

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE METHODS EMPLOYED BY WA POLICE
TO EVALUATE PERFORMANCE**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2015**

SESSION TWO

Members

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

Hearing commenced at 11.03 am**Mr MICHAEL THORNE****Indigenous Employment, PEEDAC Pty Ltd, examined:**

The CHAIR: On behalf of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, I would like to thank you for your interest and your appearance before us today. One of the functions of the committee is to gather evidence for our inquiry into the methods employed by WA Police to evaluate performance and, specifically, performance measures related to management of personnel and recruitment. I would like to begin by introducing myself and the other members of the committee. I am Margaret Quirk, member for Girrawheen. On my right is the Deputy Chair, Dr Tony Buti, the member for Armadale. On my left is Ms Libby Mettam, the member for Vasse; Mr Mick Murray, the member for Collie–Preston, and Mr Chris Hatton, the member for Balcatta. We are a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. This hearing is a formal procedure and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house itself. Even though we are not asking you to give evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a 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 will assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record.

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

Mr Thorne: Yes.

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

Mr Thorne: Yes.

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

Mr Thorne: Yes.

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

Mr Thorne: Not really, no.

The CHAIR: Great. Would you please state the capacity in which you appear before the committee today.

Mr Thorne: I manage the Indigenous community links service at PEEDAC.

The CHAIR: Just for the purposes of Hansard, what does that stand for?

Mr Thorne: PEEDAC used to stand for Perth Employment and Enterprise Development Aboriginal Corporation, when we had CDEP, but that has gone now. But we have kept the name.

The CHAIR: We have some questions to ask you today, but before we do that do you want to say anything generally about the work that you are involved in?

Mr Thorne: In the first 13 years of my employment since leaving school I was with mainly the Commonwealth Employment Service—Indigenous youth employment-type work. Since leaving there, I managed an Aboriginal group training company dealing with Indigenous apprentices and

trainees, mainly. I left there and went to Centrelink for a little while. I could not handle that, so I went back to Indigenous employment and I have been with PEEDAC for about 11 years now.

The CHAIR: I will start off the questioning. One of the issues that we will be looking at is whether there are any barriers in terms of recruitment to having more Aboriginal personnel in policing. As a general proposition—so not just police, but across the board—what are the sorts of issues that come up for recruiting young Aboriginal people across the board?

Mr Thorne: Where do I start! I think Perth is a bit unique compared with the other states. I think about 35 per cent of the Indigenous people in WA all live in the Perth metro area, so it is fairly —

The CHAIR: Centralised?

Mr Thorne: Yes. We have a lot of school leavers who do not really have an option after school, and it snowballs from there. We have got to catch them early and try to move them on as quick as we can into employment. Not all of them have got good homes and role models, and those sorts of things. There are a lot of factors. I think housing is a big thing. If we can help our kids become independent and get a unit or something at an early age, it will go a long way to helping them become an adult. I think a lot of the kids that are from broken-type homes—it is just my opinion—they think to become a man they have to go to jail and follow their uncles, and whatever.

[11.10 am]

The CHAIR: The police have now got some ads running—I think they are Step Forward, or something like that—on the television, and they do have a couple of those ads where they have Indigenous police officers or they might be engagement officers rather than police officers. Is that going to work or is there a whole lot of stuff that needs to be done in between? Is a kid going to see that ad and go, “Oh, police, I didn’t think of that.”

Mr Thorne: I have never worked in the police force, but I have some good friends who are police officers, and one of them has been a police officer for 12 years. It is funny, because generally the best recruitment tool is current staff, “Why don’t you become a police officer?” But you never hear that. I am not sure if it is a great employer and whatever, if they look after their staff. You never hear them talk about the good things in becoming a police officer—the career pathways.

The CHAIR: So, something like in the old days where police officers used to be at PCYCs and they had a bit more contact with the kids; is that the sort of role model that you mean?

Mr Thorne: From what I understand from him—I was talking to him yesterday; he has been in for 12 years, like I said—the conditions are pretty rough as it is, apart from all the Indigenous side of it, with the shiftwork, the hours and trying to have time off. Apparently, they have a policy now where they get rotated, and they have no choice. I think the conditions, apart from just how hard it is to get an Indigenous person, make it hard for people to want to stay there.

The CHAIR: I will defer to my colleagues after this question. I suppose I need to talk about the elephant in the room. There would be some level of mistrust between the Aboriginal community and police, or there would be some personal experience of maybe some racism or contact of that nature?

Mr Thorne: Yes. Look, I have never personally thought about becoming a policeman. I have had some experiences. Do you want me to talk about some experiences?

The CHAIR: No; we are trying to look at what are the impediments. I suppose if you turn it round the other way, what are the sorts of things that make kids excited about a particular job?

Mr Thorne: I think if there is a career pathway. I remember about 20 years ago when they had Indigenous police cadet intakes and they were specific to Indigenous people. I think that worked. I knew a lot of people who went through there, and it worked and they stayed for a long time. I think if they did a recruitment process where they had 20 at a time coming in together and they

had the Indigenous officers, current, coming out and doing some of the talks and training, and they could see pathways. I do not think there is an Indigenous officer at the training academy, or anything like that, where you are not just on the beat and there are other pathways for you. If you are placed, you need a buddy system, where you have two of these young people—they could be any age—at a station together with a senior Aboriginal officer there already for support.

The CHAIR: Is there sort of a bit of a fear of being rejected in the first place, do you think, in terms of applying?

Mr Thorne: No, I do not think so. I think it needs to become an option again. I mean, they have Step Forward, but if you go on the website, I googled and looked under “Indigenous” and “Aboriginal”, and there was nothing there. Did you look at that story in *The Sunday Times* last Sunday, “Why I quit the police force”?

The CHAIR: The last question I will ask is: are you aware that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has an Aboriginal cadet program? Are you aware of that?

Mr Thorne: Yes.

The CHAIR: The reports I am getting—admittedly, they are from the minister—are actually very favourable. Do you think that sort of program, where you have a cohort of kids, I think in this case there were about 12 of them, basically doing a cadetship for a year that prepares them to go in the general field —

Mr Thorne: That is what used to happen with the police cadets, and yes, the guy that is their front picture man is also — I play golf with a lot of these guys at the Noongar golf club, and the policeman plays as well, and he speaks well of it. He loves his job and talks about it all the time. But, yes; maybe the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has had cultural awareness training for the other staff. They are a bit more open and welcoming of Indigenous people.

The CHAIR: Okay, that is great.

Mr C.D. HATTON: There are obviously barriers to Indigenous uptake in the police force, and you have just talked about some of those, but from my understanding, some of the barriers come from within the Indigenous culture anyway because in past experience over 20 years or more, when there was more Indigenous involvement in policing, some of them were pressured by people in their own community because they might be siding too much with the white population or the police. Do you have any reflection on that? I am not trying to say that is the problem; I am just saying there is another barrier, possibly.

Mr Thorne: One of the stories the policeman gave me yesterday was that one of the officers in charge was having an issue with his daughter and he was not allowed to deal with it because of conflict of interest, so he got other police officers to sort it. But this Indigenous officer was forced to go to an Indigenous house that his family were feuding with and sort out somebody, whatever was going on, at a party. That sort of put him at risk and he was also apparently forced to go and arrest his own brother and things like that. They put the Indigenous officers in compromising positions like that, where they are putting their own safety at risk, and they highlighted that, “I don’t think I should be going there”, or, “Don’t send me there just because I’m Indigenous.” But, no, I think once you get people who want to be policemen, they will give it 100 per cent, but you cannot put them in compromising positions like that.

Mr C.D. HATTON: Thanks for that.

Mr Thorne: If you have a program like the cadetship, they are taught about that and it is talked about. They are aware of situations that could occur and as long as they are not put in compromising positions with their own safety, I do not think it should be a problem. Most of the cadets I knew that became APLOs loved their job, and I think there came a time when the APLO positions were going and you were either becoming a fully-fledged officer, or you had to leave.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Michael, about that time—you were talking about 20 years ago—in Collie there were several Aboriginal cadets that came through; Joe Northover was one —

Mr Thorne: Yes, I know Joe.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: — and Barry—I cannot remember. There were three or four really nice kids and they mingled, but the family pressures they were put under were huge. I understand exactly what you are saying: they should not have been sent out just because it was an Aboriginal feuding; they should not have been the ones that were in the middle. If you want liaison officers, it is a different job altogether and I can see it from that point of view and understand that, but I would like for the committee to look at how many cadets—is there a cadetship still going?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think so.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: But at one stage it was quite strong.

Mr Thorne: It was popular with the Indigenous people.

[11.20 am]

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Not only Indigenous, but right across the board, because it does give a starting point and it also means that once you are in there and you do not like it, there is no loss of face if you leave, so you are not stuck in that area. I will ask just a quick question: are you the Boddington Thornes?

Mr Thorne: Yes, Boddington.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Do you know if Kernit is still around? Sorry; we have a history! He is an old friend.

Mr Thorne: He lived in Darwin, I think it was. He was a footballer.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Yes.

Mr Thorne: I think he is back in Bunbury.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Okay; I will see if I can catch up with him.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can I ask, from your knowledge with the community, did you see the PCYC as a good conduit and facility for Indigenous kids to mix with police officers?

Mr Thorne: I do not understand why they stopped them.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Exactly right. I totally agree with you.

Mr Thorne: We were running courses with the PCYC; they would come and pick up the Indigenous kids and they were doing things like boxing training with them and teaching them life skills.

Dr A.D. BUTI: They have outsourced it now, so it has become more like a private entity, but as a result the amount of police interaction is very minimal and in some cases not at all. I think that is such a retrograde step.

Mr Thorne: When I was younger, we would go to the PCYC instead of going into Perth, and hang out, play basketball, play games, do the gym, and it stopped you going into Northbridge. I do not know why they stopped that.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Well, Armadale, which you would think would be one area where you would want them, they are out of Armadale, basically.

Mr Thorne: And now they have moved “Woody” Humes, the APLO, to Cannington.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Everything is in Cannington, like 24/7 police stations in Cannington.

Mr Thorne: Yes.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Further, one of the problems I see with PCYC now is that it is for kids at risk. You do not have the interaction that used to be there before, so standards are not set. The kids at risk that go there, other parents are a bit scared to drop their kids off because they are going to mix with the kids at risk, so you do not have someone setting a standard or saying, “Don’t do that, that’s silly.” That sort of thing through that program is a bit disappointing to see.

Mr Thorne: Our organisation is putting in a funding application with the department of employment to try to see how we can fill a gap that is missing, so there are a lot of things to think about. As you are saying, kids that are in the system already with juvenile justice, you do not want the kids at risk getting in there and mixing with them and getting dragged into that.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: If something happens, their chances of becoming a police cadet are straightaway just about banged on the head because of that interaction.

Mr Thorne: Yes, and if the cadetship thing came out and started again, we could run programs to get them prepared for that, with literacy, numeracy and the physical side of it, and whatever else is involved, so they could pass the test and get through.

Ms L. METTAM: I have one question. Can you tell me about your experience or involvement with the WA Police recruitment processes?

Mr Thorne: There has not been any, really. We have a guy on our board, Jeremy Garlett —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, I know Jeremy.

Mr Thorne: Yes, he was in the police force for many years.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, he lives in Armadale. He is in the police force, or he was.

Mr Thorne: It was a big loss, because he did a lot of cultural awareness, as part of his job, with the didgeridoo. Our organisation runs cultural awareness training, and I think one of the ladies that was on it, she had a role in HR and sort of asked us to come along, and that is why I am here, really, because I think she must have thought there was a need for cultural awareness for police officers. If they do get an Aboriginal officer, they are dealing with Aboriginal kids all the time and people, you know, they are a bit more understanding.

The CHAIR: Yes, and it is not just understanding, it is understanding the complexities of the situation, as you mention, the feuding situation, for example.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Just one quick one. The problem seems to be—correct me if I am wrong—that you are running programs over here, and the police are over here, and there is not a connector to direct or help young people who have your training to go into that police force. It is not often that the police would come to you and say, “Is there anyone here who’s keen, who’s able to be identified?” Is no-one there?

Mr Thorne: No, and generally a lot of careers have a cadetship/traineeship type intake.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: No, just a connector. Who from the police comes to you and says, “Have you got any people that might be identified that will be suitable that we can talk to to go into the police force?” Is there anyone like that at all?

Mr Thorne: I do not think so. Not that I know of.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: What I am talking about is active recruiting—the police going out there, whether to your group or the Sudanese or whatever, and actively talking to those communities and trying to say, “Here’s a job; here’s a career; are you interested? You’re fit and healthy, your schooling’s not too bad; we can help you.” You do not see any of that coming out into the —

Mr Thorne: And look, a lot of these PCYCs are perfect training venues. They have big gyms or whatever where you could run training there, just to get a kid used to being around a police officer and realise they are not a bad person, and it could be a good career path that they could take.

Mr C.D. HATTON: Talking about that connector, and agencies like the police force, the health department or whatever, back in about 2006 you had a very good Indigenous uptake of employment through the employment centre that you are running. That is about nine years ago; close to 10 years ago. It was the best in Australia, I believe, at the time, or rated the best, so what has been happening since then? Are there things that are not connecting as well as they should, do you think? What is your reflection on that?

Mr Thorne: I think there was a mining boom around then, and a lot of the programs stopped. People were told you do not need help getting a job now, if you are fit and able you will get a job. So a lot of people went to the mines. A lot of police officers went to the mines. So you were left with, I think, the people that needed a lot of help. I do not want to use this term, but the bottom of the barrel you never really got to help have risen up now and got exposed, because all the work-ready people were gone. That is why there were a lot of issues trying to place these people. They needed a lot more support and help, but government funding and programs got cut back. There was not the same level of support, and these people needed a lot more support, if you know what I mean. Back in those days there was a lot more unemployed and you generally help the 70 per cent that wanted the help and were motivated. Now, the people that were in that too-hard basket have come to the top. There is a lot more complex issues like overcrowding, drugs and alcohol, no driver's licence, all things like that.

The CHAIR: One of the impediments sometimes to recruiting young Aboriginal kids is the same with Corrective Services. They might have had a minor driving record or something when they were younger, and that is seen as a conviction and therefore they immediately rule them out.

Mr Thorne: Is that right?

The CHAIR: Yes, I think a lot of the time they do. So my view is that there needs to be a bit more flexibility in that regard. We have all had our youthful indiscretions, but we are getting the police in in February to talk about that.

Mr Thorne: Yes, I was talking to an Aboriginal nurse the other day. I think he said he was the only Aboriginal registered nurse working in a prison in Australia. He is working at Acacia. He was saying that they are doing prison officer recruitment and they have taken out those—if it is not a major, serious crime then they are willing to take you in.

[11.30 am]

The CHAIR: They are reviewing the police one, but I think that is still there, and certainly in other communities like the African community there are a few kids with driving records.

Mr Thorne: I think because a lot of the Aboriginal people are up in the mines working—there is a lot of opportunities there, but all the work-ready ones who were available then are up north. They created all these opportunities but the next crop of people are not really ready for it, skilled up.

The CHAIR: The last thing I wanted to ask was, the police have acknowledged that they are not very good dealing with the Aboriginal community and there are some cultural gulfs that they need to address, so instead of recruiting more Aboriginal police, they have taken on what they call community engagement officers who are members of the local Aboriginal community, and they are supposed to act as the link between police and communities and what have you. The thing with that is, they are not paid as much as a police officer or an auxiliary officer, and there is no career path. My personal view is that the career path is important to normalise; whether a person is Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal it does not matter, they are still doing the same job. You mentioned the career path, so do you think that is an important thing?

Mr Thorne: Not for everybody. Some people might want to stay as a community liaison officer. Others might have drive, and say, "I want to go out and earn more, and get ahead."

The CHAIR: Do you help young people in terms of applications and stuff and resumes and all of that sort of stuff?

Mr Thorne: Yes, but because the government has cut back on the funding we cannot afford staff to do all that.

The CHAIR: But you have in the past, in various roles?

Mr Thorne: Yes.

The CHAIR: So that sort of help is at hand, if the kids want it?

Mr Thorne: Not really. In the employment market now, there is a stream A, B and C. If you are a stream A you get no help. The job networks cannot really help you, or job service providers. They get no money to help you. A lot of these kids that are finishing year 11—because it works on a point system, if you say you finished year 11, basically for 12 months they will leave you alone to pick your own job. Unless there is a program—we are putting in for another one now with the Department of Training and Workforce Development to try and get hold of these kids that are 15 to 25, so we can get some money to do all that and get them ready. We have got to put submissions in and hopefully win these contracts, and then we can do it again.

The CHAIR: Okay, thanks for that. A transcript of the hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days of the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your transcript of evidence. Thanks very much.

Hearing concluded at 11.34 am
