

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE
COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

REVIEW OF THE FUNCTIONS EXERCISED BY THE COMMISSIONER

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
FRIDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2016**

SESSION THREE

Members

**Ms L.L. Baker (Chair)
Hon Robyn McSweeney (Deputy Chair)
Ms E. Evangel
Hon Sally Talbot**

Hearing commenced at 12.08 pm

Ms MICHELLE LOUISE FYFE

Assistant Commissioner, State Crime, Western Australia Police, examined:

Mr GARY DREIBERGS

Deputy Commissioner, Specialist Support, Western Australia Police, examined:

Mr DUANE BELL

Assistant Commissioner, Judicial Services, Western Australia Police, examined:

Mr PAUL BOULT

Detective Inspector, Sex Crime Division, Western Australia Police, examined:

The CHAIR: On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, thank you for appearing today. Our committee is looking at the review of the Commissioner for Children and Young People Act and the recommendations in it, specifically. You have met us before but Michelle has not, so Lisa Baker, member for Maylands, chair of the committee; Hon Robyn McSweeney, a member for South West Region in the Legislative Council and the deputy chair; Eleni Evangel, member for Perth; and Hon Sally Talbot, who is also an upper house member for South West Region. You know this is a formal proceeding of the Parliament. Therefore, it has the same ins and outs of the proceedings of the house itself. The committee is not asking you to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, but it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading is a contempt of Parliament. This is a public hearing so Hansard is here. If you refer to any documents during your evidence, it would be great if you could give us the full title.

Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

[12.10 pm]

The Witnesses: Yes.

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

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheets?

The Witnesses: Yes.

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

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIR: As I said, we have been on a long and very complex journey, looking at the children’s commissioner’s role and the value it can add to what is already quite a complex field around this broad area. We have asked you to come back in because we have our ideas into some semblance of an early draft. We wanted to, first of all, send it back to what we consider to be one of the key stakeholders in this discussion—that is, the police, WAPOL. You have had a bit of a look at our ideas around a three-pronged approach to start with. If I refer to the documents that you have been given, the three areas are education outreach, information program referral, and monitoring and oversight. I should probably just say, have no fear that monitoring and oversight is a Big Brother role that we would legislate to beat up on police. That is not what we mean that to be.

Apart from the fact that the children's commissioner has an independent role, as you well know, to speak about whatever they feel brave enough to speak about, we are not suggesting changing anything around that part of the legislation.

I suppose I should start by saying: have you got any initial comments you wanted to make; and, if not, just tell us what you think about what we have drafted?

Mr Dreibergs: The comments around monitoring and oversight are interesting for us because we had a discussion as a team; we went through the document and had a look at some of those issues. For monitoring and oversight, we understand if there is a requirement for external agencies or other agencies that have not had monitoring or oversight historically, then so be it. For us, we think that there is significant monitoring and oversight of our activities already but that does not mean we are not welcoming of any feedback from anybody along the way if they identify practices or things that can be done better.

In terms of education and outreach, absolutely. If there is a role for the children's commissioner to educate, provide that activity for us, that community engagement for young people and engaging young people, anything to do in that space, when you think about the workload that young people bring to us as a general rule, anything in that space we would support.

Information delivery and program referral—we also discussed that anything in terms of research that we could use or another agency that would do research or our behalf or we could even refer to certainly would be beneficial as well. And also for us, if they are identifying best practice in dealing with certain situations and we are getting the feedback relative to that, we are more than happy to engage. If the children's commissioner reaches into WA Police when everything is up and running, we certainly have some capacity to work together in those two areas. There is a lot of work that can be done in the children's space in terms of support for young people.

The CHAIR: Have you met with the commissioner yet? Have you had a chance to meet with the commissioner?

Mr Dreibergs: No.

Mr Boulton: We had some correspondence from him the other week but, no, since this has come, we just held that off because we would have been asking similar questions.

The CHAIR: That would make sense. That is fine. I hope that you are impressed when you meet him. We met him formally for the first time this morning. He addressed all the issues that we were interested in, as a kick-off with it anyway.

I am really interested in one aspect of this which is not clear when you read the paperwork that I sent, I suspect. It is particularly in relation to the model that is being used in other countries and in other states that is commonly referred to as trauma-informed practice. We heard evidence since we last saw you from a victim of abuse who basically, if I can paraphrase, told us that she would have been dead several times had it not been for the strength and the support she got from the one officer that she originally reported to. When it had gone way outside of really his purview to keep involved after two years of breaks and deferrals and adjournments and whatnot, he still was available at the end of the phone to support this one individual and still turned up at court. Really, the person would simply not be alive if it was not for that connection. I am really interested in the trauma recovery model and what your impression is because you guys work with the best and the worst of our services and our community, I guess. I am really interested whether or not you think that mindset, that culture, permeates all the agencies that deal with children in these circumstances. What is your position on understanding what is called the trauma recovery model or anything around that area?

Mr Boulton: Reading the letter that came with trauma-informed practice, I said those words, that definition, does not mean so much to us. But when we go into it and have a look at what are we doing around the trauma-informed practice, like speaking to our trainer in the specialist child interview area and speaking to one of the clinical psychologists to get a better idea of what we are

actually doing in this space—certainly in the child abuse and child assessment interview team, which is now 10 of the larger child abuse squad, and other squads where they are exposed to certain crime types, I suppose—we start with the workers. They obviously come in for psychological testing. They have access to wellbeing surveys and there is a dedicated clinical psychologist. It is very apparent with the royal commission going on the sort of services perhaps those victims got; we have a stark contrast going on with the type of services that current victims have. This is one of the things that we are looking at with George Jones. Have we started to measure the services of some of the victims from 10 years ago and how they were treated then and certainly the way victims are treated now? That starts, of course, still in the framework of trauma-informed practice. What happens when the child comes into the interview, which is the first place? Probably the most a child interacts with a police officer is in that interview. After that, we generally interact with the parent. It sounded like you were talking to an adult victim.

The CHAIR: Yes, but it was somebody a long time ago.

Mr Boulton: I say this, obviously, in the context of children. Through the whole training of that, there is a whole range of trauma-informed practices in relation to the welfare of the child. The child comes first and the interview is part of a larger process. It is not like the child is made to think that everything stands and falls on that. They are all designed, obviously to support the child. We are trying to minimise the trauma they are exposed to. Going off what you were talking about earlier that the victim had to rely on a police officer, there is no doubt that some victims will have a very good relationship with the case officer. We often hear this coming back, that that assists them in their recovery. Of course, what we are doing at George Jones—and I feel very strongly about it—is that of course we are very busy. We have one victim and then the next day we have another victim, and that is where the advocate comes into it. We have that person who can be beside the victim, not just with the police, but across all other services, and they continue the whole way through and beyond the court system because, of course, once the court stops, generally speaking, our involvement with the witness finishes. That approach at George Jones with the advocate and the other services come in together at the very beginning, and then, obviously, once we have finished, go beyond that. I think it goes toward how we are looking in the future around trauma-informed practice for victims. It is one way of putting it, I suppose.

[12.20 pm]

Mr Bell: I will also just take that slightly off. My areas also include youth policing and victim support. For us, trauma-informed care and practice, generally the materials and education are around these acute areas, so child protection, family service very much and child abuse. I have two areas: our youth crime intervention officers, which are dealing with young people who are offending or at risk, and our victims. But focusing on our YCIOs, as we call them, it is very hard often to discern between our offenders and what will come to be victims for other matters that may get disclosed, so it is important for us to understand how we can tailor that service better. One area we feel would be of benefit in education and research is to bring a bit more frontend and more general some of the trauma-informed care and practice so that we are ready; when there is a disclosure or something else, we are doing things right there. Now we are doing as best we can by having that victim focus and understanding all the care principles, but we just want to make sure that part is right, so if the children's commissioner had a look at that area and provided some material around that, it would be useful as well.

The CHAIR: That is very helpful, thank you, and really helpful from you too, detective inspector. I suppose this is such a complex area with so many people and when you look at the facts, as we all know, most people do not disclose. If it has not come out, they do not disclose until adulthood, so you then have in front of you someone sitting or standing who has probably developed a long history of vulnerabilities as a direct result of that. It is a really complicated area. Do you think the role that we have mapped out for the commissioner, with your concerns about monitoring managed,

is the right role? Clearly, what Blaxell originally wanted was one person to stay with the person and to report at one place, and then that one person to go through the whole journey with that child, and that is not what we are recommending. We need to be quite clear with you that that is very different from what Blaxell originally said, but not so different from what he said in subsequent evidence to this committee. What do you think of the three-pronged approach that we have put forward? I know you have covered some of your initials. Do you think it will work? Can you see any gaps? Are you cranky that we have not said one person through the whole journey? Tell us a bit about your feelings.

Mr Dreibergs: I guess we have got significant details about how things will actually work out in operation, so how they structure up—there are a lot of systems and that to be established.

The CHAIR: Sure.

Mr Dreibergs: But what I would say is that one of the issues, more broadly speaking from a policing perspective, that we are grappling with even now is the management of victims of serious crime and the management of victims more generally—so, generally victims, but also victims of serious crime. The issue for us is that police officers are very good in dealing with the first instance, so the police officers come in and deal with what they have to do, get the report, take the information and have that family liaison, particularly with the more serious offending or serious victims. But after that police officers are not trained as counsellors or people who can provide that ongoing support to people other than through the process of the justice system when we are giving them advice about certain stages that are coming up and provide them some information about how that is going to unfold for them. We also find ourselves in a difficult situation if they look to the police to be the answer for all. When they engage police, the answer from police is basically a court outcome or a conviction or even a charge. If we do not get a charge or if we do not get a conviction if we do get a charge, victims suddenly feel let down by police because that is the outcome we deliver; we do not deliver anything else in terms of—although our officers have that humane approach, we do not provide that sort of counselling or anything like that. For us, that is a very important part of the process. How it is, where it sits or how that is managed is a big issue for whoever is going to deliver that service to the victim for the long term.

The CHAIR: I was just going to say that George Jones is doing a good job at filling some of the gaps with a child advocacy centre.

Mr Boulton: No doubt some of the anecdotal feedback that we are getting—we are doing an interim evaluation at the moment but without a doubt, when you put all the services together, as we expected, it works really well. I have just made a couple of little broad notes. We are a lot more flexible, and response times in some instances have increased. The workload has actually increased by those officers down there and they are sustained in that environment. We have the psychological consultations happening very quickly and they are feeding in when the interviews happen. With all of this, we have the capacity to provide for the whole family, and I have been getting a lot of positive feedback. They might be coming in to have an interview that relates to a criminal matter, but really it is only a very small part of that. I always try to think about it in the context of a child. I think, “Well, okay; a child 11 and upwards, nowadays with access to the systems that they have, can make a lot of decisions and cause actions to happen.” It probably becomes a little bit problematic without a trusted adult, so I am always thinking, “How does a child make a complaint themselves without that adult?” That is sort of looking at what the children’s commissioner has been asked to do—provide those sort of pathways, I suppose, to a degree. When we look at the child safe standards that Victoria has got, they are the sort of things I read through and they are the sort of things we are trying to do at George Jones.

The CHAIR: This is the mandated standards that have just come in.

Mr Boulton: Yes. They are the things that we try and hit.

The CHAIR: Do you think it would help Western Australia if we had something similar?

Mr Boulton: I think there is no doubt, and I go back to the royal commission again, that we expect people who look after kids to be well-intentioned, and they are well-intentioned but we all need some framework to work around. If we are working from a standard one, even if it is non-regulatory, the commissioner then has that monitoring role over adherence to those standards. That is not a regulatory adherence and 99 per cent of the time you do not need that. Certainly, all those organisations within which child abuse may occur, which feed into us—we would hope that that would reduce that because if it reduces that, that reduces what comes to us. We have to look at the resource effects of what the commissioner is going to do; that is one aspect of it. Without a doubt, that general catch-all for everyone—that includes police—we look at that and see how that applies to us. We apply it in different ways and probably more formally, certainly across non-government agencies. That is where we go back to what Mr Dreiberger was just saying about the education and research and informing best-practice training. I have found in the last couple of years that there are so many different agencies now with an interest in children, the bureaucracy of agencies is very difficult to deal with. If there is a body, the commissioner's office, that has that, I call it "oversight"—I know that we do not like using that word, but basically looking over it like a sheepdog and keeping everyone together and feeding in best practice and all the rest of it.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: You must be a farm boy—are you?

Mr Boulton: Not a farm boy but I have to play sheepdog a lot of the time!

That sort of thing, for me, I see for the commissioners so everyone interacts with them. As soon as we put a regulatory oversight into that body, by its nature, organisations set up structures to then deal with that body, so is the information exchange as good as it could be? You have to give with one and take with the other in a way.

[12.30 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That was very interesting and it sort of adds to my two questions. Clearly, and I think we have made this quite plain to you before, one of the things motivating the committee is this increased alarm about exactly what you said: the number of people that have a stake in the protection of children and the fact that they then end up, because of the siloing and everybody's little patches, not talking to each other. It would be nice if they were all reinventing the wheel but, unfortunately, I think the metaphor needs to change and it is like they all dropped the ball. We have been very impressed with this document we have just been given by Health. Have you seen this—"Guidelines for Protecting Children 2015"? It is a very impressive document.

Mr Dreiberger: I have not seen it.

Mr Boulton: No.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It is interesting that Health has put this out, but you wonder how they have done it and who they have talked to.

The CHAIR: How many other people are putting one out?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes. We are going to end up with 15 versions of this, all of which will be slightly different. I think that when it gets to that monitoring and oversight role, that is the sort of thing the committee is talking about rather than the kind of guy with a whip or a watchdog. The committee has really stumbled over this notion of trauma-informed practice and it has been quite a revelation for us to start overlaying what we have heard previously with that new advice we have received and are continuing to hear advice through that prism. We are convinced the ChildFIRST assessment process is now rightly regarded as world's best practice; people are very impressed with what you are doing. I will take you through a very specific example and if you want to refer to real-life examples, we can always go into closed session. I want to ask you: What happens in your process if you discover that, for example, a child or young person was self-

harming while you were going through all the processes of interviewing them and collecting evidence and taking them through the court processes? Does the ChildFIRST assessment process have a way of calling in other people if you see something like self-harm or any of the other myriad things that can happen to young people as they express that trauma?

Mr Boulton: I have the seven principles listed here and I read them again this morning. I am going to repeat it because I am happy to keep repeating it about what has happened at George Jones in what we call the MIST—multi-investigation and support team. It also happens in the child’s test and interview team where we have ChildFIRST co-located. ChildFIRST provide an interviewing arm supporting us, plus they are also our pathway into, obviously, district CPFS offices. If we are talking about early in the piece and a child comes in, they will have their evidentiary interview. The CPFS interviewer is either interviewing or monitoring it. We then go to a strategy meeting and discuss it. If protective issues have arisen out of that, and “protective” is really, obviously, protective from the offender, any of these other issues that come up would be addressed there at the frontend if we were aware of them. We do not become aware of a lot of those early on. Certainly in Armadale, because we have all those services at the frontend, there is actually an example I could probably use because no names are mentioned on it that is very similar to something like that that occurred, but I did not bring it. A victim came in and was interviewed. Whilst they were being interviewed, the interviewers were a bit concerned about some psychological issues. Police may not be experts in it, but obviously we know enough to recognise if something is not right. They stopped the interview and went to speak to the psychologist. The psychologist, very soon after the interview, has spoken to the family —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: This is all done on site, is it?

Mr Boulton: This is all done on site. That was dealt with right then and there. As you are going beyond that very initial process into the court process, and one of the things that encouraged me towards the system is that—and I know from experience that as you go towards court with your victim, inevitably and unfortunately, you go towards court and you separate from the victim. There is just no doubt that that occurs. You do have contact, but you separate. Those issues that you are talking about—further trauma to that victim—are not going to be apparent to the police officer. This is when I like that advocate; I like that person who is there because they become the trusted person.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Who moves in to occupy that space that was taken up in the early stages by the police officer or police interviewer?

Mr Boulton: At the moment, if the matter is referred through to CPFS or a non-government service, they would move into that space. Often those referrals are for particular issues. At the end of the day, I suppose, when a child or young person exhibits or states that they have some other issue, irrespective of which agency it is, it still relies on that person to respond to that and refer. To me, if you have the advocate who has no connection to any therapeutic service, when they hear it, there is no interest in anything apart from the best interest of the child and family, so they can go and liaise with those services. That is why I said that is so valuable. To me, it fills that gap very nicely.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So that example you were just using where the services of the psychologist were brought in fairly early to resolve something that was happening on that day —

Mr Boulton: We are talking about within hours; like, when it is happening, at the very front end.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes. That is through George Jones?

Mr Boulton: That happened at the George Jones.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So what happens if somebody is not going through George Jones—you know, if they are in the Kimberley or Albany?

Mr Boulton: When we are talking about a child abuse matter, CPFS are always involved in that because there is a strategy meeting and it is a joint investigation. Police would rely on CPFS to take that over, obviously, and deal with the child protection and issues that arise from that. That is the purpose of that arrangement, that we can continue on and focus on the safety of the child first, always, and then, after that, it is that joint police investigation, protective issues, and naturally we go in the investigation line and they will start dealing with it, so they pick it up. Really, I suppose it is the strength of their internal processes that we rely on or the victim would rely on.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Okay.

Mr Bell: I will just add to the answer to your question about as the court process continues, you also have the victim support service run by the Department of the Attorney General that fills that role as they are going along, and they are able then to make a referral —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes; okay. So, if they were not under the umbrella of child protection, they may well —

Mr Bell: Regardless, they will still have access to VSS as well, so that fits that role to support the victim through that process, and then what we get is residual ones from police or residual ones from CPFS that will connect with the case and continue through, but that is the specific role of VSS.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Okay. The second issue I want to raise with you is the very interesting one you raised, Assistant Commissioner Bell, about the place at which the person's status as a victim and as an offender—not necessarily a perpetrator, because that has a very specific connotation, but a victim and an offender—where that overlaps. How does that work in practice? Can you talk us through a situation? Domestic violence, I suppose, would be an obvious one where, if you have somebody who is the perpetrator of family and domestic violence, it is luck—we know now that they have been a victim in the past or might still be being a victim. How does your process handle that person?

[12.40 pm]

Mr Bell: It is probably more often or frequent where we are dealing with someone because we have detected them committing offences or something like that, so we are dealing with them as an offender and through that sometimes there is disclosure. I know when I was a young detective I dealt with a young guy, a number of burglary offences, during that about where he was living and what came—there was child abuse against him. We basically switch off that system because that is the primary one, and basically move across into our child abuse and just switch systems. I think my point was more about helping our police officers have trauma-informed practice being consistent with the trauma-informed practice early on, so when they are dealing with someone who is an offender, they are not doing anything that would harm that switch over to going to victim.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: And also, presumably, they are alert to other signals.

Mr Bell: Exactly.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So that is much more the sort of material that is covered in this book, which is what you have been providing to your officers.

Mr Bell: That is why we look at those sorts of materials, and, unfortunately, that underscores your point: everyone does something from their own particular part, and I think the commissioner's role would be great to have something umbrella, and then if you do need to particularise that to your agency part, you can take it, but it gives us a good standard to work from. In that way, your educational research—but you also asked about information to do with the program limit . It is that clearinghouse part as well that we have someone there, so that is why it is useful to us, but at this point in time it is basically during that process we actually do develop quite a lot of trust, and particularly our youth crime intervention officers that are there. Whilst it came into our service, if you get what I mean, as an offender, we are trying to stop them committing offences again, so it is

intervention. During that process, it may lead to a disclosure, and basically it is then a referral across into child abuse. I just want to make sure our people on that side have some better information around that so it is consistent.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is interesting. I want to underline the point that the Chair made, that in this hearing we held with this person who had a direct experience of being a sexual assault victim—her story was just ghastly—she now has recovered to the extent that she teaches about trauma-informed practice. The police were the heroes of the story; it was quite moving. But the thing that was slightly worrying was that it felt to us as if that particular officer had not, in a sense, been acting as a police officer—does that make sense?

The CHAIR: Yes, it was going above and beyond, really.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes. This woman had his mobile number and she used to talk to him at midnight when she was having a crisis.

Mr Boulton: I do not think—obviously, it is great that that particular police officer did it, but as you were talking about it, I was thinking, “I’ve heard that story many times.” One recently we had with a junior detective dealing with victims from the royal commission, and her involvement with those victims, and some of those victims actually come back to us as offenders; we are getting each way.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is part of the issue, obviously, then, isn’t it?

Mr Boulton: She was having contact around the clock, so you do get that more than probably you do here. I suppose some victims simply are not articulate enough, but, as a norm, I think the workload is what obviously lessens the ability to do that.

Mr Bell: This is across the board. When we recently had the police officer of the year, a number came up, no matter whether it is our major accident squad, so those who go out to the crashes that result in a fatality, those police officers will be with the families for years. If people get a case, they will see that through and go, and we like that. They are committed to it, and will come through. We do need to be careful about that balance about being too reliant on the officer and coming through and having it, and part of it is the officers recognise there is a gap, and if there is a service gap, they will fill it to make sure, because they deal with this person —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Do not misunderstand; I might have put that rather clumsily. I was not indicating anything other than the fact that when you followed the narrative that she gave us, it seemed to us that there was one outstanding person who saw the problems and was prepared to respond. But clearly, if everybody had been aware, if their consciousness had been at the same level as that police officer, then the whole thing would have de-escalated and she would have emerged a happier person more quickly, and the load would have been spread.

Mr Bell: Yes. I suppose I was going to that of the part about —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I was not indicating that other officers do not do that, because I am sure they do.

Mr Bell: No, they do; what I am saying is that it is across the board, so it is very common, but there is also the danger that they get reliant and we are not the right ones to be looking after their welfare at some point, so we carefully monitor that. On one hand, we encourage all our officers to provide that sort of throughput right to the end of the case, but we also have to be careful, particularly around these matters.

Ms Fyfe: I think we also have to take into consideration caring for our officers. Whilst that victim sees him as a hero and he has given of his own private time, probably taken time away from his family and other parts of his life, and has done a wonderful thing for that victim, we have to also consider, as an agency, how we take care of him. My history is that I worked in a child abuse unit for many, many years as a junior detective, so I have some understanding of the close association that you do form, particularly with adult victims. As Paul said, when they are children, they form

attachments to other people, particularly when they are young, but adult victims, when they come back to talk about childhood trauma, do form attachments with the police officers that listen to their story and believe their story. That can be very, very difficult for the officer themselves. Whilst you want to do the right thing by the victim and you always want to be there, we have to be very careful that our officers maintain a balance, because it can be quite damaging for them. It is not an easy piece of work to do. It can be quite damaging.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It is interesting; there were two other heroes in her story who were also police officers, and they were the young—whatever you call them —

Mr Dreibergs: Constables—the attendees?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes, who pulled up at Midland train station and found her sitting on the platform. She gave us a lovely account of their interaction. She said that if she had been them, she would have just walked away from her, because she was behaving so appallingly, but these two young officers really took the time to find out what they could do to help her.

Mr Boulton: I suppose, just an anecdote to that, I was talking with one of the officers that works at the MIST and she had previously worked with me in an area in Armadale where we had—we call it—the family crime team, so we were getting a lot closer to the victims there. I just spoke to her and she said, “Oh, I just got off the phone with a victim, for 40 minutes or an hour speaking to them. What’s it like at George Jones?” I said, “It’s fantastic because I know I’ve got the advocate there.” That was really, not her wanting to get away from the victim, but simply that she is busy. She has a lot to do; she has the next victim to deal with. It is nice to know you have got that trusted person, I think. The advocate is really a trusted person that the victim can deal with.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It is the team and the relationship between the professionals who perform it.

Mr Boulton: No doubt there are silos across the childcare sector, but the goodwill and intention of all those people, I think, there is no doubt that their aim is the wellbeing of children, and we battle every day with the rules and regulations that we have to. But, I think, at the end of the day, no-one can say—certainly whilst I have been at the child abuse squad and working with ChildFIRST. Of course, we have a lot of issues in the department, as you would expect, but we have always managed to ensure that the safety of the child comes first and is looked after. Really, once you have done that, the rest of it is what we are paid to do. So, we always make sure, no matter what conflicts are between us, that we deal with that at the front end. Without a doubt, we are close together. Even when there are silos, there is still that coming together of well-intentioned and response.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: When George Jones centre was first being set up—well, a few years ago now—the police hierarchy did not want the interviews out at the George Jones centre. Now, I have just noticed that there has been a change over the last few years. Does ChildFIRST actually refer back to the George Jones centre? Are you doing that now or are you still keeping the interviews at ChildFIRST, or sometimes are you saying, “Go out to the George Jones centre”? Is there more cooperation there now?

Mr Boulton: The George Jones trial, the intention was—as it worked out, we had four districts and about a quarter of the work came from the south east metropolitan district, so it worked quite well for us because of the number of teams we had the office, so that any work that came out of that police district—and we also had to juggle a little bit because Cannington and Armadale CPFS districts do not quite align with us—so, any work that comes out of that, we refer them to the George Jones centre for specialist child interview. Of course, if the victim lives in Kensington and it is more convenient to come across to Perth, then we bring them across here. So, we are always mindful of that, but certainly we do go to George Jones for the vast majority of those interviews, and we have even started to capture more of Rockingham and Peel. We used to go down there and do those interviews, so now we will try to get them to come to us as opposed to having to come to Perth or we have to go down and do it in a police station office, so the facilities are not as good.

[12.50 pm]

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: That is good; police hierarchy must have changed a little.

The CHAIR: Yes, very good indeed. It is good to hear that.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Of course, it has.

The CHAIR: Were there any other questions? I think it is lovely, if I can just be forgiven for a slight flippancy, that you have an acronym called MIST, because this whole journey has been a whole lot more like pea soup fog for me with the plethora of agencies that are involved, and trying to see less fog and a whole lot clearer environment would be really good. So that is great.

Mr Boulton: The acronym was chosen because it was to try and obviously bring those children through that mist and make it more clear. So, there is a reason for the acronym.

The CHAIR: It works for me! I have just a quick question, and you may not be able to answer this, but it would be good if you could just chat about it for a couple of minutes for *Hansard*. The committee is interested in knowing the costs involved in child abuse to the community, to the government, to the society.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: How long is a piece of string?

The CHAIR: Yes. We know that there is no clear answer to that, but you have just raised an issue which is very interesting, which is the additional cost of the link between an offender and a victim. I just wondered if you wanted to put something on the record about how you see that influencing the costs to the community.

Mr Dreier: A significant percentage of crime relates to youth crime, so whether that is an outcome of child abuse or children not being well looked after or neglected in the first instance, or it could be just a poor home environment for a start, the cost of crime broadly is a reflection of how children are brought up and looked after. Then, when we start getting to the specifics about child abuse, the cost is significant when we are going into regional and remote locations. As you would be aware, we have dealt with a lot of stuff historically in the Kimberley and also the goldfields, so there are a lot of problems with the tyranny of distance and being able to expand your services so far. Effectively, neglected children, or children who are either abused or just not well looked after or are not brought up appropriately to be good law-abiding members of our community, is significant. Most of our volume crime issues and our lower level end stuff starts with children who are not well looked after.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much and, for the record, it is a good thing to have your comments on that. That just about winds up what we wanted to say, but is there anything that you feel that you need to tell us about what we are proposing at the moment, because I am more than happy to hear it? You have already given us feedback, but is there anything you wanted to say?

Mr Dreier: No; just thanks for the opportunity to come in. Dealing with youth is a big issue for WA Police and we know that, absolutely, we are just one very small part and anything we can do to contribute, because it helps us, we are happy to be a part of it.

The CHAIR: Every day you are presented with other instances of the horrible costs of this, and it has been a week of that, really, has it not?

Mr Dreier: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of the hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. If you make any changes, please return the transcript within 10 days of the date of the letter attached. If it is not returned, we will deem it correct. New material cannot be added, but if you want to add anything else, please just send it as a supplementary submission for us to consider. Thank you all very much. I deeply appreciate the amount of time and resources that you have committed to coming here. I can well understand that.

Hearing concluded at 12.54 pm
