

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATION

PARENTAL SUPPORT AND RESPONSIBILITY BILL 2005

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 5 APRIL 2006**

SESSION TWO

Members

Hon Graham Giffard (Chair)
Hon Giz Watson (Deputy Chair)
Hon Ken Baston
Hon Peter Collier
Hon Sally Talbot

Hearing commenced at 10.50 am**HUDD, MS SUSAN****Director, Policy and Program Development,
Department for Community Development, examined:****HANCOCK, MR JOHN****Director, Operational Policy,
Department for Community Development, examined:**

CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome you to the meeting today. Thank you for attending to assist the committee with its inquiries. You will have signed a document entitled "Information for Witnesses". Have you read and understood that document?

The Witnesses: We have.

CHAIR: Thank you. Today's discussions are public. They are being recorded and a copy of the transcript will be provided to you. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, the transcript should not be made public. I advise you that premature publication of the transcript or inaccurate disclosure of public evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege. If you wish to make a confidential statement, you can ask that the committee consider taking your statement in private. If the committee agrees, the public will be asked to leave the room before we continue.

We have some questions about the bill that we intend to ask you this morning. However, before I move to that, do you wish to make an opening statement or any general comments about the bill?

We have the submission that the Department for Community Development prepared for the Office of Crime Prevention in March 2004, during the public consultation phase. In your opening remarks to us, we invite you to make any comments you wish about that submission, and any subsequent developments you may wish to draw to our attention.

Ms Hudd: The general issues we raised in our submission have been identified in many of the previous submissions from other people appearing before the committee. We believe there are strengths in the legislation that will address some of the issues we have relating to the cooperation between agencies to provide services to clients. I refer to a broad range of services - not only parenting services - that, for example, support parents with drug and alcohol dependency or who are homeless. We believe the bill demonstrates the responsibilities of parents and government in the provision of services for those families. That is a particularly strong point in this legislation.

However, we have some difficulties with the order. The contracts are very good, and we support those in principle. We have concerns about how this will impact upon Aboriginal children and culturally and linguistically diverse children. Nothing that we have put in place since then has addressed these issues, particularly in remote and rural areas. We have not yet taken pilot projects to those areas. There is also the issue of availability of services. When the pilot projects are rolled out through various areas, we need to ensure that our department and other agencies have access to those services. Without this, the contract or agreement could not be put in place.

We also have concerns about how this will fit in with our own legislation, which has been in place for slightly over a month. A lot of it is untried and untested at this point. We are unclear about what the relationship between the two parts will be. We have been involved in the roll-out in the south east metro area and in Midland. John has had a significant role in that, which is why I thought it important for him to be here today. That is all we really wanted to say at this point.

CHAIR: John, you are in charge of the roll-out of the services. This has just started in Midland as well, has it?

Mr Hancock: The actual roll-out has been managed by the Office of Crime Prevention. I am a member of the senior officers group from all the agencies, who meet to give guidance and to make sure that departments are included in the roll-out of the program.

CHAIR: Is there anything you would like to add that you think should have been included in the bill and has not been?

Mr Hancock: No.

Ms Hudd: I don't think so. In our submission, most of the issues we identified were picked up by the Office of Crime Prevention in the final paper.

CHAIR: Turning to page two of the Department of Community Development submission, it says in the second paragraph that the department works actively to include and support families. It refers to supporting families in the management of their children. Do you view the parenting agreement and order concept as a recognition that these welfare methods of intervention no longer work?

Ms Hudd: Our position is that there are a lot of parents out there who need a lot of help. There are not enough services available to meet the needs of many of those parents. Those services are effective where the parents are willing partners with whatever service provider is available. Our point is - and many people who have been here before me have agreed - that where parents are coerced into an arrangement with a service provider, there is no longer any guarantee of a positive result for the child or for the family. You develop a different relationship, especially where a person is coerced who does not want to engage with the services being offered. When you are dealing with parents, they have certain rights and responsibilities pertaining to their children, and the right to get involved in the manner they see fit. Our legislation has the ultimate coercion, which is that if there is significant harm or the likelihood of significant harm to the child, then we can actually remove the child. That is an ultimate penalty, if you like. However, that always focuses upon the wellbeing of the child, not upon the fulfilment of parental responsibility.

CHAIR: That takes us to the next paragraph in the submission where reference is made to a child-centred approach. Do you think that this will change that emphasis on the child-centred approach and instead focus more on parents? How do you think that will impact upon your approach?

[11.00 am]

Mr Hancock: Our new act allows us to work with all families in a child-centred family support approach in the first instance. That is our preferred way of working. The research shows that if we are to have good outcomes for children, we need to work with families and communities in the first instance. The use of coercive order should only be used as the very last resort when everything else has failed. In answer to your question, when families and parents are able to engage with government services, and if they are available, then there are good outcomes. When they cannot engage for all sorts of reasons - it might be because of their own history or that their own wellbeing is not in a good state, or their attitude to government or whatever - then an incredible amount of resources is used to try to get those parents on side in the first instance before we can provide the remedial or therapeutic services. There is an old adage that you can drive a horse to water but you cannot make it drink. We could use an order to get parents into a room, we could use an order to bring parents before a court, but what order will make them do what they should be doing, unless they are willing? It was mentioned before that if a parent was from the middle-class or was a

privileged member of the community, the threat of an order would probably get a result. But if parents are battling a whole lot of other issues - such as poverty, domestic violence and drugs - the fact that their kid is not going to school and is running amuck in the community is just another difficulty that they are trying to face. If someone threatens them with an order before the court, so what - they have been there before. Is that going to work? From our experience in using that coercive approach, it does not work, but it does bring people - parents especially - before another body, such as a community body or a court, where they are brought to account for what is happening. Whether that ends up in a good outcome, the research seems to say that you cannot guarantee it.

I feel as though I am rambling a bit, but I have tried to get the point across that if something is going to work for these families then we have to engage and work with them and we have to do a hell of a lot of work doing that before we can do anything else. With the particular families that we are wanting to focus on, just bringing them before a body and saying they have to do it, and if they do not do it this will happen to them, will not work. It might work with me, but it will not work with these families.

Hon PETER COLLIER: You are saying that is the consummate deterrent?

Mr Hancock: Yes.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Ideally, for the consummate deterrent you need to have undergone a number of processes?

Mr Hancock: Yes. The bill does ask that that happen.

CHAIR: So you would not be coming in at day one and telling people what they have to do, because that is not how the bill is framed?

Mr Hancock: No, but if the delinquent parents will not engage and you believe they have the capacity to provide guidance to their children or meet their responsibilities, then putting an order on them according to that bill is the way to go. The point I am trying to make is that a lot of the families with these kids who are causing difficulties do not have that capacity, for all sorts of reasons.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I understand where you are coming from. Can I get some clarification from your experience? You are talking about punitive action with the order. Do you think punitive action will be an effective tool when talking about delinquent families?

Mr Hancock: On families who in all sense and purpose have the capacity and should be providing good guidance to their children and accepting their responsibilities, I think it would. That is how most of our laws work: the threat of something is going to happen to you if you do not follow through on it.

Hon PETER COLLIER: The assumption is the ultimate deterrent?

Mr Hancock: That is right. As a responsible member of the community and a member of the community who wants to be included and respected, just the threat of that will make me do things.

Ms Hudd: Our experience in child protection certainly indicates that. You work with families as much as you can, but if they are unable to make the changes that you require of them to keep their children safe and we remove the children, those who are able to certainly make the changes over time and the children are returned to them. But a very small group is unable to make those changes no matter what services you provide, and those children remain in care for long term.

Hon PETER COLLIER: If I can just recap on a point with a previous witness. To clarify this, we are referring to a miniscule proportion of parents and children?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You are going a little further than that and saying that it is not just a miniscule proportion, that those people do not exist? You have identified the people who might be in that category as “delinquent parents”?

Mr Hancock: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You have given them access; you have made the services available to them on a voluntary basis. They have not availed themselves of those services, so the bill then assumes that you slap a mandatory order on them. I think the previous witness referred to the fact that it is a fantastic deterrent for middle-class people. Those people would say that they had better do this otherwise they will have some order served on them. You are suggesting that the people who do not respond to the voluntary system are so dysfunctional that they will not respond to the mandated order?

Ms Hudd: That would be our experience, but you need to remember that our philosophy and background experience is working with some of the most difficult child protection families. Whether there is a group slightly outside of that that would respond to an order, I do not know. I do not think we will know that until the services have been in place a bit longer.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Just to clarify it: you did agree that the number is miniscule?

Ms Hudd: I do not know. I think it might be.

CHAIR: Somewhere between miniscule and zero?

Ms Hudd: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You may be aware, if you have looked at the evidence of previous witnesses, that many of them have suggested that the provisions included in this bill would be more appropriately picked up by the new Children and Community Services Act. Would you like to comment on that? Do you agree with that assertion?

Ms Hudd: John and I have had lots of conversations about this, because we know this is a key issue that has been raised by many of the other submissions. From our perspective we have some concerns about that, principally because the Children and Community Services Act is primarily child-focused. It is about what happens to a child and how the department responds to that, usually in emergency situations, although there are many provisions for our family support role. Our understanding of the bill is that it is primarily based on a child’s behaviour and then the impact is to the parent rather than the child. We are seeing them almost as the opposite sides of the coin and, from our perspective, even though I know many other people say that it is a good fit, we are not sure that it is at all. It would give us some problems in terms of how we respond to our families and how we work with them at a field level. We have a history, as I am sure you are aware, of being coercive with our clients, particularly Aboriginal families, and this new legislation is trying to move as far away from that as possible and work with families in a strengthening and capacity-building way. From the department’s perspective there are some dilemmas for us if that is going to be the government’s decision.

[11.10 am]

Mr Hancock: Our act does cater for the bill up to the agreement, but once you start getting into an order there is no provision in our act for that. What we call child-centred family support responses are catered for within our act, because it is about the child’s wellbeing. However, once we move into the statutory investigation of families and statutory intervention into families in terms of child abuse, the order of the bill would not fit into that part of the act.

Ms Hudd: The other issue for us is that having it as a separate piece of legislation means that other agencies have a responsibility to it in the provision of services to families. I talked about that earlier. If there is any possibility that it comes into our legislation, a section of our act enables us to ask agencies to provide services, but it certainly does not - this is a personal statement - have the

same strength that is in the bill. The ability for other agencies to provide services is less stated in our act than it is in the bill.

CHAIR: That is the reason you cited stand-alone legislation in your submission.

Ms Hudd: Interagency services or our ability to access services has been a consistent problem for the department. We would like to see the bill stand separately because of that if nothing else.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Mr Hancock, I would like you to clarify what you said. I am unclear about whether you are talking about your act or the bill when say that you are covered up to the point of the orders. Clearly the new act goes way beyond that into the area of abuse.

Mr Hancock: That is right. Section 31 of the new act allows us to take information from the public about concerns for a child's wellbeing. Section 32 outlines a number of different things that the department can do. The first provision relates to providing, on a voluntary basis, social services, family meetings, working out family plans and, perhaps in the short term, providing respite placement for a child if need be. When those concerns move into the realms of abuse, it moves on and allows us to move into an investigation or intervention mode.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The bill that is under consideration today interfaces with the new act at the point of services to the family.

Mr Hancock: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Are you saying that the services that you can provide under the new act at that point are limited compared with the services offered by the bill?

Mr Hancock: I think Sue made the point that the services our department provides interface quite well in that first part of section 32. However, the bill that we are discussing defines a role for other government agencies which is needed when you are working with these sorts of families, because there are presenting problems of not only school truancy, but also domestic violence, drug abuse and homelessness. A range of issues can be dealt with only if you deal with the symptom, which is the parents feeling that they have more control over their kids. We have to deal with all these other issues either at the same time or before the parent feels confident enough to start addressing his or her parental responsibilities. When we focus on the parents who we think are not doing the right thing by their kids because their kids are under notice of the community - they are out of control - it is a big job. I use the term often - people are probably sick of me using it - that they are not bad families; rather, they are very sad families. They are people who are experiencing a range of personal and societal issues that they find overwhelming. As a result, their parenting falls aside. Their kids are not socialised within the norms or the culture of the community, so they run amuck. I think that term is heard a fair bit. To address that and to help the parents, we have to do a lot of other work. From our perspective it is not about putting them on an order; it is about engagement and about having the right people who can knock on the door to get these people to understand their circumstances and convince them to take off a bit at a time and to chew some of this stuff up so they can make some gains and get some confidence back to parent their kids. If that is what we are talking about in terms of wanting to use this bill to address some of the crime and problems in our community, I go back to the point that a parental responsibility order is applicable to those people who we think have the capacity to parent.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: They may not be the saddest.

Mr Hancock: They may not be the sad families, but it is the sad families' kids who have probably been under the focus at the time when we started to talk about what we could do for those kids and their families. The bill does that. We must reach agreements and get government departments together to provide a range of services.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Do you feel that the coping strategies of those parents will improve as a result of the actions?

Mr Hancock: I do. I know that it is hard to understand, but a lot of effort must be put into engaging these families. You might think that is soft soap, but it is not. It is hard work to convince them not to feel so alienated from government services. We are trying to get them to have some sort of mutual obligation. The state expects their kids to behave in a certain way and we will do certain things to help them get there. However, if we cannot get that mutual understanding and agreement, we will not reach the next step.

Hon PETER COLLIER: The final step would be punitive.

Mr Hancock: The final step is punitive.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Do you think that the coping strategies of these parents will necessarily be improved as a result of punitive action?

Mr Hancock: My opinion is no. However, I dare say that at any time we could pull out a few cases of a person who said, "I was lost in the trees and I couldn't see anything until an order was slapped on me and all of a sudden I have seen the light; and isn't it wonderful that I have seen the light?" That is great. However, as a general rule I do not think that will happen.

CHAIR: I refer to page three of your paper. In the second last paragraph you refer to the impact of contracts and orders on indigenous families and culturally linguistically diverse communities. In terms of the impact of the bill, specifically agreements and orders, do you envisage that the Department of Community Development will have to take extra measures to accommodate the impact of the legislation, or are your mechanisms for communication and assisting these families adequate enough to deal with the extra imposition of the bill? If not, are you planning on doing things differently?

Ms Hudd: It is a very complex question. From the department's point of view, we would tread very cautiously around an agreement or order with Aboriginal families and communities. It would depend on where in the state the family lived. For example, in the remote and rural areas - assuming that there had been a roll-out across the state - we would want to work with the local agencies and communities themselves to determine how we would develop a response and what needed doing. It may be slightly different in the metropolitan area. I am not saying that it would be totally different, because I think we would still want to work with the Aboriginal communities.

[11.20 am]

It would vary with individual families. Some would respond differently in different ways to what this will mean. We would have to take it on a case-by-case basis at the end of the day but be very careful about how we deal with it and engage Aboriginal agencies that they wanted to have to support them through the process, whatever it was we were going to do. The department is very sensitive to the "Bringing Them Home" report and to the removal of children. I think we would take any new thing for Aboriginal people cautiously. I am not sure that is answering your question, but I am not sure that I have a clear answer.

CHAIR: I suppose that I am asking if you have plans for the employment of extra caseworkers to deal with those particular sensitivities.

Ms Hudd: Certainly we have been increasing the number of Aboriginal staff over the past few years. We now have a significant number. If there were a need to employ more, we certainly would if we could and we had the resources to be able to do so. We have a number of Aboriginal workers now who work on the Northbridge project and the Aboriginal engaging families projects that work with some of the more difficult families. I think they have been successful.

Mr Hancock: As I have said before, those resources are most effective for engaging families. They may not provide the final solution or even therapeutic intervention, but they are most important for access and for encouraging families to work cooperatively with government services.

Ms Hudd: And being more visible and more accessible to what services are available. That can sometimes take two or three years. Did that answer your question?

CHAIR: I think so. It is a difficult thing for you to plan for and to anticipate. You said that it would be variable.

Ms Hudd: Our standard process is to talk through this stuff with as many Aboriginal people as we can contact and agencies, and work with them on developing solutions. That is the process that we would need to put in place. We would do the same with CaLD families.

CHAIR: That is the point you are making in your submission. In the last paragraph on page 4 you refer to how successful the contracts or agreements are and how you gauge success and that it will be unique for each family.

Ms Hudd: It will be. We may end up with families who have been through an agreement and end up with very good parenting skills but are still unable to control their children; alternatively, we could end up with children who learn the controls themselves but whose parents never really grasp the parenting skills. It would have to be very much on a case-by-case assessed basis. Would you agree with that?

Mr Hancock: Yes.

CHAIR: Is part of what you are saying that in each individual circumstance you have families, and maybe slightly broader communities, having a different view and a different perspective on what is successful, competent or adequate parenting and that that will be a difficult thing to assess?

Ms Hudd: Yes.

CHAIR: I suppose that is what I was taking out of that point you are making on page 4.

Ms Hudd: We certainly do not have the view that there is one type of parenting that is better than others. Each cultural group will be different, whether they are indigenous Aboriginals or from Somalia. They still need to meet the regulations and responsibilities around the safety of children, but how they do that can sometimes be very variable.

Mr Hancock: It would be fair to say as a general rule, not always, that some families are chaotic in the sense of the way that they relate to themselves and the community. There seem to be, from an outside view, not a lot of rules and regulations, as opposed to those families that are what we might call quite rigid and where there are lots of rules and regulations. Sometimes they hide a lot of violence because they must maintain those rules. They get kids reacting to that sort of family structure; whereas, the ones from the chaotic family system will be more evident on the street. Dealing with families is along that spectrum. You have to have some respect for the way in which they operate, so the planned intervention with them would need to be cognisant of that and sensitive to the way in which they want to deal with the issue.

CHAIR: I refer to your next page where you are referring to the staged implementation of the parent agreement concept, which is now occurring, and which you indicate has been quite successful. Can you give us any more feedback on the implementation of the roll-out that you refer to?

Ms Hudd: That is the pilot project implementation. John has that information.

Mr Hancock: We had only one department involved in that roll-out. Initially our responsibilities were to provide a referral opportunity to both the Department of Housing and Works and WA Police, as well as our own staff in terms of referring to the parent support service that was set up in Cannington. I understand that arrangement has since changed. The police, housing staff and our own staff are able to refer directly to the parenting support service rather than go through a screening person within our department. I have asked our person on the ground to give me just an idea of what has occurred from her perspective. The parent support service has been operational

since April 2005. Between April 2005 and February 2006 parent support has worked with 17 open DCD cases; that means cases where we have case management and we are already involved with those families primarily through a child protection role.

If the measure of success of their intervention is based on the reasons for referral, the reduction in antisocial behaviour or improvement in school attendance of children, our assessment would be that the parent support intervention was successful in two of these cases. Parent support is still actively working with two open DCD cases, and another two of these cases are new referrals. Not including the open DCD cases, where parent support intervention has been successful, and not including the new referral, the 12 cases that are now closed to parent support were closed for the following reasons: parent experiencing homelessness; parent commenced with parent support and then withdrew consent for continuing; parent was never available for scheduled parent support visits; child was placed in our care due to child protection reasons; parent elected to home-school child - that referral was for non-attendance and antisocial behaviour at school; child relocated from care of mother to care of father in another state; parent did not commit to addressing substance abuse issues that were a contributing factor impacting upon parenting. Of the four WA Police referrals that progressed to referral to our parent support service, our assessment would be that parent support intervention helped in two of those cases. There were two that did not follow through, as the parents did not fully and consistently engage with the service and parents withdrew their consent partway through parent support involvement. Of the three housing referrals that progressed, one was a referral to parent support three months following the cessation of parent support involvement for the same issues but a referral made by another agency.

[11.30 am]

In all these cases, the anti-social behaviour of children that was creating tenancy issues had been addressed. Notwithstanding this, the antisocial behaviour of the children in the community in one of these cases continues to be a problem. What does that tell us? It tells us that when people have been willing to follow through, there is a measure of success. When, for whatever reason, they have withdrawn, we cannot measure whether it has been successful. We do not know whether an order on these families would have made a difference.

CHAIR: That would be the next step.

Mr Hancock: That would be the next step, yes.

CHAIR: Surely whether it would have made a difference has not been determined because that has not yet been dealt with.

Mr Hancock: That is right. We would have to examine all the reasons. We would have to go to the family and find out what happened.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Presumably in some cases it would not be applicable, such as when a child has gone to live with another parent. Presumably the department would not pursue that.

Mr Hancock: Once again we would have to test it. I cannot sit here and say that it would not have worked. We are operating without an order.

CHAIR: That is right.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You are referring to 17 families.

Ms Hudd: There were 17 DCD families and additional families from housing and police.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Are they included in that?

Mr Hancock: Of the 17, housing and police are included, but education and justice can refer separately.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Does that report not include the referrals by education and DCD?

Mr Hancock: No. Since then, I understand that both housing and police were able to refer directly to the service rather than through DCD. The officer who has written this report for me has said that when education, DCD and justice each employed a screening person, so there was one point of referral, they met regularly and discussed the cases and were able to provide an across-agency response. However, since then, with the individual agencies going direct to the parent support service, they lose that interagency stuff. DCD could refer a family that has already been referred by another agency without knowing, or another agency could refer. There is not that opportunity for that cross-government involvement, which we consider to be crucial to the bill.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: This is the pilot program for the bill.

Mr Hancock: That is right.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What has gone wrong?

Mr Hancock: I am not saying anything has gone wrong.

CHAIR: Is not the parenting support program the vehicle for cross-agency collaboration?

Mr Hancock: I believe so.

CHAIR: The fact that it went to the parenting support program before it went to DCD does not mean there is not close agency collaboration; it just means that DCD is not the primary vehicle for that; the parent support program is.

Mr Hancock: That is correct. We must remember that these families need more than just parenting involvement. What happens if those families also require other services such as intervention around domestic violence or drug taking?

CHAIR: I would have thought the parent support program would enlist those services.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It is not my idea of interagency cooperation. I understand you to be saying that the perception of your officer on the ground is that there used to be interagency cooperation and consultation and now that has been superseded by another system that effectively precludes it.

Mr Hancock: Her perception is that, initially, the parenting support service did not actually case manage; it provided a parenting service. There was collective involvement with other government departments around what can be best done for this family. One avenue is the parenting service. That collaboration opportunity, if you like, is no longer available with the agencies actually being able to - outside that small group of people who are keeping a good watch - refer directly to the parenting service. The parenting support service actually becomes a service that would then be responsible for trying to get services out of other government departments. We know how difficult that is. We are no different from any other government departments in the sense that we believe that we have our mandate, and that is our priority. We have priorities within that. If another agency requests services, as we well know when we try to get other government departments to provide services to our department, we need to fit in with that department's schedule. If three or four reasonably senior officers from government departments are sitting around, who are all involved with the one family, we can start to make priorities. That is the strength of this bill. It fits in very closely with the existing strong families program. The previous witness mentioned that program, which involves government departments getting together and talking about their involvement with particular families that require a multitude of services and, which agencies are in the best position to deliver or to take over management of those services. It is not an ad hoc process.

CHAIR: From the summary about those 17 individual cases that were initially under the jurisdiction of DCD, there seemed to be a significant number - four or five - for whom parents had withdrawn consent.

Mr Hancock: They might have found it too hard or other things were happening in their lives.

CHAIR: There were a couple of “not availables” and I think four or five had withdrawn consent.

Mr Hancock: Yes.

CHAIR: Without this bill and without the parental support network trial, what happens with those people?

Mr Hancock: Unless the children come to the notice of our department in a child protection manner, they would miss out on services. Another of our fears is whether, without this bill, more resources will be available in the community to provide services to those families who desperately need them.

CHAIR: Without this bill, if the services are provided, what will happen with families when parents withdraw consent?

Mr Hancock: That is right. We pay for it in other ways through children committing crime or through more drug abuse.

Ms Hudd: If we did not have the legislation, I think we may, and each circumstance would be different, go back to those families to find out why they withdrew from the program, and see whether we could engage them in another way. That would be a reasonable practice if the department has known the family for a long time and we have had ongoing concerns. We would go back and ask what happened. It may be that they did not like the worker. Then we would try to organise some other service if there is one available.

CHAIR: I understand that.

Ms Hudd: It is difficult to know when we have so little information.

Mr Hancock: My understanding is that the program is being evaluated quite comprehensively. All those cases would be delved into and reported on.

CHAIR: You made a point earlier about the sensitivities involved with indigenous families. That has been raised with us by many witnesses, as I think you are aware, concerning the overrepresentation of those families. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about what DCD is doing, or could do, to prevent those families coming to your attention, or proficiently deal with those who do?

[11.40 am]

Ms Hudd: A range of strategies have come into place over the years, as I am sure you are all aware, from the Aboriginal Early Years Support Service tackling zero to five-year-olds to Best Beginning services and parenting in home support services, that are specific to Aboriginals. There is a significant number of those across the state. Some of those work collaboratively with the Department of Health, for example, particularly when you are talking about those of a younger age. We have also put in a significant number of services since the Gordon inquiry and the recommendations from that. That includes the Aboriginal liaison workers in the metro area, and some in the country, and the Northbridge workers whom I mentioned earlier. We had a significant recruitment drive to increase our number of Aboriginal workers. We have senior officers Aboriginal services - I think that is what they are called - in each district who work specifically with the communities, families and the staff to make sure that whatever we are doing is appropriate for those Aboriginal families. In a lot of the remote and rural areas with the district officers, they have been working with the communities to develop different ways of working from what we did five years ago, for example. Therefore, it is working more in collaboration with them about what they would like to see put in place. I have the list of parenting services, but not of other broader services; I did not bring those.

Mr Hancock: And the early intervention.

Ms Hudd: Yes.

CHAIR: If you think it would assist us, we are happy to receive any information at a later date.

Ms Hudd: We have quite a lot since the Gordon inquiry recommendations went in. It works with those more difficult families, which I think are the ones we are most interested in, rather than the very early intervention parental support.

CHAIR: That concludes our questions. Thank you very much for your interesting evidence today.

Mr Hancock: I want to leave with you today a paper that was prepared for the Victorian government that you might find interesting. It is around regulating families and government approaches to that, whether through policy or legislation, and the way the Victorian government is moving in that regard.

CHAIR: So that is from a DCD in Victoria?

Mr Hancock: That is right. It is primarily around child protection, but it does address those issues of coercion and whether you can regulate families through policy or through legislation.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That would be very interesting.

Mr Hancock: It compares the coercive child protection investigation way of intervention with families versus the intensive family support method, and looks at different countries that have modelled both of those as well in terms of outcomes. It is a very interesting paper. If you want the whole document, I can get it for you. We have really just given you the overview.

CHAIR: Is that a public document?

Mr Hancock: It is a public document. I will leave that with you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your time today.

Hearing concluded at 11.43 am
