ongoing cost of running that facility, will that come out of homelessness support services?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Yes, it will.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Parliamentary secretary, referring to the general appropriation for the Department of Communities budget paper No 2, volume 2, page 513, you will be aware that in the last financial year the Commissioner for Children and Young People was referred an inquiry by the minister and tabled a report recently in September 2021. It refers to two cases—the names of the young people have been de-identified and referred to as Macie and Lee. When did the department first brief the minister about those two individuals?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Member, we do not have that detail with us.

**The CHAIR:** We will take that on notice.

[*Supplementary Information No A20.*]

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** The Commissioner for Children and Young People made reference to concerning behaviour and harmful sexual behaviours in estimates in the other place. The minister indicated that the department will no longer be housing children in care who are reportable offenders. What is the government’s policy with respect to children with harmful sexual behaviours?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, there are some children who display inappropriate or harmful sexual behaviours currently in the care of the CEO. This is managed as part of their placement and safety planning accordingly. In such cases, Communities holds multi-agency strategy meetings with relevant stakeholders to understand that level of risk posed by such young people. These meetings inform joint safety planning. Residential care staff place a really strong focus on having educational conversations with children around healthy relationships and sexuality. As such, action is critical to creating safety for children.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Are they still being housed in residential care together? I understand the reportable offenders are not, but what about the children with harmful sexual behaviours?

[4.00 pm]

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Honourable member, we are talking about a spectrum of behaviour, from inappropriate age sexual behaviours to reportable offences. If the department has concerns, or issues are raised, then they are planned for accordingly.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** So there are still children with harmful sexual behaviours being placed in residential care settings, notwithstanding the Commissioner for Children and Young People's inquiry?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I might ask Ms Green to make some comments.

**Ms GREEN:** Children are in care across a range of placements; more than half are with their family and parent carers. For those children in residential care, we have a level of staffing. So, within each residential care home the department runs, there is a house manager, there are two staff on duty at all times, plus there is a psychologist's support as well. Each of the children come to us with a range of needs, supports, challenges and strengths. They may come to us with learning difficulties and in regulating their emotions, impacted by trauma and abuse, but also mental health, disability and acting out. We have individual safety plans as per the *Residential care practice manual*. For each child coming into that residential care setting, it looks at the dynamics—ages of the children that are already there and the impacts and dynamic of another child coming into care. So there is a broad range of behaviours that our children demonstrate in residential care. We work to manage in the preventive space, so we work with their triggers and what to look for in their behaviours, but also a response plan, so where we do see concerning behaviour or somebody playing up, we have a response there to be able to manage and to be able to work and keep not only that child safe but the other children safe in the house.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I thank everyone for your attendance today.

Members, you may submit your remaining questions, if you have any further questions, through the electronic lodgement system, and that will close at 5.00 pm on 29 October. If you have any further questions, you can put them in the electronic lodgement system.

Witnesses, the committee will forward the uncorrected transcript of evidence, with questions taken on notice highlighted, as soon as possible after the hearing. Responses to questions on notice are due by 5.00 pm on 17 November 2021. Should you be unable to meet the due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons why the due date cannot be met. Once again, I thank you for your attendance today.

**Hearing concluded at 4.03 pm**

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