

TRANSCRIPT

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations

Melbourne — 12 April 2013

Members

Mrs A. Coote

Ms G. Crozier

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Mr V. Srinivasan, president, Federation of Indian Associations of Victoria.

The CHAIR — Good morning everyone. In accordance with the guidelines of the hearings, I remind members of the public gallery they cannot participate in any way in the committee's proceedings. Only officers of the Family and Community Development Committee secretariat are to approach committee members. Members of the media are also requested to observe the media guidelines. Can you please all ensure that your mobile phones are either switched off or onto silent.

On behalf of the committee I welcome Mr Vasan Srinivasan. Thank you for your willingness to appear before this hearing. Mr Srinivasan is the president of the Federation of Indian Associations of Victoria.

All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the precincts of the hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. Witnesses may also be asked to return at a later date to give further evidence if required. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript. Please note that these proceedings are not being broadcast.

As I said, the committee is very appreciative of your time of being before us. We are looking at various community organisations within our community, and we are particularly interested in understanding the policies and processes that various organisations have and what they are doing in relation to this important aspect of child abuse and child protection in the state of Victoria.

I would first like to ask you, Mr Srinivasan, in relation to your organisation, could you please explain to the committee the structure of the organisation and how it operates within Victoria?

Mr SRINIVASAN — Sure. Thank you, Chair and friends — some of you I have known quite well over the years. FIAV is a community organisation which was established in 1989 by our former Consul General, Dr Rao, by the influence of a former Premier when he was a shadow Labor Party leader, as well as the former Premier of Victoria, I think, John Cain. That is the time we managed to put things together. There was a necessity for a peak body in Victoria for Indians. It was established in '89. We have currently 28 Indian community organisations in Victoria based on regional and language groups from India, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, like the Gujarati association, the Telegu association, the Kalamandir association — I do not want to name all of them.

Also we have two regional associations, which are the Gippsland and Latrobe Indian community associations, and also the Ballarat and Ararat Indian associations as community organisations. Also we have 26 Indian, Sri Lankan and Fijian music schools in Victoria. We brought them under the Federation of Indian Music and Dance Victoria. Technically speaking, from business to community to culture we have 52 organisations. We act as a peak body for the community to lobby the governments — state, federal and local. We take an interest in any benefit to the Indian community. If any issue is related to the Indian community, we take an interest.

Currently the structure is that we have 11 committee members — 7 are elected; the rest of them are co-opted. Each one has got a role to play, the chairman of one particular issue. We have a chairman for women's affairs, we have sports and youth and we have community services. For each and every area which we need to support, we have got a chair and we have got a subcommittee attached to that. Moreover, we have got a community support panel, which was established five years ago.

When an international student issue came up we established an 1800 number as a helpline for the Indian community to call for any issues related to the assistance they required. Then we have got a 24-hour helpline, which was supported by the VMC and the Victorian government and funded by a number of private groups at the time. Technically private colleges, mainly supported by former minister Phil Honeywood, financially funded that 1800 number to go along.

From there on the community services panel got two general practitioners; two psychiatrists; two psychologists; two lawyers; two immigration agents; community seniors, two of them from each group; and we also have other language professionals within the community to assist them with CV writing, job interview support. So it is a parcel of everything as a one-stop shop. This is our community organisation. We are very grateful for the Victorian government and the federal and local governments that have given us such support to come this far.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Thank you for providing the additional information to committee members this morning. I just want to ask you a little bit more about the community support services that you highlight in that

paper. It says that it focuses on 'domestic violence victims assistance service and other related victims that include early childhood, aged personnel and people with special needs'. I am particularly interested in the early childhood, and you have just outlined some of those community members that sit on that community support services board. But in relation to the volunteers who also support those services, do those volunteers have a screening process, working-with-children checks, if they are dealing particularly with the issues around early childhood?

Mr SRINIVASAN — Yes. What we do is every two years we change the panel and also volunteers. We rotate the volunteers because sometimes if we keep one language person for a long time it is an issue for the community. We have got almost 52 organisations; we need to rotate between them. We cannot have more than 11 committee members at any time, because we do not need more than that or it becomes a United Nations within the Indian community. We also go through — including myself — a police clearance, working-with-children, and especially during the Commonwealth Games 2006, which was when it started. We make sure that every member coming into the federation, in any position, gets a police check to work with the community as well as the children, mainly. While we are dealing with domestic violence issues we have come across three or four occasions of issues about the little ones. But we do not call it child abuse when it is directly related to that. Most of the cases we have recorded related to a domestic violence issue and a dispute between a family.

The CHAIR — Okay. I am sure members will ask a little bit more detail about those issues. But particularly in relation to those instances of abuse that you have just described, does the Federation of Indian Associations keep records in relation to the complaints that might come to your peak body from community members or from the community at large?

Mr SRINIVASAN — The reference or most of the work teams are guided to us through the Indian consulate in Melbourne, the Indian high commission as well as Magistrates Courts and other community organisations. They refer the clients to us, victims to us. And again, from their arrival at our doorsteps, FIAV, we keep all the records in order. Why? There are two reasons. One, we want to make everything in order so if there is a question tomorrow we do not need to go around and start writing things. Everything is available online, on record. And also we submit this report to the Indian consulate. Why? We are the only organisation which is listed in the Indian community website to support the Indians in Australia. For anything related to domestic violence or any other victims issue, we are the only organisation. The Indian government gives us approximately \$1500 to \$3000 as a legal support for each and every case. So we have got all the records; we do maintain all the records.

The CHAIR — Thank you. When you submit those records to the consulate, do you also contact the police if there is abuse of a criminal nature?

Mr SRINIVASAN — Sorry?

The CHAIR — When you submit those records to the consulate, if the abuse was of a criminal nature would you also contact the police?

Mr SRINIVASAN — Yes, we do. We have very solid support from Victoria Police. If you read my report, you will see we work with crime prevention et cetera.

The CHAIR — My apologies. I have not had time to glance at this.

Mr SRINIVASAN — I understand that. I gave it to you only at the last minute.

Mr McGUIRE — We are obviously looking at peak organisations and the leadership roles that they are playing, so I would like you to give us a little more detail on what actually happens. Has the Indian Welfare and Resource Centre provided reports to you of child sexual abuse, or are you saying that it is just under domestic violence?

Mr SRINIVASAN — Again, we as a community work best on demands, if you can say that. In the last four or five years, since the numbers of international student arrivals has increased, especially from 2005 to 2009, we had almost 95 000 Indian international students living in Victoria. That was a time in which domestic violence crime increased, so we thought we should act on that. That is why we created that panel. Within the panel we

have a different role for each one to play. If any issues come up in relation to child abuse or anything related to children, we work with child support agencies through the Magistrates Court and through the consulate.

Mr McGUIRE — I guess the point I am trying to get to is that, yes, there would be big headline issues that you have to deal with and flashpoints that you have to go into crisis management with, but the pattern of this behaviour — the evidence that we have received — is that it is manipulative and hidden, so it is not obvious on many occasions, and that is how it can be repeated. Has the general issue of child sexual abuse been recognised, and what steps have you taken as a peak organisation to inform your constituent members that this is something that requires eternal vigilance?

Mr SRINIVASAN — Again, in relation to the child sexual abuse issue, we have had a number of community gatherings and also, if there is the necessity, we have psychologists or psychiatrists speak to the concerned groups. We have taken all premeasures and education factors, but there has been no issue that we have handled directly based on the child sexual abuse issue in the last five years in which I have been the president.

Mr McGUIRE — So you have had no reports in the last five years?

Mr SRINIVASAN — No.

Mr McGUIRE — To take it a step further — —

Mr SRINIVASAN — Let me also reiterate that we have some records in relation to domestic violence issues. That is a bifold issue rather than a main issue.

Mr McGUIRE — I guess what I am trying to get at is: could child sexual abuse be a subset of that domestic violence?

Mr SRINIVASAN — That is right.

Mr McGUIRE — The point is that we are trying to uncover these issues. Should you now then think of putting out some stronger guidelines to say that we need to address this, that we cannot have it covered up by a domestic violence issue and that we need to address it? It is all crime, but in particular we are wanting to bring this to the surface so that we actually know and understand. Do you understand the position that I am putting to you?

Mr SRINIVASAN — Absolutely. On that issue, yes, we are thinking about creating a separate platform. I hope you understand that for the majority of Indians all these issues come through the religious or spiritual organisations. That is the first place they go either for worship or prayer or to communicate with someone, because they are more comfortable with them than coming to a community organisation like us straightaway, so the referrals come through the temples, the churches, the mosques and the spiritual organisations. What we did recently to take that step forward was to bring all of them together. We had one or two meetings last year as well as at the beginning of this year. We are trying to bring them together as one federation — religious and spiritual organisations together.

Also we are trying to bring in the Indian senior citizens, who can play a major role on this. There are seven senior citizens organisations within Victoria, which are Fijians, Sri Lankans and Indians together, so we are also bringing them together as a federation. When we bring these groups together it will assist us more because the grandparents are the ones playing a major role within each and every family. In India there is no interest for women to go to work. Their job is to support the family and do the upbringing until the kids get to school, and here what we are doing, by working with the religious groups and working with the Indian senior citizens, is that we can approach them if there are any issues relating to children.

Mr McGUIRE — To follow on from that, you are now saying that your federation has evolved to this sophisticated model, if you like, so would you now look at issuing guidelines to raise the issue of child sexual abuse and, within that, would you make it mandatory that they be reported to the police?

Mr SRINIVASAN — Yes, we will. We spoke to the Minister for Community Services. We received quite a lot of guidelines and books from her office, so we have been working on it for the last two or three months.

Mr McGuire — On that final point, would you make it mandatory that it be reported to the police?

Mr Srinivasan — Yes, we will. With each and every domestic violence victims issue — anything related to any victims — the first step we take is to make sure that we report it to the police. We get the police report first, even before we get the legal professions to take it on.

Mrs Coote — Thank you very much indeed for being here. The Indian community has a very good and close relationship with Victoria Police; is that right?

Mr Srinivasan — Absolutely.

Mrs Coote — You have a police liaison officer, I think, who deals with a number of the issues that come forward. I would like to congratulate the Indian community, because I know that through the Australia India Society of Victoria you have been very progressive in looking into family violence and, together with the Jewish community, have done an extraordinary amount of work and put out some excellent, groundbreaking material for cultural groups. It has been absolutely terrific what you have done.

I am very interested in the work that AISV has done and the work that it is collecting on family violence. As Mr McGuire has said, often children are caught up in that family violence, and abuse of children, whether it be physical, sexual or emotional, is part of what I understand the AISV is looking into. Have you got any evidence that has come out of any of the work that they have done to date indicating that there is a very great culture within the Indian community of family violence and its ongoing impact on children as child abuse?

Mr Srinivasan — Let me give you a little bit of information about what we have done in the last four years. In 2009–10 we had 16 domestic violence cases reported to us. We took them through in many ways. In 2010–11 there were only 11 cases reported. In 2011–12 there were only seven cases reported. Whatever the numbers come in, you can see that as soon as we had come to know that there was an issue here, we needed to act on that. So we worked on communicating and educating the community through different panel sessions with the community, especially women. Currently Dr Lata Satyen — she gave a report to your meeting at Parliament House a few weeks ago — is the one leading that community support panel. We are also supported by Monash University as well as Deakin University for this research work we are doing currently.

On the child side, yes, it is part of, or related to, the domestic violence victims issues coming up. There are only three instances where I can say that children were involved. There is one particular instance — I do not know whether we would call it as abuse or anger — that related to a fight between husband and wife. This again happened around 2 o'clock after midnight. We called the police immediately. The social worker got involved. During that fight between the husband and wife, the husband threw the child right on the ground; it was only a four-month-old child. That is the first one which I can say was reported to us, and we took an interest. At 1.00 a.m. or 1.30 a.m., with police support, we removed the mother and the child and we kept her away from the husband, and we took all the steps through. The case is settled; they are living together now.

In another case I can say the mother was mentally unwell due to postnatal depression. I do not know whether we would call that child abuse — we do not know — but the little ones were going through really difficult times. The lady was not in a mental state to even keep the house clean. When we walked into that house, it was something — whether you call it a tip or a family home, we do not know. That is how it was. We managed to clean that up. We worked with children's support services. We managed to bring the father back from America. We handed over custody to the father through the court system. That one happened some time ago. The Minister for Housing currently, as a former member, was very helpful with that.

Mrs Coote — Vasan, what we have noticed through this committee but also through the work the Indian community has done with the Jewish community is that members of the Jewish community do not find it quite as easy to go to the police as a first stop. In the example you have just given about going to child protection, the Indian community has a very good relationship with the police and would go to police as a first stop, or in this instance to the proper authorities?

Mr Srinivasan — Initially I agree with the sentiment of what you are saying, that the Jewish community had gone through this many years ago before we arrived, and they got a really good system. We work with the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and we do share the platform with them. We organise functions with them to understand how they operate. We have taken quite a number of initiatives from what

they have done and then we started working on that. The current vice-president of the Indian federation comes from a Jewish background, so that has helped us to communicate with the Jewish community for the last four years. What we have done on that, yes, there was some sort of screen in front of the Indian community, especially women. On anything related to domestic violence victims or issues related to children, the screen is no, we are not going to go to the police, that is no good. Why? Because it takes us back to India: the way we are treated at the police station, the time we have to spend and the agony you need to go through — all of us got that in our mind; I can say that. That was the first screen we found. After the work we did with the Jewish community we approached Victoria Police.

I am actually part of the Victoria Police reference panel. I do work with them on a monthly basis, in the east as well as in the central area. I travel around with them in the country area to assist the Indian community whenever there is a necessity. On that basis the Victoria Police is coming closer to the community; the screen is being removed slowly. So the approach — —

What they used to do previously was come to us, because they were more comfortable talking to an Indian member rather than to Victoria Police. As you are aware, Andrea, there were some issues in Victoria that were created by the Indian media that Victoria and Victorian streets were not a safe place for Indians. Those racist comments and slurs which were created by the Indian media were big trouble for us at one stage; now we are out of that. The community is well and truly aware. We bring police officials into each and every function.

I will just give you an example. On Sunday we had a Baisakhi Mela in the middle of the Dandenong city. The first speaker was the local police inspector. Each and every thing we do, even to the temple; we bring the local police into the temple. We make sure that they are available. Every function we do in a year — maybe 10 or 12 — we make sure that we have one other Victoria Police official. I especially mention the amount of work and support done by Inspector Ian Geddes, as well as Commander Trevor Carter. Their support is absolutely marvellous. With their support we have removed that screen. Also I was invited by Victoria Police two years ago to be part of that community policing project. They took us through, as soon as a call comes in, what we should do and where we should go. That education was absolutely amazing.

Mrs COOTE — Vasan, thank you very much indeed.

Ms HALFPENNY — Thanks, Vasan. I would like to ask a little bit about the religious organisations that are affiliated or members of the federation. I know a little bit about churches and how they are sort of set up, and I think we are hearing from the Islamic council at some stage, but in particular the temples — excuse my ignorance, but as I understand from the little bit I know just from the locals in the Thomastown area, the temples are a very important and integral part of those of the Sikh belief and life, and they play a real welfare as well as a spiritual and religious role in the community. I was just wondering how the structure works. Is each temple separate? Is there a sort of overarching organisation that runs it? How do they operate?

Mr SRINIVASAN — Thank you, Bronwyn. You met a number of my community groups. You have been to a number of my FIAV functions. Currently there is no federation or overarching organisation for religious groups. I do not know whether you are aware that there was an issue with one of our temples in Carrum Downs. A priest was charged in a sexual abuse case, and he went through that process. At the end of the process we thought, 'We need to work through the religious organisations to bring them together because each one takes their own angle'. There are seven Sikh temples in Victoria — quite well known — right from Shepparton to Craigieburn to Dandenong and Keysborough. Also we have seven Hindu temples in Victoria. The major one is at Carrum Downs. I have been part of that since the inception of the temple in 1987–88.

What we do currently, as I said to your Chair, is that the initial reaction for the community members — they go to the gurdwaras and the temple and the spiritual groups like Chinmaya Mission, Vedanta Society and God Melbourne. There are quite a lot of them, each one trying to do it from a different angle. We thought hearing separately is difficult, so let us bring these 28 — in total 35; some of them are not registered — religious and spiritual organisations, including Islamic mosques as well as the church groups within the Indian community, together to form a federation. We did, as I said, two meetings in May. We are actually bringing them together to form related Indian-origin religious organisations in Victoria.

Ms HALFPENNY — Just going back into the case of what happened at Carrum Downs, how did you people become aware of that issue? Did the child tell somebody?

Mr SRINIVASAN — It was not really a child, it was a young lady. Again, it is like churches. You go to the father, and you sit down and you discuss with him the issues related to family or personal. This particular incident came out in public after the police started investigating.

Ms HALFPENNY — And the police investigated because the — —

Mr SRINIVASAN — She reported to police directly, and one of the devotees outside — the instance happened in a priest's home. It is widely available in the media as well as the court system. She immediately went to Frankston police and reported it. From there we came to know as a community organisation.

Ms HALFPENNY — What was the community's reaction to it? We have sort of heard a lot of information about how sometimes the community may not believe things, and they get upset in other cases. I am not talking particularly about the Indian community; this is more about Western church communities. In other cases there is a lot of support, but it is really about the leadership around the issue and what happens. What was the reaction of the community in that case?

Mr SRINIVASAN — The community was absolutely uneasy because we had never seen anything like that in Australia so far, because the Indians have been here since 1881. The first Indian family is actually married to the Jewish community. They landed here in 1881. They are very well-known business people in the city. They are philanthropists. They support the community in a big way. When that happened we were really going through bit of depression in the community because we had never seen that happen in Australia. That was the first time to our knowledge. We had a number of gatherings. We had a number of meetings within the community. So our gut made us educate our community members. It does not matter who you are or how well known the priest is; we do not want anyone, especially women and children, to see them alone.

Ms HALFPENNY — Thank you. It seems you are taking steps, so thank you.

Mr O'BRIEN — Thank you, Vasan, and thank you for your presentation. I would like to follow on from the questions of my colleagues, particularly for you as a leader of the peak body. If I could just quote a paragraph in your submission to us, where you say:

Although Indians belong to many different religions, split by numerous languages and thousands of dialects, a strong social structure and number of divisions in the land of diversity, the unique strength is that of the unity amongst the various diverse background of Indian community members in Victoria.

In a sense there are broader parallels for multicultural Victoria and Australia in the sense of the importance of diversity, and I ask you, in terms of leadership, how you approach, I suppose, the challenges that can arise in that role you play where there are potentially conflicts between various groups in the communities you represent or between one of those groups and, say, the laws of the land from a cultural background.

Mr SRINIVASAN — Thank you for that question. Yes, I know five fingers are not equal. There are a major 23 languages in India. It is multicultural itself, on its own. It is like the United Nations — dealing with Indians. It is not easy, because each one speaks a different language, each has different, separate — the culture is the only one that brings us together. The belief is the second one to bring us together.

Yes, it is difficult to deal with the number of regional-based groups within the Indian community in Victoria, but let me put that in a different perspective. With the support of the Victorian government and the federal government we now have the amount of links we have, or currently I have made in the last five years. I have worked very closely with each and every Premier of Victoria since I arrived here, from John Cain to Dr Napthine, and I am quite heavily involved with the community. I am part of a number of community organisations like the Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund, the masonic society and Rotary. Using that learning curve from other groups and what I am hearing and learning assists me to communicate between my regional groups.

Yes, there are issues with which we are faced. In every organisation it sometimes happens that if the incoming president does not get elected, there is another organisation to be floated immediately. That is a concept on many occasions. Dealing with them and bringing them together is a difficult task, but we manage to do it because of the support we get from the Victorian, federal and local governments as well as Victoria Police, which mainly assists us. We always use one of them to mediate. I bring someone from outside the Indian community to mediate, and I will give you an example.

We are currently going through an issue with — I do not want to name them — one of the Buddhist temples. We tried to mediate but we could not get far. We approached the former mayor of Monash, Peter Vlahos, who is a lawyer himself. Within three hours he managed to bring the groups together and come to an understanding where they could work together. We approach external support as soon as we know that we cannot handle it on our own, because sometimes there is a conflict of interest for me too. If there is an issue within the Tamil or Hindi-speaking community, I am very closely related to both of them and I can speak both languages quite well. We always use external support to convince the community to come back together.

Mr O'BRIEN — Thank you, just one follow-up question if I could. I was also particularly interested in your role as a leader of the organisation. I suppose the timing of your reaction to events and these issues, and they are in every organisation — what is at the top and what is a sub-organisation, and do you step in or do you not? We are obviously focused on child abuse and how that can be prevented in institutional organisations. How do you see your role as a leader of the organisation in, say, reacting to an issue such as child abuse? I note your comments that there is no evidence of much child abuse but nevertheless it is an issue across the whole community, so what do you feel the role of a leader is in relation to those issues?

Mr SRINIVASAN — I am the father of two young girls, two teenagers. One is doing pharmacy and one is doing year 9, so as a rule as a parent that is my feeling too; and again as a community leader, if I cannot do it, I do not expect others to do it. The third point is that we have regional-based people in the committee. What we do is to select one from each major group. Recently again, thanks to the Victorian government, we did the demographics of the Indian community in Victoria. I am happy to say that I think most of the members may have that CD which was launched on 17 August last year by the Honourable Matthew Guy, the planning minister.

We have outlined each and every step that we have taken so far and also the demographics of the Indian community in Victoria. I would also like to acknowledge the former VMC chair, George Lekakis, who played a big role with us during that time. We put this together. As leaders we feel that we have done quite a lot, but that is not sufficient. We need to do more to bring the community's attention to issues such as child abuse and sexual abuse.

Mr O'BRIEN — Are there any additional recommendations you would offer us from your experience with the broader issues we are dealing with in terms of child abuse?

Mr SRINIVASAN — This has all happened purely because of what happened in the Catholic Church recently; it surfaced from there. Previously my community never came forward to talk about this, because it was not an agenda item. It is not bothering anybody. It may happen in one or two families which we do not know about. I think there should be regular communication with parliamentarians related to children's services, with the early childhood minister or the parliamentary secretary. Perhaps you could host a platform to bring community organisations together to give us guidance so that if that happens we know what to do. We have done it with the domestic violence issue; that was a prime issue five years back. From there we moved on and we are working on one particular thing at one time. If members of Parliament together can put a proposal to the government that once a year at least — because this is the future generation we are talking about; we are all parents and we have our responsibilities and roles to play — the government takes the initiative to bring community organisations and religious groups together, even one from each organisation, that will assist us to understand the issues. We understand logic and we understand other issues, but not the law and order issue or step by step what needs to be done. I put a request through the Chair that if there is a platform for us to come together to share and learn and educate our community, that would be very useful.

Mr O'BRIEN — Thank you very much.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Could I also say that we have received evidence from a number of witnesses, not only in the Catholic Church, and that is why we are looking at organisations across Victoria.

Mr WAKELING — Vasan, thank you very much for your submission and your presentation. Certainly I am aware of the significant role that your organisation plays, and particularly the role that individual Indian organisations play, particularly through my own local organisation, Sant Nirankari Mission. I know that, using that as a model, it is a community hub. It is hub for the Indian community in that region. In that context, are you aware of any of your member organisations that have policies or procedures in place within their individual

organisations that relate to child abuse or to the handling of children? You talked about working-with-children checks, but do you know if any of your member organisations have gone so far as to develop an internal policy to deal with these issues?

Mr SRINIVASAN — Thank you, Nick, and once again, you are very familiar to my community groups within your region. We have seen you every time at Nirankari Mission, and any other function we organise. Thank you for your continuous support. Currently, apart from the FIAV, there is nothing really constructive. Andrea commented about the Australia India Society of Victoria. That is, again, another small organisation, but none of them have gone so far as to do anything except the FIAV. The reason we managed to do it was because of the support we received from the Victorian government. We have got a social worker in place and we have got project officers in place, so we have managed to develop the policies and procedures related to each and every issue. Currently we are working on that, because we received from Mary Wooldridge all the documentation that is required for us to prepare to approach this issue, which we are currently working on. There is nothing available. Nothing has been made by any organisation so far within the Indian community.

Mr WAKELING — We have had evidence presented to us by various organisations. One in particular was Child Wise, but there are other organisations that work with peak bodies to develop and tailor policies, particularly in this area, and they have been able to roll that out in various organisations, and we have had other organisations that do similar work. That may be something your organisation may wish to look at. We, as a committee, are looking at that issue in terms of how and whether or not that is something we should consider, but certainly we would be encouraging all organisations, particularly peak organisations, to be encouraging their members to create policies and procedures specifically in this area.

Mr SRINIVASAN — Nick, thank you. Definitely we will do it. Give us maybe three to six months, and I will come back and send a copy to all six of you.

The CHAIR — Thank you. I do not believe there are any further questions from members, Mr Srinivasan, but are there any concluding remarks that you would like to make to the committee?

Mr SRINIVASAN — Thank you for enlightening us. You are all familiar faces to me. I am not new to any one of you. Such opportunities will put our community on the next step. People will see that the government is taking an interest in a community organisation. Janine called me and said, ‘Would you like to submit or would you like to appear?’. I said, ‘I am happy to appear’. This will help us to go back to the community groups, and say, ‘Listen, we are working with the government. We need to take further steps. They are also working with us. Can I sit down with you all to prepare the policies and procedures in this particular area?’. One thing Indians always do is look at a hierarchy’s influence. When they see that members of Parliament are taking an interest and asking questions about the Indian community, that puts us on a first step to taking some serious action to prepare policies and procedures, which we will do. Thank you. The second thing is that if you could all create a platform for us to learn and educate ourselves, we can go back to the community and give something back. Thank you.

The CHAIR — On behalf of the committee, I thank you very much indeed for your time this morning and for making yourself available. We do appreciate it, and your evidence has been most helpful.

Mr SRINIVASAN — Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Witness withdrew.