

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE  
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO BUILDING RESILIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT  
FOR AT-RISK YOUTH THROUGH SPORT AND CULTURE**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
WEDNESDAY, 29 JUNE 2016**

**SESSION ONE**

**Members**

**Ms M.M. Quirk (Chair)  
Dr A.D. Buti (Deputy Chair)  
Mr C.D. Hatton  
Ms L. Mettam  
Mr M.P. Murray**

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**Hearing commenced at 9.42 am****Mr ROSS WORTHAM****Chief Executive Officer, Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia, examined:****Mr SHAUN WYN-JONES****Policy Officer, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, examined:**

**The CHAIR:** On behalf of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, I would like to thank you for your interest and appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist us in gathering evidence for our inquiry into building resilience and engagement for at-risk youth through sport and culture. I would like to begin by introducing myself. I am Margaret Quirk, member for Girrawheen. On my far left is Chris Hatton, member for Balcatta. Mr Mick Murray, member for Collie–Preston, may come in about 20 minutes and he apologises for being late. Our committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. This hearing is a formal procedure of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to the proceedings in the house itself. Even though the committee is not asking you to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament. This is a public hearing and Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any document during your evidence, it would assist us and Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record.

Before we proceed to questions we have for you today, I need to ask you a series of questions. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

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

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

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

**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:** Thanks very much for your submission. Together with the information you provide today, your submission will form part of the evidence of the inquiry. Are there any amendments you would like to make to the submission?

**Mr Wortham:** We noticed a few typos that we will correct later this morning and return to Sarah, if that is all right.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. We have a series of questions to ask but before we do that, would you like to provide the committee with any additional information or to make an opening statement?

**Mr Wortham:** An opening statement would be welcome. Just in the beginning of the opening statement I want to acknowledge that the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia has partnered with the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia in our submission to provide a broader insight into the needs of Aboriginal young people in particular who are at risk in Western Australia.

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Both YACWA and AHCWA would like to thank the standing committee on community development and justice for the opportunity to provide a submission, and we appreciated being approached to do so. YACWA is the peak body in Western Australia for young people and services that support young people, with more than 400 members who guide our work. The Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia is also the peak body for Aboriginal health in Western Australia with over 21 Aboriginal community-controlled health centres guiding their work, and together we have consulted our membership base to provide our submission today. Both organisations have previously been consulted in developing policy and providing input into parliamentary hearings and we appreciate that and hope to do that again in the future. Broadly speaking, with the concerning rates of Aboriginal, in particular, young people in detention having experiences with attempts and/or successful suicides of young people in care, we, as a society need to do more to try to respond to those. We are encouraged to see that the committee is looking at how we build resilience in at-risk young people through sport and culture and we look forward to contributing to that discussion. Both YACWA and AHCWA believe that engaging young people through sport is a constructive thing. Competition sport in its own right is not an effective way of building resilience; however, it can be part of the whole picture. In preparing this submission, both organisations have consulted our membership base with more than 30 members directly consulted. We have received feedback specifically from the Nyoongar Wellbeing and Sports organisation, the City of Armadale's Ignite Basketball program, Save the Children Australia, Ladder WA, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre and other AHCWA and YACWA members. I am happy to leave my opening statement there, otherwise I have a few key points I would like to mention, but I think we can probably get to them in your questions.

**The CHAIR:** In your submission, you talked about a number of barriers for at-risk young people to pass through before being involved in sport and cultural activities. Can you expand on that please?

**Mr Wortham:** Absolutely. In our submission we have identified some of the gaps that exist in community for young people but also some of the major challenges to young people engaging in services. In this case, the barriers often have to do with a lack of access to services due to, in particular, at-risk groups. Let us look at marginalised groups such as Aboriginal young people, CALD young people and homeless young people. Mainstream services do not provide the levels of support that those young people need, and the predominant availability of sports and cultural-based programs are mainstream. In addition to that, travel is often required. Beyond travel, other difficulties such as fees, equipment costs et cetera for sporting clubs in particular can be a challenge. We certainly see the need for more support structures within mainstream services, but the lack of availability due to the non-existence of targeted programs that directly support and are tailored for at-risk young people is a big barrier. There is a gap within the service provision of targeted support services. I can expand on that but I think broadly speaking—Shaun, do you have anything to add?

**Mr Wyn-Jones:** No.

**The CHAIR:** I think implicit in your submission is the idea that we want to get more kids involved in art or cultural activities. But our inquiry is really more focused on using those two mechanisms to reach marginalised youth, so it is kind of the other way around almost.

**Mr Wortham:** If I can comment on that, I think that sport and culture work well as engagement tools. We are happy to stand behind the statement that we think more of that is a good thing. Our challenge is ensuring that we have support structures embedded within those programs and activities that can actually support the complex needs of young people. We believe that sport and cultural activities often meet the interests of young people, at-risk young people in particular. We and our members find that sport is a phenomenal engagement tool because it taps into that interest so that young people will come. How we use those environments as soft entry into more targeted services is the big challenge. We find that obviously sport does not build resilience on its

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own, but when you match it with quality youth work and skilled and trained staff, not just volunteers, significant achievements can be had. As you would know though, the funding available for services to be able to provide staff who are trained and qualified is hard to find. It is ad hoc and often short term. We know that trust is one of the most important things that young people need to feel so that they can engage in any service, and so when there is a constant turnover of staff due to short-term funding we see a significant breakdown in trust when it is built. We believe again, as we said in the submission, that sport and culture are good tools. It is about how we take them further to provide more targeted specialist support.

**The CHAIR:** We have heard from a number of groups, including you, that it is that sustained contact, not just short, sharp programs, that is important, but then that brings into question funding issues. Can you expand on them a bit? You actually said in your submission that getting access to funding for programs that use sports to build resilience is difficult to obtain. I would have actually thought that funders would be more willing in that context than others.

**Mr Wortham:** You would think. In addition to being a peak body at the Youth Affairs Council, I have personally delivered sports-based programs for at-risk Aboriginal young people in WA and I have firsthand experience of the challenges of trying to resource those programs. I and the members who are a part of our organisation have gone to great lengths to try to resource services and it is very difficult. The government line agencies that you think would fund this do not have significant resources, DSR in particular. Resources have come through the Attorney General's office, child protection and, on occasion, previously corrective services, although that is now changing —

**The CHAIR:** Why is that?

**Mr Wortham:** Why is corrective services changing?

**The CHAIR:** Yes. You are saying they are pulling the pin on this youth engagement stuff are you?

**Mr Wortham:** It is probably not my place to talk about the —

**The CHAIR:** No, it is exactly your place to talk about it.

**Mr Wortham:** Great, I will take the bandstand then. Currently we are seeing across the board, state government departments going through measures of review, in particular expenditure due to tight fiscal environments. That is leading to several departments in particular who are positioned to look after the most vulnerable young people in Western Australia pulling back to core business. DCS in particular is focussing on young people who are already engaged in the justice system —

**The CHAIR:** Too late.

**Mr Wortham:** Rather than young people who might become engaged in the justice system where we know that if life has been that difficult that you end up in detention, it is likely you have complex needs, and group-based programs like sport and culture are probably not the best environment when you need one-on-one support. Prevention is the aim and we are seeing a pull back from that from funding streams.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Some of that pull back—let us get this on the table—is not necessarily due to the lack of funding or the fiscal environment, but it probably is, okay? Overall, what is happening out there with all the taxpayers' money being poured into the Kimberley, but Indigenous—I have got a lot of connections up in the Kimberley, and I have been up there just very recently, and there are a lot of people who are not Indigenous who are really still concerned at things not working. We cannot just keep pouring out the money. There might be a tight fiscal environment, there is also, most likely, a rethink on where we are putting the money. Can you comment on that? I am older than you; I want to see what your—you are engaged close up to what is going on. What is really happening there with the money that is going out over the last 20 to 30 years?

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**Mr Wortham:** I appreciate your point, actually, and I am happy to publicly comment that we believe review is necessary; that reform often can lead to very good things. Reviewing the effectiveness of existing services is a good thing. It is about how we do that with the intended outcomes of the wellbeing of the most vulnerable in mind. I believe that process is happening, and I believe it can happen. I am not completely discouraged by it, but it means that as we see reforms to procurement processes of our industry—there will be a transition period—which can lead to young people disengaging from processes et cetera. To comment on your point that it is not always just about money; it is about effectiveness. We believe that is true.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Also, reading your submission, I think it is very good—I am very encouraged by what I see here.

**Mr Wortham:** Great. Thank you for that.

**Mr Wyn-Jones:** My comments were going to follow on from that as well, around the issues with funding, contracting and the length and the effectiveness of these. Not only at a state government level, but we are also seeing at a federal level changes in the way that funding is coming down. I think this is where there is a real risk of significant gaps occurring, where the state government is changing its methodology and at the same time you are seeing the federal government change its methodology. You saw the issues with the IAS—the Indigenous Advancement Strategy—and the impact that was having on communities. I guess from our sector's perspective, we are really caught in the middle and this is really a reflection on where communities are as well. For example, with short contracting, there is that real issue of every year or every second year, you have to spend time reapplying for that funding and that is impacting the ability of services to actually provide what they are meant to be doing under that contract. At the same time we are seeing the contracting arrangements actually become more complex, which again creates an extra burden on services. Then finally, is what is happening to the money and why despite all the money that is coming into communities, we are still seeing increasing rates of contact with justice and increasing rates of suicide. I think this is because the money is not really being targeted or really put to where it is most effective, and that is really listening to your communities, listening to young people and actually allowing them to be the decision-makers, rather than instead of—and no disrespect—someone in Perth making decisions for a population in the Kimberley without actually an effective engagement with that community. That is what we have been hearing for not only the last couple of years, but the last decade in terms of the way the funding is coming down. And this is more relevant than ever with the recent inquiry into suicide in rural remote areas; that was one of the big factors.

**The CHAIR:** Just on that issue of consultation with youth, are there effective forums, say in the Kimberley or the Pilbara, that that can be done through?

**Mr Wyn-Jones:** I would say at the moment it is probably a bit ad hoc. AHCWA in particular, on the basis of feedback and push from member services, we have a youth coordinator role and we are transitioning that role into a youth policy role, specifically to actually get that mechanism for having someone who is organising feedback and consultation with young people, and also being in a position where we can develop young leaders within communities to become the voices for their needs essentially.

**Mr Wortham:** Can I comment on that as well? The idea is becoming more common around co-design of services. What I mean by co-design is more often involving the service-intended user in the development of the model of what is going to be delivered. To effective service delivery, if we are going to develop services that work when investing our money effectively for at-risk young people, we need to be involving them. We have written into our submission that point as well; that young people need to be involved at the outset of an idea of delivering a program. To address your question, Margaret: does the current system of engagement that we have available to us work? I think it needs to be improved on, it needs to be built on; the status quo is not good enough. That is not just from a government perspective; that is from our industry as well. I am encouraged to see

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the conversation being had around improving our mechanisms and engaging young people in the discussion.

[10.00 am]

**The CHAIR:** Is there any model of youth engagement from elsewhere that you think works well?

**Mr Wortham:** Yes. There are lots of different engagement models around how to improve the relationship and the involvement of young people in the development of services or, in particular, say for example in the governance of organisations and we would be happy in addition to our submission to try to provide some of that literature to the committee.

**The CHAIR:** That would be great.

**Mr Wortham:** It is currently a piece of work that needs to be undertaken. The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia is committed to doing that and we are actually going through a process of reviewing co-design materials, so that is probably good timing for us to commit that to you guys.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Could I ask you about the Kimberley region as an example to focus on and get your comments on? In the Kimberley there are huge issues up there, and we need to layer it down—we know what they are. You have got Broome, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Kununurra, Derby, say, if you hone in on the regional hub of Broome, which services Fitzroy, Halls Creek and all through there. In Broome, you have got disability services, other government services and a whole layer of them actually. But you have also got PCYC and Clontarf dealing with Indigenous people. Can you comment on this? You talk about team leadership and having good programs. When you have two significant bodies working well there—working, I will not say working well—what is it that you can put more into, into that region through a regional hub like Broome for remote Indigenous? Can you just tell me a story on that?

**Mr Wortham:** Yes. Again, I am probably not prepared to comment on how effective either of the services are, but in terms of how we all collectively improve what we are doing, it comes back to engaging the community, engaging young people and asking the question around how things can be more effective. As I said, it is not necessarily always about more money. If we have services available for young people, it is about how we improve access to them and the work that they are doing with those young people. A lot of our members also feed back, in particular from the Kimberley, around the importance of involving elders in community in the development of services and also in the delivery of services. It is kind of stepping back from the more sterilised models of a professional working with a client, which is critical, but you also have to have a situation in which you build trust and a relationship with a young person, which is a very difficult thing to do if they are coming from an environment where they have been probably more distrusting of people in official positions. The involvement of respected community members, other young people and elders could happen more.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** So you have the scales weighted there. You talk about equitable funding and so forth, but you talk about the attitude. Now, within the Indigenous population, they have their own barriers to uptake, which you are talking about, and then you have the non-Indigenous who have their own attitudes, too. Where do we need to put most of our effort to change attitudes to get young team leaders in the north and things like that? Can you explain—it is a very big question?

**Mr Wortham:** It is, and it goes back to the point of focusing our energy on those most vulnerable. We have cohorts in Western Australia who have common engagement with the justice system and who, based on the definition that the committee has put forward on at-risk youth, become engaged within statutory services, such as child protection, the police, the justice system, the mental health system et cetera. Whilst mainstream services are essential in Western Australia, I think where we need to be putting our energy is how we improve targeted services for those cohorts—the CALD community as well. Our migrant refugee community—we do a lot of work with young people in

that space and we hear still continued significant responses of discrimination, of barriers due to language, cultural misunderstanding, also not tapping into the interests of that cohort. There is a lot more that could be done that is targeted work. Balancing that out with mainstream services has to be a consideration, but we need to look at our service delivery based on a spectrum of need where we have universal services supporting the majority of society—I think we have got that quite well. We have a very strong system to support young people through our schools, through sporting clubs, through local governments, and we should be quite proud of that. It is where we are putting our energy further down that end of the spectrum, towards those deemed at risk, that I am encouraged to know the committee is reviewing that point.

**The CHAIR:** One of the next questions we have—I should have asked this right at the start—is: what is your definition of youth?

**Mr Wortham:** I noticed the committee's definition is 10 to 18.

**The CHAIR:** We are revisiting that, I think.

**Mr Wortham:** Okay. We officially have a definition of 12 to 25. I do believe, though, that the needs of young people through direct service provision are younger than 12. We are seeing young people today exhibiting behaviours that you would expect much older young people to have at younger and younger ages due to technology, access to information, also a continued trend of greater levels of poverty. Being able to be flexible with that age range in direct service provision is a critical thing. When you have young people as young as eight, who most would consider a child, on the streets engaged in crime and in environments that are not safe, we need to be able to effectively respond to that need.

**The CHAIR:** What sort of behaviours are you talking about?

**Mr Wortham:** I can speak firsthand from having previously delivered services, but also from experiences from our members, that we are seeing earlier sexualisation of young people; we are seeing earlier exposure to drugs and alcohol abuse at much younger ages. Street presence in Perth in the urban environment is very clear. At younger and younger ages we are seeing young people putting themselves, not necessarily by choice, more by lack of opportunity, in dangerous environments. You go to somewhere like Kununurra, as we were saying, it is an area in the Kimberley and in the Pilbara of great need, but spend a night out on the streets in Kununurra and you will end up seeing quite a lot of children. We need to be able to respond to that. Is that child-focused work or is that youth-focused work is up for debate, but I think that needs to be integrated into youth services.

**The CHAIR:** We visited one service in Melbourne, which is basically almost wraparound. The homeless kids might go in and get their clothes washed and the counsellor might happen to talk to them while they are there, and then there might be referrals elsewhere, plus there were art and music activities and what have you. Is there anything much like that here?

**Mr Wortham:** We have spotlights of very successful initiatives across the state. The Broome youth hub is a really good example of a collaborative model. In Perth, we have in the south east quarter through Armadale phenomenal models of collaboration and holistic services through organisations like Save the Children and local governments as well who are delivering services in partnership. It is not necessarily one service doing the whole holistic model but organisations coming together to respond to that need. Most of that is organically happening—often spontaneous—so learning from those initiatives will be essential, but that is not to say that it does not exist in WA.

**The CHAIR:** Is that then a bit problematic in terms of funding because they cannot necessarily be described as addressing one issue, but, as you say, a complex range?

[10.10 am]

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**Mr Wortham:** Absolutely. The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia is in support of and currently funded to be part of the Aboriginal youth expenditure review in the Aboriginal youth investment reforms process, which is being run through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Through that, they have identified, I believe, somewhere in the range of 15 different government departments that have funded at-risk youth services for Aboriginal young people. At the outset, that creates fragmentation and that creates challenges to collaboration when there are potentially different priorities within the funding streams that are being allocated to community organisations.

The flow-on effect of that is fragmentation, I guess, is what I am saying. Again, we are encouraged to see that reform process happening because it is saying we need to review what we have and find a better way to invest in the future. What we are concerned about is that that may lead to a reduction in availability of funding for future services based on tight fiscal times. We are in support of it, but we are also wanting to make sure that it leads to greater availability and access of the right services at the right time in the right place for young people at risk. Again, that is why I am—what is the right word?—optimistic that that will be the aim.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Looking now at education leading to jobs and employment, can you give a little bit of a thought bubble on that one with reference to what is happening with employment of the Indigenous in the north? Say, the Kimberley: what is happening? Where are we leading to? Is it working and how can you have strategies that are targeted to lead to being employed, because ultimately you need to have everyone working some time, do you not?

**Mr Wortham:** Yes, that is the ideal. What I would say I can comment on is that the mainstream education system does not work for every young person and it starts from really an early age of, well, preschool, to be honest, around being able to engage in quality early childhood development and early learning to set a person up for success academically and professionally. The flow-on effect from that with at-risk young people, which is what we are talking about, is often disengagement and/or lack of success within the academic space within school. We know that the education department is flat out. The schools are extremely overburdened and so being able to respond to the needs of at-risk young people, behavioural challenges et cetera is limited, often leading to expulsion or suspensions, which then leads to young people completely disengaging from the education system. The flow-on effect is welfare engagement, lack of employment et cetera. We would say that there is still significant work that needs to happen to engage young people in alternative educational opportunities and to build some of those skills to create resilience.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Thank for the answer. In Broome there is Clontarf, an educational model, and we visited Clontarf a number of weeks ago down here.

**Mr Wortham:** Great.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** It is very good down here and it is across Australia. If you were to restructure based upon the withdrawal of resources at the moment and reforming, what would be your ideal for, say, that model at Broome—more Clontarfs?

**Mr Wortham:** It is a great question. I would love to take that away and whiteboard it up and bring you some —

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Is this not what we need to target?

**Mr Wortham:** It is.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Young leaders who are aiming towards being employed et cetera.

**Mr Wortham:** I think it starts with being able to understand what a young person's experience is like at home and what they need to become independent, self-reliant and resilient contributing citizens. One program that engages a young person for four hours on a Friday night is not going to change their life but it can contribute to it. What we need is a connected system from early on in life that supports those who are disengaging from the mainstream. Unfortunately, the response to your

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question is quite complex because it is going to take a collective approach of multiple service types but also generational change and welfare reform, and again, the list is quite long. I do not believe that generational change is an impossible task and I do think conversations are being had, and hopefully the up and coming generation going into politics, government and the communities up there will continue that discussion. It has taken generations to achieve the level of poverty that we have got in Australia, and it will take a while to get out of that. The ideal system is certainly not less though. You asked whether we should have more Clontarfs, more alternative education, more sports programs and more youth work. The answer is yes. Our statistics on kids in care, kids in detention and young people suiciding is going up, so what we have got is not good enough. Again, I am encouraged that the committee is reviewing how we do that work.

I will briefly comment on the spectrum of need. The spectrum of need has a direct effect on what services are available. If you have got a young person with extremely complex needs, which may, for example, include homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues and anger issues et cetera, lesser-funded group and sports programs are not likely to give that person what they need to transform their lives. We need targeted, intensive one-on-one case management mentoring programs in which specialists focus on areas—for example, mental health and drugs and alcohol—to respond to those needs. At the same time, we also need services available for young people who are not quite at that end of the spectrum of need, who maybe on the precipice of experiencing or having behaviours that we would consider at risk. That is certainly where Clontarf would be quite a transformational experience for a young person. My point is that one service will not respond to the spectrum of needs.

**The CHAIR:** I am familiar with your Home is Where My Heart Is program. We have not talked a lot about the arts as such, but have you got any idea how many have been involved in that program over the years?

**Mr Wortham:** Yes, I do. It is targeted at a small cohort each year and we have had, I believe, up to 60 young people go through the program over the years. We are currently in the development of the 2016 Home is Where My Heart Is exhibition. We have 10 young people and 10 mentors engaged, most of which have experienced homelessness, young people who are currently in the care system and/or currently homeless and in short-term crisis accommodation, who have come from lives of a very complex need. I have personally had conversations with them around their aspirations, their connection to self-worth and pride, and the effect that art—in this case photography—has had on them. One young man who is a mentor this year was a participant two years ago. Two years ago he had never picked up a camera seriously but two years later he is now what I would consider to be, and I have seen his work, quite a professional photographer and he is a mentor to other young people. He said that photography has helped change his life. The challenge that I have is engaging young people in what they are interested in; that is what we need to be doing. We are trying to create something that sounds like it would work, but if young people are not interested in it, they will not engage. So the first port of call is how we get them to engage. There is footy, sport, soccer and things like that—that is easy; it works—but it works for a lot of boys.

**The CHAIR:** It is also the dominant culture and if you are feeling a bit excluded—I must admit we had someone from the Department of Culture and the Arts last week and I was concerned that they were really only interested in elite artists and people with potential and not using art for these broader issues that we are talking about. Is that your experience? Is there more that they could be doing?

[10.20 am]

**Mr Wortham:** I believe the answer is yes. As I kind of alluded to before, more is not a bad thing. The more we focus on how we use our existing resources to target and support those most at risk—we do see art being used in the community through organisations like Propel Youth Arts and through others—I will remember in a minute—that are targeted at the non-mainstream. They target

at-risk young people, regional communities or young people in remote areas. It is being done. Resourcing those has been a challenge. That being said, we commend DSR and the Department of Culture and the Arts for their continued commitment to engaging at-risk young people, but more is not a bad thing.

**The CHAIR:** I just want to ask Shaun a couple of questions. In terms of involvement with young people in the justice system, is any local work being done on the cost–benefit analysis comparing the cost of juvenile detention with programs outside of detention?

**Mr Wyn-Jones:** This is probably more relevant to YACWA in their whole policy—they have been quite active in the youth justice reinvestment space.

**Mr Wortham:** Do you want me to comment?

**Mr Wyn-Jones:** I would like to say that the Aboriginal Health Council of WA is still quite actively involved in conversations around the justice system. We believe that the benefit of addressing the social determinants that lead to young people having contact with the justice system rather than actually placing them in detention is quite evident. Further, detention is having a detrimental impact on their life. We know that recidivism rates are still continuing to increase, which is a real concern to us. That is really pointing towards the fact that the justice system is not having a rehabilitative effect, and where it is, it is not being supported consistently. Again, the services addressing these issues are very sporadic. There is not the consistent or systemic support from both levels of government to address that.

**Mr Wortham:** To add to that, I agree with what Shaun said. The Youth Affairs Council and also the youth industry sector has done a lot of work on understanding the cost-benefit analysis of intervening early, of engaging young people who are at risk of committing crime. There are varying reports available, some stating as high as a one to four and some infer an even higher per cent return on investment based on the costs of detention, the court system et cetera. That is based on very limited data. We understand, though, and it is almost commonsense, that if you intervene early and get a young person involved in positive activities that you can help them to avoid entering the justice system of courts et cetera, but it extrapolates further from there. You may go through court, be engaged with the police and end up in detention, but on exiting detention there are significant rates of homelessness, homelessness support services and poor health et cetera.

**The CHAIR:** I was really just asking about the Western Australian situation in particular. I think someone got the Nobel Prize for working out the 7:1 ratio.

**Mr Wortham:** That is right, yes.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Another question for you, Shaun. The involvement of elders and a lot of these disengaged Aboriginal kids have not got any cultural identity. Do you think there is some benefit in getting programs based on kids and young people finding out their cultural identity?

**Mr Wyn-Jones:** I think that would be fantastic. In terms of the model of our sector where you have the community in control of the services that they are providing, they can respond to need more effectively. Once again, support for the sector is quite ad hoc and, given the changing environment with regards to funding, the ability of community organisations to respond effectively, I think, is being restricted. Referring to one of the documents that we referred to in the submission are the social and emotional wellbeing workshops that AHCWA facilitated last year through our youth coordinator role. I will just quickly mention that the youth coordinator role, which is transitioning into a youth policy role, is a role that was identified as an area of need by member services and, as such, it is funded by member services without any other support. What occurred with those workshops is our youth coordinator went out to the regions, engaged with young Aboriginal people within the communities amongst a whole range of different areas, but really, these were led by the young people there. We have had continuing engagement with the young people involved in those workshops and they have expressed a really strong desire to be involved in any leadership

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opportunities or potentially even training as well. That is something that we are trying to work towards in the future.

Going back to your comment, sorry, about the elders and young people and kind of tying it back to culture, I think that is integral to being able to build resilience for at-risk Aboriginal youth and for Aboriginal young people generally. I know Ross would be able to speak specifically on some of the programs that are occurring in the non-health sector. From our side, we are seeing a real willingness for elders within communities to engage with young people and for young people in communities to be really screaming out for some sort of response to the issues that they are encountering. There is just a bit of a gap there in terms of the ability for programs and services to connect the two or for either of both parties to access funding to create something.

**Mr Wortham:** Can I briefly comment, please?

**The CHAIR:** Sure.

**Mr Wortham:** I think, as Shaun said, it is a no-brainer to have as many people involved who know young people at risk. Elders within the Aboriginal community are essential to that discussion, as well as other senior community members not recognised as elders. It is also kind of just playing devil's advocate for the elders—the few that we do have across this state—in often trying to involve young people, elders, others and the design and delivery is done with no support to those individuals. I think it is certainly worthwhile acknowledging that there is a need for a review of how we engage with community to develop services. I have seen firsthand and we have members who engage elders in their delivery of youth services and support, and the trust that brings is phenomenal. If you can get young people involved who would otherwise be disengaged and uninterested—involved because they are interested in the subject; whether it is art, sport or culture—that is a win. Then they get there and they know people that they trust—local community members who are good role models—and that will achieve phenomenal things. The biggest challenge we have in transformative change in young people's lives is not the in-depth work of changing their attitudes and beliefs. It is actually building a relationship with them. If we can do that first, that will unlock the door to changing their lives with better behaviours, better decisions and more resilience.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** I think we can all agree on a lot of things there. The youth leadership is something that we are probably quite interested in—all of us. You talked about the elders and the embedding of culture, and then you have the youth and getting engaged and interested, but there is still a disconnect—there is still a gap—that needs to be worked on. That could be in a type of reform we get through plus, also, you have even got the cross-cultural between the non-Indigenous and Indigenous that needs to be worked on fairly heavily. Then you need to actually get the youth involved in some way. Can you sort of see a picture for a new reform model coming out of that? Is it encouraging or is there just so much work to do, or what?

**Mr Wortham:** I definitely think there is a lot of work to do. Reconciliation in this country still has a long way to go and that is across the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, but as well around multiculturalism. That is something that again, we should be very proud of as Australians that we have a very multicultural society. There is a disconnect between multiculturalism and white Anglo-Australians. There is a divide that really can be bridged. I believe our upcoming generation of young people who are our future generation will see transformation in the way that we all treat each other. I am not discouraged by that. I was just saying to Shaun before, I think that some of these things are generational and will take time to change. I am not sure if that has answered your question but it is —

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** I did not expect you would be able to answer that very specifically, but just in broad terms.

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**Mr Wortham:** Just to comment briefly on youth leadership, something that the Youth Affairs Council has very much at our core is we believe that young people supporting young people is a good thing. If we can give positive peer environments where we get positive pro-social environments where young people who are at risk and young people who are stronger role models build a relationship, that is a wonderful thing. Also, the honesty that can come from having a young person having a conversation with another young person is a powerful thing. We have been involved and supporting peer-to-peer led consultations for a number of years now to get real stories from young people about what they are experiencing. The information that comes out of that environment is uncommon because, more often we have got adults or officials engaging in the discussions. So we would encourage more peer-led and youth leadership models.

[10.30 am]

**The CHAIR:** We will just have to finish up, I am sorry, but in that context, through the feedback from those consultations, what is the assumption that you have had that has been dispelled? Do you understand what I mean? You would assume that young people would want or think a particular thing and after feedback from consultations, you thought “Oh, well”. Is there anything you can —

**Mr Wortham:** The conversations have been, over the years, quite varied and broad so I could probably respond to that in a number of ways that are around topical issues of young people from everything to how they view school to how young people want to be engaged in recreational activities and drop-in centres. A lot of myths have probably been dispelled over the years from those things. Again, I am happy to send some of our reports through to the committee. There was a great summit done by Save the Children two years ago. They got 100 at-risk young people in the city to ask them questions around their priorities. Just at the beginning of the year, we held a summit with 50 migrant and refugee young people to understand their priorities and the things that came out of those were again, quite varied. Just as an example, the idea of investing in significant resources for youth drop-in centres seems like a very daunting thing. We have got millions of dollars going into a facility and all of this stuff. Young people come back saying, “We don’t need all the flash; just give us a space. Make it simple. Grungy is cool”—right? That actually could be happening all over the state if we dial back our expectations. That is one example. There are lots within the education environment as well, but again, I am happy to send the reports through.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks very much for being so generous with your time, both of you.

**Mr Wortham:** Thank you for inviting us.

**The CHAIR:** A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it is deemed to be correct. You have undertaken to send us some additional material. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Thank you very much.

**Mr Wortham:** Thank you for the invitation.

**Mr Wyn-Jones:** Thank you all for your time.

**Hearing concluded at 10.32 am**

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