

**SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE EDUCATION  
AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE**

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

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT FITZROY CROSSING  
FRIDAY, 30 JULY 2010**

**SESSION ONE**

**Members**

**Mr P. Abetz (Chairman)  
Mr P.B. Watson**

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**Hearing commenced at 9.58 am****SANDERSON, MR HEATH ANDREW****Manager, Fitzroy Valley Men's Shed, examined:**

**The CHAIRMAN:** I want to thank you, Heath, for coming today and being willing to share your wisdom with us; we certainly need it with the issue that we are trying to deal with. Before we start I want to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners, past, present and future, of the land on which we are meeting today.

As you probably know, the purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into the adequacy and appropriateness of prevention and treatment services for alcohol and illicit drug problems in Western Australia. At this stage I would like to introduce myself and the other members of the committee present: I am Peter Abetz, vice chairman of this committee and to my left is Mr Peter Watson, member for Albany and committee member. Judith Baverstock from Hansard, who will be recording today's proceedings, and Alice, our research officer, are also present.

The Education and Health Standing Committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia and this hearing is a formal procedure of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house. Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you wish to share something that you feel it would not be appropriate to have on the public record, please flag that and I will indicate that we are going into closed session and that part of your evidence will not be on the public record. Please feel free to speak up because we can go in and out of closed session as often as we like. There are no rules about that. You may want to share something with us that if it were on the public record and somebody knew that you had said such and such, may make your work more difficult in a small community. We are more than happy to go into closed session.

Before we proceed I have to ask you a few questions—although I know how you will answer!—for the record. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes.

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

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes.

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

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Good. Do any of you have any questions in relation to being a witness here today?

**Mr Sanderson:** No.

**The CHAIRMAN:** For the Hansard record, would you please state your full name and the capacity in which you appear before the committee today?

**Mr Sanderson:** Heath Andrew Sanderson. I am the manager of the Fitzroy Valley Men's Shed, here in Fitzroy Crossing.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you.

We have roughly an hour. Perhaps the best way to start is for you to make an opening statement or summary to tell us what you are all about. There are a lot of interesting things going on here but we are particularly interested in and our primary focus is, of course, the drug and alcohol issues in terms of what we could be doing differently as a government to improve the situation. Are there things that we should be funding, but are not funding? Are we funding things that are useless and that money could be redirected from? Basically, we are looking to hear from grassroots people like yourself working in the community to find out what we could be doing better. We recognise that this is a significant problem not just in the Kimberley but right throughout the state. Obviously, the Kimberley has its own unique issues and we are keen to learn from you about them.

**Mr Sanderson:** The Fitzroy Valley Men's Shed is a project supported by the Australian Children's Trust and has been in operation since May 2009. We are located —

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Sorry, Heath; who runs the Australian Children's Trust?

**Mr Sanderson:** The Australian Children's Trust is a public benevolent institution founded by Mrs Nicola Forrest, the CEO, and her husband, Andrew Forrest. The quick history of the Men's Shed is that Andrew and Nicola were in Fitzroy Crossing talking to community stakeholders around the time the bans were being considered. Two things came out of those community discussions: first, was that the community wanted somewhere for men to go post bans to utilise some of their spare time. The Australian Children's Trust has jumped on board and put the Men's Shed facility into place. The second thing requested by the community was a full-time dentist and the Australian Children's Trust has been responsible for part funding a dentist and a dental assistant to come to Fitzroy Crossing.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Is the dentist here full time?

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** That is the first we have heard of that, and we have been here two days. No one has mentioned that.

**Mr Sanderson:** The dentist has been in town now for about seven months and it is great. I have been a couple of times!

To describe the shed, it is located down in the industrial area in town and it is an old transport yard. Essentially, it is an 80-metre long by 15-metre wide shed with classrooms at either end. Initially, the brief was to establish partnerships in town with job service providers, TAFE and health professionals with the broader links to employment outcomes through quality training. Rather than just occupying people's time by putting them through training course after training course, our scope is to identify employment opportunities both in town—through the current town building project, we have put guys through industrial skills training—and in the mines through our links with the mining community. Our first mining program will commence in late August of this year. There will be 25 positions. The individuals will be fly in, fly out from Fitzroy Crossing to mine sites in the Pilbara and the role of the Men's Shed is to deliver the pre-employment training, which will be six weeks in duration, to give people the skills they need to go onto mine sites.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Heath, what age groups are at the Men's Shed?

**Mr Sanderson:** At the moment, with our industrial skills focus, for the first six months the minimum age has been 17 years. The only qualifier for that is the construction white card—the cut-off for that is 16. We have been very conscious of talking to the school about particular individuals who might fall into the 15 or 16-year-old age bracket. Predominantly, it has been 17 years and up, and there is no upper age limit.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** So rather than you going out to them, the main idea is to get them in as a captive audience because they are more relaxed. Do you bring the health services in, too?

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes. Initially, we had a weekly clinic and the staff from the Nindilingarri clinic would come down. That was for medications, dressing changes and on-the-spot counselling. We also participate in monthly men's health days networking with the Flying Doctor and its health professionals—to get two doctors in place. Basically, on those days we have a full pit-stop health check. It starts off with individuals providing a urine specimen and checks for eyes, blood sugar and diabetes and ends with a one-on-one with the doctor. We have also been fortunate to have an ongoing relationship with Dave Pigram. You guys might be aware that the Pigram Brothers from Broome are quite a successful band. They come across and do a bit of a concert at the end of the day. That is now a three-monthly event at the Men's Shed.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Do they have to be sober to come into the shed?

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes.

**Mr P. ABETZ:** Do you do a breath test or just a visual check?

**Mr Sanderson:** It is generally a visual check. That is not a rule that I have imposed; it is a rule that the men of the shed have imposed, because of the machinery—we have trucks, loaders, bobcats; we have industrial lathes—in the workshop environment. I have actually had people rock up to the shed to let me know that they are intoxicated and would not be coming in today, which is great, because they know it is not the place they need to be.

On that point, initially, there was a bit of confusion in the community with regard to the Men's Shed being associated to the men's refuge in Derby and also the men's shelter in Broome. We had a number of the old buildings from the hospital on site and a whole stack of old hospital beds at the front gate as well, and we had men rocking up asking: where do we camp? Which room is mine? What time is the feed? In the Derby model, the men could rock up and they would be given a shower pack and told to have a shower and to clean themselves up. They could then go and have a feed and a sleep and then go on their way. Our approach is totally different in that we make those links to drug and alcohol counselling, to a driver's license or to whatever the referral may be—for example, money management. But I am not a counsellor and I am not a psychiatrist; my job is to make the links with those relevant professionals.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Heath, when they brought in the liquor bans, private enterprise provided this service. Has the state government or the federal government provided enough support for the community? It is all right to come in and put on blanket bans, but from what we have heard from the health services and from others in the community, there is not enough support for mental health, and drug and alcohol issues.

**Mr Sanderson:** The short answer is: no, there is not. I will go through a couple of examples —

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Do you want to do that first and then perhaps we can ask questions?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes.

**Mr Sanderson:** During the period from May 2009 to the current day, approximately 27 men have been considered regulars at the facility. The composition of the 27 is that they may be CDEP participants who are —

[10.10 am]

**The CHAIRMAN:** So that is a work for the dole thing, is it?

**Mr Sanderson:** Well, they are not currently engaged in their community program, or there is no community program, so they come in to us; Centrelink participants; and also people who are working full time but who come into the facility on their R&R to get away from family humbug—for a little bit of breathing space.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** So they can be in a full-time working position?

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes. One particular gentleman does eight days on, six days off bush work, and on his six days off he chooses to come in to work with us to be away from the family humbug.

So on a normal day, I jump in the bus at about 10 to seven and I go out to the communities of Darlgunya and Garnduwa, the town of Fitzroy Crossing, Minderardi, Kurnangki and Bayulu as part of my morning bus run. I know only too well when alcohol is in town. I have seen when men jump onto the bus how many people then would openly show their available bottles of spirits and cans of good beer as a means of temptation and of taunting to individuals who want something else to do other than drink. This is as we are driving out of Newman. There are people sort of showing the men on the bus that they have got grog and telling them to come back.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Do any get off?

**Mr Sanderson:** No. It is a bit of a laugh now. The guys will laugh it off. But that is the daily temptation that is out there. I have seen men engaged in the shed activities also disappear in the back of a police car for parole breaches, only to return to jail for further time. Perhaps the hardest thing to swallow in Fitzroy is seeing the people who want to turn their lives around, only to be dragged back down by their families, their home environment, or through boredom, depression and hopelessness. Living in an industrial area of Fitzroy Crossing, I am removed from the bump and grind of the real Fitzroy. However, across from the Men's Shed is the back road connecting Mindi Rardi, Kurnangki and town to the pub, which is a very busy road indeed. I see people confidently striding out at 11.45 am, only to stagger back late in the afternoon, yelling abuse, swearing and generally making their presence felt to all and sundry.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Do they come into the shed or are they just walking down the road?

**Mr Sanderson:** No; they are walking down the road.

The injustice that is currently imposed on the people of Fitzroy Crossing comes directly back to what support mechanisms are in place. But simply banning full-strength alcohol in a takeaway form is not the answer. You only need to visit the hotspots like Jealousy Creek in Derby, which is at the back of Woolworths, or the fun of Rusty's bottle shop, again in Derby, to see that accessing alcohol is not a problem for some. These are people not only from Derby but also from Fitzroy Crossing and the surrounding communities.

I am not advocating Kimberly-wide restrictions for potentially five per cent of the Kimberley population who are chronic alcoholics. I would only support such a notion once all avenues have been investigated, including the greater resourcing of drug and alcohol counsellors in Fitzroy Crossing, better resourcing of diversionary programs for the youth of Fitzroy Crossing, and probably most importantly having full-time residential staff in Fitzroy Crossing. This I believe involves having a serious investigation into the core of the problem, not just simply moving the problem. The point I want to make there is if you see a heroin addict in a car park, simply taking away the spoon, line or syringe does not make him a reformed person. He is still a heroin addict. The point with Fitzroy Crossing is that we have taken the notion of restricting the sale of full-strength alcohol, but what has come behind is where the question marks have come in.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** So you say there are only five per cent of people in the Fitzroy Valley who are totally dependent on alcohol?

**Mr Sanderson:** Who I believe are chronic alcoholics. There are I believe at the last census 3 650 people who make up the Fitzroy Valley. The figures that I am hearing from the men's health team in Fitzroy here is that the chronic alcoholics—the two and three-day binge drinkers—could be five to 10 per cent.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** You say you have those. But what is the next level? Are they the ones who are committing the sexual assaults and the bashings? Are they the ones who are going away and leaving their children at home alone? You do not have to be a chronic alcoholic to be damaging your family.

**Mr Sanderson:** No, and that is why I made the point about whether you guys are going down to the Crossing this afternoon, because what you will see at three o'clock is an exodus of people who then, to take your point, Peter, do not go home and make sure the kids are in bed and not roaming the streets, who then may go home and assault their partner's children, who then jump into a car and crash into a tree. It is that knock-on effect.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** So you think if full-strength alcohol was available it would fix that problem?

**Mr Sanderson:** No. But simply removing the takeaway—because what we have basically done is that each family or each community group had their own spot where they would sit and drink. But what we have done now is that those people who cannot access a vehicle or the finances for someone to bring alcohol back from town to Fitzroy here are congregating at the pub every single day.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Is that a safer drinking environment than drinking out in the bush at night?

**Mr Sanderson:** I suppose what concerns me most is that during our last Murdoch University round of talks, which was about four months ago, as we were doing the post-ban surveys, when you hear stories of individuals who have been barred from the pub for irresponsible behaviour or whatever the situation may be, when you hear that those individuals' names could be removed from the barred-out list if they were to give the bouncers some ganja —

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are you serious?

**Mr Sanderson:** That is when I have concerns; and when I see people coming back from the pub at three or four o'clock in the afternoon, rolling drunk, I have to consider the responsible service of alcohol and whether that is actually happening.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Can I just ask one other question—I know I am hogging it a bit here—but we had Joe Ross in yesterday. He said that he has seen the change since the restrictions came in. He has been here all his life. He is a guy who was born here and he has worked here and lived here. He is saying that it is empowering more people to do things in Fitzroy Crossing. Now, I am not having a crack at you here, but we have got people who have been here for only a short time saying that the alcohol restrictions are working. We have got people who have been here over a long period of time and who have seen the transition and have seen when they brought all the communities into here because they reckoned it was not working out in the communities, and it has all settled down and everything like that. He is saying he is now seeing men going to school with their kids, going to teacher–parent nights, and mothers are going along in the morning and things like that. How do you gauge that on what you have been saying to us this morning?

**Mr Sanderson:** I think that the big ticket item, and the thing that is missing the most, is the available resources for people who want to turn their lives around.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** I agree 100 per cent.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Can I butt in there for a minute? Am I hearing you say that you are not actually opposed to the restrictions, but the restrictions are—as somebody else said; I will use their term—giving us a window of opportunity to engage with the community, but we are not putting in enough resources to deal with the root cause that is leading to the excessive drinking, which is despair, hopelessness and all those kinds of issues? Is that what I am hearing you say? Can you clarify that?

[10.20 am]

**Mr Sanderson:** What the bans have done is create entrepreneurial behaviour by people doing trips to Derby for grog—by accessing grog through Chrisco, through Christmas hampers, through liquor delivery to your door and runs into Broome. So I do not think there is a problem with accessing alcohol whatsoever. You have got two distinct groups of people: you have people who frequent the pub on a daily basis and you have people going to Derby and into Broome to get their alcohol.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What sort of figures have you got for the people going into Derby? What we are hearing from the police is that there might be a couple a week who go into Derby. There are some that are doing this—there is no question about that—but I ask about the degree to which it is happening. Some of the evidence that has been presented to us suggests that a lot of the Indigenous people in the communities are what you might call—what is a term we use?—if it is there, they will drink; if it is not, they do not drink. Therefore, if you restrict the supply, they do an awful lot less drinking. The real hard-core guys who are desperate for alcohol will make a special trip to Derby, but a lot of it is partly, like with the shop burning down here, some people go down to Derby to do their grocery shopping and while they are down there they think, “We’ll get some grog”, and up they come. But it is more kind of opportunistic. The number of assaults and presentations to emergency departments of hospitals and all that sort of thing seems to have reduced very significantly, which would suggest that the negative impact of alcohol has been very much reduced. So it seems to have had a very positive effect. There are certainly people doing those things. Do you have any idea of figures or is it more anecdotal?

**Mr Sanderson:** It is more a case of when I am in Derby doing my own shopping, I see the Fitzroy people walking out of the bottle shop with trolleys full of grog. That is what I am saying. I am not suggesting for a second that people are fly grogging, which we all know is —

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** It is very hard to prove, isn’t it?

**Mr Sanderson:** What I am saying is that people have become very entrepreneurial. I agree 100 per cent with your point, in that if people are only drinking when grog is available, but then going on a three-day bender—I remember talking to one of our men who had been on a three-day bender, and he does not remember a thing of the second and third day. I said, “Do you worry about the sorts of behaviour that you may do when you are on the second and third day?” He said, “I would not know.” That is, I suppose, the alarming thing. If people are sitting down to have six or eight drinks and the carton has gone—happy days! People are then going on to the second and third day and then ending up waking up in the police station thinking, “What have I done?” A case is point—this is not to go on the record —

**The CHAIRMAN:** So we will go into closed session for a moment, yes.

#### **Hearing suspended from 10.24 to 1027 am**

**Mr Sanderson:** I have personally seen 15 individuals who, during our Men’s Shed health days, have identified that they are drinking at dangerous levels and were asking for help. These are people who voluntarily, through surveys of their current health, identified that when they do participate in alcohol, they are drinking to dangerous levels. Not one person out of the 15 has successfully received counselling or been referred.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Why is that?

**Mr Sanderson:** Purely and simply, the resource here at the moment for one day per fortnight is targeted at justice referrals. So for people who are on parole, part of their parole conditions is that they attend the fortnightly or monthly drug and alcohol sessions. Individuals who are seeking assistance with their drinking have not —

**The CHAIRMAN:** So basically, if you have not been in jail or have not been court ordered to drug and alcohol counselling, you basically do not get a look into the service.

**Mr Sanderson:** Absolutely.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is appalling. It indicates a gross under-resourcing of that area, which is something we have heard repeatedly from just about everybody.

**Mr Sanderson:** And you have got an individual who comes across from Derby one day a fortnight. We can all sit here until we are blue in the face and talk about the fact that there is a lack of housing, there is a lack of this and there is a lack of that. What you have got is accommodation here.

You have got accommodation in town, but if you really wanted the resource to be on the ground in Fitzroy Crossing tomorrow, the easiest thing to do would be to go and grab a \$100 000 caravan, which is perfectly liveable, and put someone in town to do intensive on-the-ground support Monday through to Friday, after hours if required, to talk again to that individual and talk him down out of that situation to remove him from that situation, so that there is not another person at the cemetery or another person in Broome regional.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** When you consider what it costs to get into Broome and what it cost the flying doctor to get into Perth, you could fund people, couldn't you?

**The CHAIRMAN:** I think it is really critical. That ongoing availability is so critical in terms of dealing with people who have drug and alcohol issues. I ran a drug rehab support group for about five years in Perth in the community, and both the family that is affected and the recovering addict need not just the weekly meeting, which is really important, but also to know that they have access to the person running the group. They could ring me at any time when they were feeling that they were on the slide back down again, and that just often provided them with that lift that they needed to stay out of trouble. If you do not have somebody on the ground who is accessible all the time, you are just not going to cut it. So it would seem to me that you would be saying, "Unless we put some drug and alcohol-type counsellors here, who are constantly available, the situation will not improve." This would be within certain boundaries obviously, but certainly more accessible than what they are, and not just for the justice people but also for people who say, "Hey, I've got a problem. I'm not in trouble with the law at this point in time, but I need help." At this point in time they are not able to access help is what I am hearing you say.

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes. "I am not in trouble with the law at the moment, but I beat my wife; I do not provide a supportive home environment for my kids, and it is only a matter of time until I end up on this side." I have just two other quick points to make.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes.

**Mr Sanderson:** A further case in point is the new police station facility in Fitzroy. The town is screaming, literally, for a 24-hour facility, whereby people of the valley can ring up in situations where drunks have returned to houses.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Is that the police's job?

**Mr Sanderson:** I think it is the right of any human being, be it in the Kimberley, Perth or otherwise, to feel safe in their home environment. If someone comes into that home environment —

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Sorry. I thought you meant to pick them up and take them home.

**The CHAIRMAN:** If they go home and cause trouble and bash the wife —

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** I see.

**The CHAIRMAN:** — they can ring the local police station and get immediate response, rather than Broome —

**Mr Sanderson:** It gets better. It is not Broome now; it is Geraldton.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is it? They told us it was Broome, I thought; but it does not matter.

**Mr Sanderson:** Let us say you are an Aboriginal person, someone who has rocked up at the house and you are a non-drinker. They know you have got money. They are coming through because they want to get more money to get grog. You pick up the phone and you get a lovely operator on the other end in Geraldton, who says, "What's your street address?" You say, "I am in house 9, Kurnangki." The operator will then say, "Is it an emergency? Is it life-threatening?" What are you going to say—yes or no? "We cannot be there until eight o'clock tomorrow morning." I know there are budget constraints with the additional hours to run a 24-hour facility, but again it gets back to: do we throw all of our resources into the lovely police station where people sit in lovely offices and

have lovely cells or do we have a lesser facility and a greater emphasis on being a resourced facility 24 hours a day?

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** The trouble is that if you do not have a good facility, you will not get the police up here.

**Mr Sanderson:** I think that is the crux of where we are at the moment in that you have got again resources thrown in one particular area and you have got the other parts of the community who are screaming for help through resources or through being able to feel safe, and the knock-on effect of those five to 10 per cent serious problem drinkers that then go home to their home environments and create chaos.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** What is the elders' role in all this?

**Mr Sanderson:** I would like to think that the elders have the capacity to stand up, but, as you hear today, yesterday, and as you do on your regional trips, there is no respect for their elders. What was once a given is simply not. You will hear about strong elders who, from Joy Springs and Bayulu, used to stand at the gate and would not allow drunks past the gate back into the community, and who would box on if it was required because that was the stance that they took. But if those people are now gone, passed on or in the justice system —

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** It has got a lot to do with the by-laws of the community, hasn't it? We were at one of the communities.

[10.35 am]

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes, one of the communities. Was it Beagle Bay, the guy said? A couple of Indigenous people have said—in the community just out of Derby, was it not?

**Mr Sanderson:** Mowanjum.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Yes, they have got a grog-free community, but they cannot enforce it.

**Mr Sanderson:** But there are lounge chairs, there are fire pits, there is everything out the front. When I go to Bayulu at 7.30 in the morning, there are still 20 people standing at the front gate humbugging me for cigarettes as I drive through in the bus to pick up a crew.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Which means that it does not matter how strong your leaders are, you have not got the power to enforce what you want in your own community.

**Mr Sanderson:** You have got to think of a family who are non-drinkers, who want their kids to get a good night's sleep, who do not want to live in fear. But the simple thing of picking up a phone and saying, "There's someone here who is causing a ruckus", if that option is not there, and you do not have a car to remove yourself from that situation, what do you do?

**The CHAIRMAN:** I know in Warburton when they built the police station they got about three or four police officers based in Warburton—and that is a dry community—but domestic violence and all that has just nosedived because the people know that they can ring the police officer who sleeps with his mobile phone next to him and they can ring him at any time and he will be there within five, 10 minutes. So, the culprit knows there are consequences and he will take him into the lockup. He may not charge him, but he is in the cold lockup for the night and that gives him time to think about what he has been doing. And that has been very effective, apparently, in terms of reducing the amount of domestic violence in the community; and that is a dry community where they are really very strict on the alcohol.

**Mr Sanderson:** You see, everyone knows that after nine o'clock, there are no police driving around. If there are police who are on, they are on suicide watch at the police station. So if I am driving back from Derby and I have grabbed a few cartons and we are drinking merrily; I mean you guys flew in today, but you have only got to look where people have pulled up on the side of the

road to have a few and there are 20 UDL cans on the side. They come back to town all charged up, having driven all the way, driving around the streets and they know for a fact they are not going to get pulled up.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It was interesting, at Beagle Bay we were told by the police officer that he actually does random breath tests. At two o'clock in the morning they will do a block on the highway in. And initially when they started doing it, they used to get one in four random breath tests were over the limit. Now it is down to one in 20 or 25.

**Mr Sanderson:** Because now people know.

**The CHAIRMAN:** People know it is not worth the risk.

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** And they are not a 24-hour station either. They just do their roster so they can do it. So maybe that is what we should look at here.

**Mr Sanderson:** The irony is we have got 15 police, I believe, in town here.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I think it is 13 or something.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Thirteen.

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes. If we are putting all of our resources into those daytime hours when people are getting loaded up at the pub, but then putting nothing in that window of night, again, I think we need to shift some of those resources across so that people who have the right to feel safe in their homes; so that people who are coming to our training programs who are wanting to go on to full-time employment can get to sleep; and so their kids can feel safe in their own beds, so they are getting up next morning for school.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Are there many kids walking around the streets at night?

**Mr Sanderson:** The kids will tell you that the streets are the safest place to be.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** It is the same in Albany.

**The CHAIRMAN:** But it is a reflection of what is going on in the home. Like, if mum and dad are home and not drunk and looking after their kids, the kids probably would not be out on the street because they would probably prefer to be home with mum and dad and tucked into bed. So, are there many walking the streets at night here or not?

**Mr Sanderson:** I do not get around too much at night, but from what I am being told by the guys who come through the shed—the men—if the house is charging, then the kids are nowhere to be seen.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** And the child protection agency does not work at night here, like they do anywhere else. Everywhere we have been the child protection agency is nine to five. That is when the kids are safe.

**Mr Sanderson:** But, again, the biggest misconception is to pick the kids up and drop them home where they are safe.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That would be disaster!

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** But the police are doing that job for them.

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** In Broome the police are actually going out on the streets picking up the kids and if it is not safe at home, they take them to a relative.

**Mr Sanderson:** I think one of the biggest things that Fitzroy Crossing is crying out for is a youth facility.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Like a safe house or hostel-type thing?

**Mr Sanderson:** No, I would be thinking more like a drop-in centre.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** A PCYC?

**Mr Sanderson:** A PCYC. Because if you look at what is available resource-wise in town you have got Garnduwa, which is the football sporting association; you have got the pub; and you have got the cards. They are the three big social things that happen in town—football, drinking and cards. But if you happen to sit in between those things, so that you are not really into football, you are not old enough to play cards or drink, what the devil do you do in town? There are no parks, apart from the grass out the front of where the post office and the highway sit.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** You have got a new swimming pool and a new basketball stadium.

**Mr Sanderson:** Opening soon.

**The CHAIRMAN:** How strong are the churches in the community here?

**Mr Sanderson:** I would not be able to comment on what the participation rate is or the number of parishioners.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** So, do you reckon the alcohol is a social lubricant or a get-out for boredom?

**Mr Sanderson:** I think what you have got is a whole raft of people who have managed, despite being on welfare, to have the capacity to live very well by limited means over a long period of time and the drinking is a major social activity in the town.

**The CHAIRMAN:** If it is a social activity—it is nice to hang out with your friends and, I guess, have some drinks—but they are obviously drinking alcohol rather than lemon squashes or Coke or whatever. So, obviously the alcohol issue is not just the social thing; they are actually choosing to drink alcohol to get tanked up. In terms of addressing that issue, if you had unlimited resources available to you, what would you change in Fitzroy?

**Mr Sanderson:** I personally believe we need to take 10 steps back to look at why people are going to the pub to make themselves feel better; to look at why, because Fitzroy Crossing is one of those places where it is very easy to take a tourist view of the town. I have been coming here since 1999, both in a football capacity as a schoolteacher and in my current capacity now, and it is very easy to judge someone sitting under a tree or someone passed out in front of the pub. And the first thing that we do is we judge something on face value and say, “Oh, poor bloke.” But what I would like to do is find out why that person has to drink to excess to make themselves feel good, to fall down and then do it all again the next day. I want to know why the hopelessness, why the despair, why the depression. Because what you have in Fitzroy Crossing is people who are on a synthetic high for two or three days while money is in their account, and then a very, very low three or four days until the money comes back in. And this is what I see on a daily basis, driving round to the communities. You know when money is in town, you know when grog is in town because the music is blaring, people are happy and people are dancing. But when people are drying out, you also know that as well, because you can drive through these places and it is like a ghost town.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It is a pretty miserable end, too, with a hangover?

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Just on that, my experience of working with drug addicts is that every single one of them has unresolved emotional issues in terms of sexual abuse in childhood, unresolved issues of mum and dad splitting up when they were a young kid or whatever. In all the people that came through the rehab group that I ran, there was only one girl in the five years who actually would say she had no issues, and she recovered very quickly. She went to a party, took heroin and got hooked kind of instantly. She realised what she had done after a few months and said, “Hang on a minute, I’m nicking money from mum and dad. I can’t keep doing this. I confess.” And she went

on rehab and she recovered very quickly. But the others who had those unresolved issues often had relapses and stuff in their journey to wholeness. But every single one had unresolved emotional pain that they had not dealt with. And obviously for the Indigenous people, I would assume, who are addicted to alcohol—if not chemically addicted, emotionally addicted—and wanting to get sloshed, there are unresolved issues; which really means there is a massive counselling issue that needs to be dealt with. But then do we not also have to address the children, so that these children of those people do not follow the same route, actually help these kids so that we can get a new era for these kids? So, what would you suggest for the kids' side to protect them?

**Mr Sanderson:** I think that, again, we have got to go back to the resourcing and look at what physically is on the ground, because at the moment I think we have totally missed the boat in that all of our resources have been tipped in on this end. You have got to go back to schools.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Kids, preschools?

**Mr Sanderson:** You have got to go back to preschools; you have got to go back to emerging leaders, because what happens with emerging leaders who do not shine, they end up in that core group of people who, again, are not part of the justice system but are just sort of bubbling along. I think a classic case in point is the banning of cards in Kununurra. The shire has said, "Right, we're banning cards." Now, everyone knows that that is not going to fix gambling in Kununurra. And I think the same can be said here, in that we have done probably the hardest thing possible in saying, "Yes, this town has some serious social issues and we've drawn the line in the sand, we've made that decision which is fantastic." But now what we need to do is to look at all those microscopic levels with the policing, with the resourcing and with the housing that is available in town. You have only got to stop and look at the \$500 million housing project that is rolling out across town at the moment. If we can find \$500 million to fix Aboriginal housing, if we could get one per cent of that back into some diversional programs, back into some resourcing on the ground, I think then we are really having a crack at fixing some of these issues. Because I know that the Shire of Derby – West Kimberley is currently under consideration for banning takeaway. I know that the Shire of Wyndham – East Kimberley is also doing the same. But, again, if we do the same thing that we have done in Fitzroy Crossing, if we do the same thing that we have done in Halls Creek, Halls Creek is in the exact same predicament in that they have got people driving in, driving out from Kununurra one or two days per week, and I do not think we are then delving down into it. As you were saying, Peter, each of those individuals has those individual support requirements as well. We sat around one day over a cup of tea and we were talking about suicide and the impact within family groups. There were eight people sitting around and each person had had a direct family member that had committed suicide. And I said to the guys, "How do you feel about, you know, the fact that you walk outside?" This is one particular case in point at the moment.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Go into closed session?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Closed session, yes.

### **Hearing suspended from 10.49 to 10.51 am**

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** If you have one issue that the state government could do to stop the alcohol and drug problems in the Kimberley, what would it be?

**Mr Sanderson:** That is the million-dollar question.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** I do not think you would get that much, but just the initiative for starters.

**Mr Sanderson:** I was actually thinking about this last night; if I was asked this question, what would we do? I had a chat to our CEO about my briefing statement today, and probably the most important thing is that we have done all the hard work, but now the harder work starts, and we have got to roll up our sleeves. This is something that cannot be measured in budget documents. It is about having good people on the ground, not just a pulse. I think up until the appointment of this

drug and alcohol counsellor from Derby, there was actually a Nyoongah woman who was up here. Again, the effectiveness—it ticks the box, but it is not actually going —

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** They will not speak to her.

**Mr Sanderson:** No. They will do all the head nodding —

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Following on from that, we went to Broome prison, and they have sent up young girls from the University of Western Australia psyches. The men will not talk to them.

**Mr Sanderson:** No.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Who is making these decisions? It is not having a go at women or anything like that; it is just that it is a culture thing. We mentioned that to a couple of the guys in one of the communities we went to, and they said, “We wouldn’t talk to them either if they came out to our community.” They are the little one per cent things that add up. As you say, you have got to take those 10 steps back and look at what we are doing.

**The CHAIRMAN:** One of the key issues too, I think, is that—I would be interested in your comment on that as you look at the community—governments seem to love to do things that you can measure; like \$500 million for housing. At the end of it we can say that there are 500 new houses in the Kimberley for Aboriginal people; terrific. But to put people on the ground they say might cost \$50 million over the next 10 years or whatever. How do you actually measure the improvement in the quality of life of the people who are drinking too much and all that by having the drug and alcohol counsellors there? That is much more difficult to measure. People love things so that you can tick the boxes for KPIs—key performance indicators: “You’re doing a good job; you’re doing a good job”, and often the things that you cannot measure are the things that do not get done because you cannot tick boxes. Would you think that is a fair comment?

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes. One of my last principal postings was Wiluna. You could tell when things were good in Wiluna, because you could sit outside at night and literally not hear people getting the bejesus belted out of them, and when things were good, you could sit outside and it would be nice and still. There were not the violent sort of—it was in your face; there was no way you could escape it. I think one thing that government has to do in a place like Fitzroy Crossing is not go out of this forum of yesterday, today, go back to Perth and say, “Right; we need to throw big numbers of money into Fitzroy Crossing”, because what you see happening up on the hill area—the new school, the new pool, all those things—they are fixing some of the issues but not addressing some of the problems. A case in point is I had a meeting with the new team leader at DCP about six weeks ago now, and we had a tour of the men’s shed and she said, “What a fantastic facility this is.” I said, “Tell me about your new building”, which has probably cost in the vicinity of \$3 million to \$5 million. She said, “Well, we’ve realised that it’s not culturally appropriate.” So are we building better offices or better police stations for white people to sit in, or are we building better facilities that are better resourcing the local community? If you are going to build a big white elephant up on a hill—a big kartiya building—and fill it full of whitefellas, where people do not feel they can go and talk about their issues, talk about their alcohol issues, talk about their emotional issues, then, for goodness sake, do not do it. We have a room at the shed that we call the govvie room, and the whole idea is that a visiting health professional, a job service provider, a drug and alcohol counsellor, a money management adviser—anyone who is visiting can come to the facility and grab Joe off the floor, take him into somewhere where he feels comfortable and talk about stuff. The rest of the group does not know who that person is or what they are talking about or the fact that he is wandering off to a strange building up on the hill. I think the more that we do that, then we are going to gather some momentum.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is interesting. We have a couple of minutes left. Do you want to ask anything else, Peter? If not, I will just ask Heath to perhaps sum up for us, if you would like to sum up in some way. Would you be able to leave that as a supplementary submission for us?

**Mr Sanderson:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That would be good.

**Mr Sanderson:** In summary, what we have got to do is to look at the current resourcing in town here. We have got to look at the appropriateness of the current resourcing and to say what is working, what is not working, what could increase the capacity, because I think at the moment we have overshot the requirement, and I think we are focusing in too much on this end. The case in point is if we have individuals who have identified that they want and need to seek assistance in regard to their alcohol consumption and cannot until they get to the justice system, I think we have really missed the boat, because what sits in behind those people is their families as well, so the hell that they have to go through; and, unfortunately, if someone does get into the justice system, then they can access that counselling, and I think that is entirely wrong. I think that people in their home environments with their kids who are making a stand against drinking, against drugs, against all the other things, and trying to create that stable home environment, if they cannot get the backup support of having a police officer who is local, who is not in Geraldton, who is not in Broome, who understands where Mindi Rardi is, what is your nearest street corner, rather than saying house two or house three, then I think they will feel safe.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** This is at night?

**Mr Sanderson:** This is at night. We have a young two-week-old baby. I would hate to think that in my hour of need, if someone was at my door demanding grog, demanding money, demanding cigarettes, whatever it might be, that I could not pick up the phone. Is it an emergency? Maybe it is not. But in the scheme of Fitzroy and being able to create that home environment, it probably is, because if I do not give the person what they want, or if I do not have the money to give them what they want, if he or she going to —

**The CHAIRMAN:** Become violent, yes.

**Mr Sanderson:** — become violent? Statistics say yes. I think perhaps statistics and figures tell us what we want to hear at times as well, and I think that, yes, the statistics in reportable incidents at the hospital and those things and a number of incarcerations have improved, but I think if you were to compare Fitzroy Crossing with, say, Fremantle, which has a pocket of very elite people but also has a pocket of people who would be probably similar to that of Fitzroy Crossing, I think that those statistics would be skewed somewhat. I think that too often we become hardened up here to walk past people who are being assaulted, to hear the screams of someone getting the strips torn off them or to see people rolling around drunk. I think that too often we just grow to accept that as being the norm. I know that after being up here since 1999, and being not only in Fitzroy, Derby, Wiluna, Carnarvon, Ngalgunya and Meekatharra, that it is not the norm, but the hardest thing is that for anyone who has only ever lived in the Kimberley and been as far as Broome or as far as Kununurra for a basketball carnival, if you always do what you have always done, you will always do what you have always done, and I think that is the case in point.

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** Thanks, Heath.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you very much, Heath. I just need to read the little closing statement. Basically, what it is about is that Hansard will forward you a transcript of what we have talked about, and if you can just correct any errors—particularly if there are any misspellings of some of the place names you have mentioned, you can correct that—and send it back to us. We will send that to you, and you need to return that within 28 days. If you do not send it back, we will assume it is correct, even if it is wrong. If, having left here, you think, “Oh, I wish I had said this or that”, do not try to sort of fit that into the transcript—that is a historic record; feel free to add an extra sheet or two and tell us what you want to tell us, and we will accept that then as a supplementary submission. Just in closing, for the record, we will also accept your opening statement as a supplementary submission to the inquiry.

**Mr Sanderson:** Did you need me to sign that or anything?

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** No, we know where you live!

**The CHAIRMAN:** Perhaps if you just write your name on the bottom of it, that might be useful, so that when David looks at it, he knows whom it is from. Thank you very much, Heath, for your time. We really appreciate it.

**Mr Sanderson:** Not a problem.

**Hearing concluded at 11.03 am**