

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**“MAKING OUR PRISONS WORK”:
AN INQUIRY INTO THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PRISONER
EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 10 MARCH 2010**

SESSION TWO

Members

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan (Chairman)

Mr A.P. Jacob (Deputy Chairman)

Mr I.M. Britza

Mr A.P. O’Gorman

Mr T.G. Stephens

Hearing commenced at 11.05 am

SIRR, MR PETER

**Chief Executive Officer, Outcare Incorporated,
examined:**

HENSON, MR PETER

**President, Outcare Incorporated,
examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for coming in. I will introduce the committee. My name is Alannah MacTiernan, I chair this committee. I have here with me my deputy chair Albert Jacob, Tony O’Gorman, Ian Britza and Tom Stephens and of course, Brian Gordon, whom you probably have been dealing with, and Jovita Hogan. Have either of you given evidence before?

Mr Sirr: Once, some years ago.

Mr Henson: I have not.

The CHAIRMAN: This committee is actually considered to be a proceeding of Parliament and therefore has to be treated in the same way as proceedings in the house, and even though you are not required to give evidence on oath any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: And you did receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you got any questions about the process?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you both very much. Perhaps you can start off by giving us a very brief overview of what Outcare does and how your organisation is structured.

Mr Sirr: Outcare is essentially a crime prevention and community safety organisation. We work primarily in tertiary crime prevention, which is basically after the fact. We are dealing with the crime after it is committed. We work on a fairly substantial through-care model. We endeavour to connect with our client base pre-release and work with them all the way through post-release on the basis that such a holistic program has much more benefits than offering one service. Over the years we have attempted to attract a range of different services to the organisation. For example, in the nineties we recognised that addiction issues were becoming prevalent amongst our client base. We did not have a great amount of expertise in that area, so over the past 10 years we have endeavoured to develop a response to addictions—the AOD sector—because it is one of the most significant contributing factors to people going to prison and going back into prison when they exit prison. We provide a fairly substantial range of services—some well funded, some not. We have employment training services. We offer accommodation services, addiction services, emergency relief and family support. We offer child care in some of the prisons. We are offering, for example, something unique —

The CHAIRMAN: Can you explain offering child care in prisons?

Mr Sirr: We run a licensed child care centre in Hakea Prison.

The CHAIRMAN: Who are the clients?

Mr Sirr: The children of visitors. The visit structures before that were people just turned up and it was pretty much ad hoc and unfocussed in terms of child care. I come from a family support background so I managed to convince the Department for Communities to put some money into the prison side. It is unique in Australia. That was just trying to think a bit laterally. Another form of work we do is to offer a vaccination service to families of prisoners who attend prison. They are some of the most at-risk families in Western Australia in terms of blood-borne viruses. We attempt to have our fingers in a lot of pies.

The CHAIRMAN: On the vaccination service, what are you vaccinating for?

Mr Sirr: For hepatitis A and B. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C, but generally the preventative factors around hepatitis A and B are the same for hepatitis C. It is a matter of minimising risk in that group. Prisoners are 31 per cent likely to be exposed to blood-borne viruses and to have had problems around that. Therefore, their families are at great risk. We fund that service ourselves because we could not get other agencies to fund it. We saw that as a massive return on health outcomes for that client group.

What I am trying to say is that we get exposed to a whole range of issues. Our client base is not just the prisoners but the families. They come with a massive range of issues. They usually come from incredibly disadvantaged backgrounds. At the end of the day, unless we provide a holistic service to our client base there is a greater propensity for them to fall through the cracks and go back to prison. We run a fairly significant sized re-entry service, which is funded through the state. If a hundred people are released today 41 per cent will go back to prison within two years. With the work that we are offering, as I say, under contract—it is based on models we have done for decades—only 17.5 per cent will go back to prison. I must qualify that—that is over a two-year period. That is the last known statistic, which is 18 months old.

The CHAIRMAN: Is this the PEP program?

Mr Sirr: No. The prisoner employment program is a prison-based program. We call it Re-entry Link. It is a through-care model.

The CHAIRMAN: How does it work?

Mr Sirr: We pick up people prior to release—usually three months prior; the contract states three months, but this is what our practice has been over the years—and for six months afterwards. We are currently talking with the Department of Corrective Services and looking at taking it to six months prior to release and then 12 months post-release. That is based on the premise that the more intensive and the more holistic service you offer, the better the outcomes will be at the end of that. It is around building relationships and trust with your clients before they get out, and being able to engage them post release. One of the hardest things to do with clients going through is to get them to come when they do not have to.

The CHAIRMAN: These people are not on parole?

Mr Sirr: We get the whole range. The service is attempting to target finites first, because they are people coming out generally with no statutory supervision and no supports. They are the people who come and go from prison very quickly; they are in and out quite often. They are incarcerated multiple times over years. There is no obligation on them to turn up. The hardest part is engaging them to get them to turn up. Once you get that commitment, you have an opportunity to do the work when they get out.

The CHAIRMAN: Mr Henson, could you give us some idea how this organisation was founded? Was it founded by people who were concerned about prisoner recidivism?

Mr Henson: It was originally established as a welfare service. It was called the civil rehabilitation council—I think that was what it was called close to 47 years ago. It primarily provided welfare support and accommodation services to people who were leaving prison. That was basically the extent. It provided food vouchers, welfare assistance, some clothing and some accommodation. Over the years they recognised, as Peter has indicated, there were a range of supports required for those particular individuals. Just giving them a house was not necessarily going to assist them in not re-offending; there were a range of supports that needed addressing.

The CHAIRMAN: Was this coming out of church-based group or a group of concerned citizens?

Mr Sirr: A group of concerned citizens, from what I understand. We are trying to research our history at the moment. There were also some ex-offenders involved. This was around the time the first parole officer was appointed in the prison system; a fellow called Cliff Gannel. There was an agency prior to us—we are trying to research this—called the Prisoners Aid Association. Some of those still exist in other states. I think it morphed into the Civil Rehabilitation Council; but essentially concerned citizens.

[11.15 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Under our terms of reference we are really looking at what needs to be done in terms of employment and training to reduce recidivism. We are looking at the positive impacts of employment, and training and education in the prison system. Could you give us your thoughts and concerns about what is happening and what could be done?

Mr Sirr: We did provide a document that has got an executive summary. Perhaps we will use that as a reference point. How much time do we have?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Half an hour.

Mr Sirr: I will try to get to the point.

The CHAIRMAN: But we will want to ask the questions.

Mr Sirr: One of the biggest issues at the moment, and you have perhaps heard it from other people, is that the prison muster is really impacting on the provision of services and programs in the prison. It has climbed significantly. I need to say that I think that service does a very good job under some very trying circumstances. I know there has been some publicity around that there has been improvements and figures put in the paper about being successful, but you need to qualify that in the sense that those services have probably picked up their outcomes. Their outcomes have not been in relationship to the size of the prison muster increasing. The prison muster has increased very significantly. If you gain 50 per cent on 100 participants, and this year we have got 150 as opposed to 100 last year, that is rather insignificant if the prison muster has gone from 3 000 last year to 4 000 this year. The statistics around those outcomes in fact pro rata you probably see as a backwards step. Although it is not explicit in our submission —

The CHAIRMAN: Sorry, can you quickly give those to us again.

Mr Sirr: We have not had time to —

The CHAIRMAN: But just those ones you quoted.

Mr Sirr: Quoted?

The CHAIRMAN: Just then—that has gone from what to what?

Mr Sirr: No. It was just an example, trying to show you how the maths works. The pro rata achievement will not be there. What is not explicit in this, because every committee hears this around resources, we have implied all the way through our submission that there is not enough resources in employment and training, and the services in corrections. Certainly around the musters, as musters grow the focus goes off program delivery. The organisation gets consumed with accommodation. Creating beds becomes the driving force. It is our view that you need to keep the

resources and education and training consistent with the prison population. As the population increases, the department does need to look at adding more and more resources into those supports. The further we get away from people management towards body management, which is really what the focus is about, accommodation, the less rehabilitative and, I think, the less productive the prisons will be.

The other thing that we would like to push is the whole concept of through-care in terms of what you do in prisons and what happens afterwards. That is a very strongly held principle for us. Prisons are subcultures. You cannot get away from the fact they are subcultures. Somehow you need to bring the community in. If you want to train someone to work well in the community, locking them away is counterintuitive to that, so you have to bring the community in so that they transfer back into the community in a positive way. Wherever we can we are saying to people you need to have programs in prison that are continuous, that actually run out in the community. Certainly the Re-entry Link is that. Certainly most of the programs we attempt to get into the prisons do that as well. The department, to give it credit, has picked this up. Over the last few years it has done really, really well with that. But I think certainly in terms of the education and training section, there needs to be a greater connection with that particular model. Where we can, we have helped with that, but again that section is resource deficient in planning to do those things.

The other issues around what happens in prison is that we are talking about more directed and meaningful programs in prisons. You can go out to a prison. In terms of the concept of a constructive day in a prison, a constructive day for one particular person in one particular prison was they were allocated a corridor to keep clean. They spent half a day in that corridor keeping it clean. To me, that is actually counterproductive. The other issue—I am sympathetic with this—is how many jobs can you create in a prison when you have got 600 or 700 people there? It is actually incredibly difficult to do. To excuse the pun —

The CHAIRMAN: It is done in other jurisdictions.

Mr Sirr: Perhaps we can learn from those particular jurisdictions. I know it is still an issue here, to give someone a productive day. We have a population in prisons that is generally very illiterate in all areas. I actually think that there needs to be a massive effort by the department to provide basic numeracy and literacy. We have people coming out of prison who cannot read forms. They have to come into us. I see this as a massive opportunity to raise the literacy levels. I have not seen recent stats but I think that 65 per cent of prisoners, some years ago, had not gone beyond the age of 15—what is that, year 10 these days? When you actually look at their achievement levels, they are down around about 9 and 10.

The CHAIRMAN: We were given stats that 70 per cent of the prison cohort have been assessed as having literacy problems.

Mr Sirr: Yes. I would certainly support that. Certainly, as we pick up clients coming out, that is very much a real risk factor with our clients. We think that corrections need to focus their training as well, where they can, on the demands of the labour market, so that they match what they are doing in prisons with the demands of the state. We have got a state that is going to have very low unemployment again. We know what trades are needed. We also know that as demand gets higher, companies get less fussy about turning people away with criminal records. Most companies, when times are easy for them employment-wise, would just see a record and it would go off the stack. Now they are actually willing to work with ex-offenders who have got records, if they have got the appropriate skills.

The CHAIRMAN: Can we talk on this issue. That is a very significant issue, and it is a very significant issue to plan what employment and training opportunities we create. What work does your group do with the private sector? Mr Henson, do you have on your board, for example, private sector people?

Mr Henson: We do. We actually have several members on the board who have their own practices. We have got a prominent lawyer, we have a retired psychiatrist, we have an accountant —

The CHAIRMAN: But not actually people employing? You do not have any industry owners?

Mr Henson: No. Not in that sort of context, no. But we have several people who have been either self-employed, are currently self-employed or have been self-employed in quite large business sectors. We have that relationship with industry.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you, as an organisation, then go out and try to advocate for ex-prisoners within the employer groups? Is that something that you do?

Mr Henson: Yes, we do. We have an employment and training program which does that on an active day-to-day basis trying to get employers to recognise offenders and ex-offenders as people who have got employment skills and looking at risk and relevance to say, “Just because they’ve got this particular offence, the job you’re asking them to do has no relationship to the offence. They are not a risk to you. They have got the skills you’re looking for. You need to consider them as a viable employee.” Several years ago we had a program called Second Chance Business Register, which was a very successful program that was all about educating employers and industry to say, “You’ve got a workforce here that is able to assist you in achieving your requirements.” At that stage statistics showed that 40 per cent of people in the workforce had some form of criminal record. It was about educating them about the risk and relevance arrangements. We received some funding for that in the first instance.

The CHAIRMAN: When was this, Peter?

Mr Henson: That was about five or six years ago.

Mr Sirr: Early 1990s.

The CHAIRMAN: Early 1990s—that is 16 years ago.

Mr Sirr: We have been playing it on and off. It is one of those projects which we will plug now.

The CHAIRMAN: I would be interested when you last had that in play?

Mr Sirr: It actually sits in the background. We have an employment register with our employment training service. We cannot resource it the way it should be resourced. It is essentially a marketing campaign that goes to business. At its highest point we got pilot funding through Lotterywest, which was unusual in those days because it was such a good program. At its highest point, after a couple of years of operation, we had 55 employers who, between them, had around 50 000 employees between them. We had some very big companies that were coming to us to allow us to refer clients to them. Any of the government departments we approached did not want to buy into it.

Mr Henson: You may recall probably six months ago, possibly 12 months ago, there was a program about Toll in Victoria and New South Wales that actually was espousing the same principle. We have been having some conversations with them. They said they wanted to take it nationally. We said, “Hang on. We’ve got a concept that we employed quite a number of years ago which was extremely successful. How would you like to partner with us and we can provide that service to you in Western Australia?”

Mr A.P. O’GORMAN: Is that Toll IPEC, the trucking company?

Mr Sirr: It is the Toll group.

Mr Henson: It was the Toll group. Their CEO was advocating that there was a group of individuals who have got criminal records who are a viable workforce that we are not tapping into. We needed to be mindful of the risk and relevance issues, as we were mentioning.

The CHAIRMAN: And who would probably provide more loyal employees because, once having got a job, they would not want to go through that whole declaration thing again.

Mr Henson: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Has that been Toll's experience? How long have they been doing this for?

Mr Sirr: Three years, I think. They are a little different in the sense that they are targeting people primarily with addictions and not the general population. We have placed several people through our employment training services with them. In regards to that, we are talking nationally amongst the offender aid organisations as to whether or not we can get up a national program by going to the feds for funding, or somewhere else.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you get any federal money for your employment activities?

Mr Sirr: We are picking up some now through the —

Mr Henson: The STEPERS program.

Mr Sirr: Which has become the Innovation Fund. We are also picking up stuff under the Indigenous Employment Program. We have got several programs running across several prisons. It is much more significant than the state is providing us with. The state grant is \$156 000. Under the Innovation Fund and the IEP it is probably going to run close to three-quarters of a million dollars.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: You have mentioned the IEP in your submission. You have suggested that it needs to be made more cost effective. Have you got any idea how you want to make that more cost effective?

Mr Sirr: Sorry, the IEP? What page was that on?

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: In there you say that programs such as the federal government's IEP program provides targeted pre-release training and post-release training, and this has seen improved results. These programs are expensive and labour intensive. Thought should be given to expand them in a less expensive way.

Mr Sirr: They are very intensive. That is one of its beauties. But the problem is you can only get these funds for a certain period of time. Because they are so cost ineffective, they actually taper off. What the organisation is trying to look at is how we can get more efficient with doing that.

Mr Henson: In using those funds.

Mr Sirr: Because the parameters around using them are actually spelt out by the federal government. The outcomes are spelt out by the federal government. I guess we are saying that we want to get the best value for the dollar. Shall I continue?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

[11.30 am]

Mr Sirr: There are coordination and continuity problems in the prison around employment and training. There are some basic structural things that happen. If the courts dictate that you need to build a course, sometimes you may not be able to get that in prison so that is an inequity that needs to be looked at somewhere somehow. If you can get into a course, because sometimes availability is not good, and you then shift prison, there is no continuity across from one prison to the other. The other thing around the particular delivery of services is that—I am covering a couple of points—a lot of people, because of the way the parole system has worked in the past, would attend as many courses as they could and the parole board, in those days, would accept them as good evidence that they were actually doing stuff constructively in prisons. What is happening now that the parole act is being strictly adhered to is that the parole board is looking not at attendance at particular courses, but at content and achievement through those. A lot of that has not been translated down to the prisoner population. People are still doing courses that they probably would not need and that are probably irrelevant to what they are going to do when they get out because they think that the parole board will accept that. As a systems issue, next Monday our staff will be trained up in the parole act as it is now being interpreted, so that we can tell the prisoners what they need to do, because it is

not happening internally. We are also keeping track of people who are not getting out of prison due to refusal by the parole board. That has leapt up too. In one particular month, we had 54 people exit our re-entry programs, which is the transition from prison to the community, and I think about 51 were because the parole board would not release them, even though they were coming to a support like us. They say that it is not evidence that change is being made inside the prison for this person. The idea of offering support very often holds no weight that we will support the program.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that right? The parole board told us that one of the significant things that it looks at is the amount of support that a prisoner will have when he is released.

Mr Sirr: We have had contrary advice to the extent that “So what if they are with your program? That is no evidence that they have changed while they have been in prison. It is their achievement while they are in prison rather than their actions while in prison that counts.”

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, but have you been told that the emphasis is the risk they pose when they come out, and that that is associated with the amount of support they will have? You are saying that even when prisoners are on your program and have your support —

Mr Sirr: Our understanding is that at the point of making a decision about whether or not they will be allowed to leave jail, that is irrelevant.

The CHAIRMAN: We should sort that out because that is certainly contrary to the evidence we were given. You might be interested in seeing that transcript.

Mr Sirr: Yes. We have the parole board coming in next Monday.

Mr Henson: The other issue that we are hearing anecdotally from some of the prisoners is, “If that’s the way it’s going to be taken, why do I need to do a program? What’s the point in doing a program because I’m due out in 12 months. Why would I do all this effort over 12 months with the possibility of being released six months early?” The story that they are hearing is that they have done all this and have been knocked back, so what is the point. So they do not even participate in the program. It is having quite a flow-on effect for offenders inside who say, “Forget it. I won’t do it. I’ll just get released to a finite arrangement without parole.” As Peter indicated earlier, that means that it is more difficult for them. There is no compulsion for them to engage.

The CHAIRMAN: We have had those discussions with the parole board.

Mr A.P. O’GORMAN: Is that not a case of what you are saying: it has not been translated down to the prisoners that it is not just good enough to do courses; they actually have to achieve significant benchmarks in those courses to say that they are changing their offending behaviour?

The CHAIRMAN: Those courses are not often available, are they? Only a very small number of prisoners can do courses.

Mr Sirr: There is a limited amount of resources for a very large amount of demand. Basically, that is what it boils down to in the prisons.

The CHAIRMAN: Perhaps to make it easier, can you describe a typical thing that you do for a prisoner, such as when you would start working with a typical prisoner and what you would do for that prisoner—a fairly typical case?

Mr Sirr: We would get a referral through the prison. We advertise but there is also a transition manager. We would end up with a referral through the prison with some basic information saying that they might benefit from our services. We will go out and do a preliminary assessment and do a follow-up one that is more intensive in terms of collecting information and some data around the prisoners. We would continue to have a series of pre-release meetings based on how intensive you think that may need to be in terms of engaging that prisoner. You would also be starting to talk about some of the risk factors that the person might have when he gets out of prison. You would look at the person’s accommodation needs, financial needs, addiction or health problems and any barriers to employment. We try to cover the whole person in terms of what we need to look at on

the basis that if we cannot deal with some of those issues internally, we would link that person with other agencies. But in line with us wanting to provide a holistic service, we would try to do as much as we possibly can internally. If we pick up a 25-year-old client who has had several B&Es that are related to substance abuse, who may not have a driver's licence, who is disconnected from his family and who has nowhere to go when he gets out, we would bring that referral back, we would sit down and, in the best world possible, we would say, "Can we house this person internally?" We have 80-odd beds scattered around the metro area. If we cannot do that, where can we find it? Is the offending based on substance abuse going to be a continuing thing? Does the person have any recognition of the problem? Can we provide him with addiction counselling inside? Again, there are limited resources. If we cannot, we will find a referral. We will end up with a plan that addresses what we call the risk factors for someone getting back into the community successfully and we would try to find an avenue to deal with that either internally or externally. We operate on a through-care case management model. From a process point of view, we document it and look at the plans and then we might review the plans and action the plans for each particular client.

The CHAIRMAN: Where are the 80 beds that you have, which are an important part of getting people stabilised? Are they group housing or single flats?

Mr Sirr: Thirty of them are under a current arrangement that we now have with Foundation Housing, because we have difficulty getting access to housing. They are offering us 30 beds at a Fremantle facility. I think we have filled seven of those—under 10 anyway. The others are scattered all around Perth, usually within eight to five kilometres of the city centre, because most of these people have public transport needs. They are always located reasonably close to major transport routes, either stations or good bus routes, on the basis that all the barriers that pop up tend to be risk factors. If you have to walk a couple of kays to the railway station to report, it is much easier not to do it than it is to do it. It is just experience. They are all one and two-bedroom units. Anything bigger than that is problematic. They are usually on the ground floor in blocks of units that are not owner occupied. We have figured out that this is the best way to minimise problems. When there is a lot of coming and going, our people do not stand out. We furnish the units with single lounge chairs rather than double lounge chairs, which does not encourage anyone to stay over. There is a whole physical way of looking at the world that minimises structures and the physical barriers to the client failing. There is a massive shortfall in accommodation. We stopped counting some years ago. Three or so years ago, we were getting 1 500 referrals a year for accommodation and could satisfy only about 10 per cent of those. Last year there might have been 170 or 180 that we were able to satisfy. We have just stopped counting because it is a waste of our time. There is a massive demand for public housing. Most of our stuff is short-term emergency housing, so we are still faced with that problem of moving people on after three or so months once they come out of prison; it is a flexible, rubbery sort of time. It is very difficult to get these clients on emergency housing lists. It is very difficult to accept that they are going back into accommodation where they have come from where it is going to be problematic in terms of reoffending behaviour. The tendency of most of these clients, when they are faced with accommodation needs, is to go to their peers. Generally, their peers, as we know, are not a great influence on their lives, particularly around drug use and the offending that goes with that. Accommodation is a very under-resourced area in terms of people coming out of prison.

The CHAIRMAN: We will quickly go to your recommendations. What are the things that you would stress to us as this idea of through care? From the statistics that you have provided, you would be emphasising not only through care, but also the importance of improving education, training and employment skills to deal with this.

Mr Sirr: Yes, and relevant industry skills on top. There is a need for basic education to get people up to par just in basic numeracy and literacy. When you are looking at training in the prisons, you should make sure that it is industry relevant.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any input back to the prisons about what you find employers want?

Mr Sirr: Yes, we have a good dialogue with education and training services at prisons. I think they are hampered financially in terms of the sorts of services that they can do and buy in. We do quite a few partnerships with them as the opportunities arise. We are currently looking at trying to obtain some IEP funding to work in partnership with training young Indigenous offenders under the age of 22, but that is in the pipeline.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there any major difference between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous prisoners you deal with?

Mr Sirr: Given the fact that they are incredibly overrepresented in the prison system, yes. We have a philosophical commitment to working with Indigenous offenders. We have identified a small group. We run a youth service that runs with offenders up to the age of 25. Under that particular service, we have identified a group of young Aboriginal offenders generally under the age of the 22 who might have two or three kids already and who are in prison. There is a fairly large cohort of that group, I think particularly up at Acacia Prison. Part of the IEP funding that we get is aimed at working with those particular clients. We are running what is called a “live works” program. This is working with young kids coming out of the juvenile detention centres. We engage the young person. We are restoring some of Homeswest’s old housing stock that is in great need. We spoke this morning about 300 being empty, but most of us know what state those houses are in. They are offering us a certain amount of restoration money. I think it is about \$15 000 per house. We are taking a team of five to six kids along to those houses and exposing them to a range of trades in a fairly general sort of way—rendering, plastering, painting, gardening and horticulture—to renovate those houses in a green way so that when the future tenants move in, the cost is minimised, because they will be public housing tenants. The quid pro quo with this is that we will get some more accommodation for our client base as well. We do not get to keep all the houses. It is a very good program because it exposes the kids to a whole range of things. It allows them to have a choice. I may not have these stats right, but I think we have run about 19 kids through the program. We got nine of them on to apprenticeships and about six are still going, which is a pretty good outcome. These kids have lasted quite a while under these apprenticeships, and some are into their second year. There is a different way of dealing with Indigenous clients. Once we have got our head around that, it has been quite successful. Indigenous overrepresentation in the prison is a massive issue outside of this committee, as well. It is something that we really do need to look at. The vast majority of youth between 18 and 25 years of age will have spent time in prison at some time.

[11.45 am]

Mr Henson: And a significant number of those would never have had a job, ever.

The CHAIRMAN: And gone straight from school to welfare. There is a huge cultural issue there as well.

Mr Henson: I remember talking to a young Aboriginal man, 22 or 23 years old, at Wooroloo prison. He was getting out and was quite excited. I asked him what he was going to do. He said, “I am not too sure. I am getting too old for this.” I asked him how old he was. He said that he had been in the system since he was eight. His comment was, “I do not want to come back, but I do not know how. I did not finish school. I have never had a job. I have got no skills. I have a criminal record, and I am black. What are my options?” If you looked at the unemployment stats of those who presented to prison and compared those who are Indigenous to non-Indigenous, I would say the unemployment rate would be a lot higher for Indigenous people because they have never had a capacity and experience.

The CHAIRMAN: That is right. And there will be some very different views about how that emerges, but that is without doubt a huge issue. But not always the most conventional answers are going to be the answers.

Mr Sirr: One of the things we found, particularly working with Indigenous young people, is that it is not a five day a week, Monday to Friday, nine to five job. It is an entirely different way of working.

The CHAIRMAN: We need to go unfortunately because we have to get back to Parliament. Thank you very much for coming. A transcript of the hearing will be forwarded to you. You can make minor corrections just to get the sense right, but you cannot make any material changes to the transcript. That will be sent to you. You then have 10 working days to send that back. If you are happy with it, you do not need to send it back and it will be deemed to have been acceptable. If you have think of something else that you have not said but would like to, you can either make an additional statement when you return your submission or you can make it separately.

We appreciate your work. It is good to see people in the community showing concern about what is ultimately a very unfashionable group of people.

Mr Sirr: Tell us about it.

Mr Henson: They are a hard product to sell. Thank you very much.

Hearing concluded 11.48 am