CORRECTED VERSION

LAW REFORM COMMITTEE

Inquiry into access to and interaction with the justice system by people with an intellectual disability and their families and carers

Melbourne — 21 February 2012

Members

Mr A. Carbines
Ms J. Garrett
Mr C. Newton-Brown
Mr R. Northe
Mrs D. Petrovich

Chair: Mr C. Newton-Brown
Deputy Chair: Ms J. Garrett

Staff

Executive Officer: Dr V. Koops
Research Officer: Ms V. Shivanandan

Witnesses

Mr K. Stone, Executive Officer,

Mr J. McKenna, and

Ms D. McLean, Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disabilities.

The CHAIR — I am Clem Newton-Brown, the chair of the Law Reform Committee. I am here with Jane Garrett and Russell Northe, and the other two members are not available today. We are a cross-party committee set up by Parliament to investigate references they give us, and this is one of three that we are looking at. In this public hearing all your evidence is recorded and you will receive a copy of the transcript at the end. You can check that, and if there are any corrections required, you can let us know. Anything you say here is protected by parliamentary privilege but not outside the room. At the end of the process we complete a report which goes to Parliament, and then hopefully our recommendations will be picked up and eventually filter through to some changes that will assist in the area that we are looking at.

For the purposes of the transcript, could you please start with your name, professional address and who you represent? Then we have 40 minutes to talk to you. Perhaps you could, amongst yourselves, divide that time as appropriate, and we will probably have a few questions to throw in as it goes along as well.

Mr STONE — My name is Kevin Stone, and I am the Executive Officer with VALID — the Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disabilities.

Mr McKENNA — My name is John McKenna, and I am also with VALID as an advocate.

Ms McLEAN — I am Darianne McLean. I also work for VALID as an individual advocate and project worker, but I would have to say I am also here as a parent.

The CHAIR — And VALID's address?

Mr STONE — 235 Napier Street, Fitzroy.

The CHAIR — What do you want to tell us?

Mr STONE — I guess we had the opportunity last year to meet with you as part of the delegation from the Coalition for Disability Rights. That coalition, if you recall, comprised VALID, NDS — National Disability Services — Carers Victoria and the Association for Children with a Disability, and we certainly welcomed that opportunity to talk to you. VALID put in a submission in its own right which basically reflected the same sorts of overarching conclusions or recommendations, but we wanted to say it in our own right and perhaps give some nuance to it that we were not able to do in a broader coalition. Do you have a copy of our submission?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr STONE — Okay. There are no surprises. We have said what we want to say, but perhaps we could take you through it, and we welcome questions.

The CHAIR — If you take us through the key points, that would be good. We have all read it.

Mr STONE — This week we are just recovering from our major conference, which we had two weeks ago in Geelong. We have that conference every year, and we get around 1300 people with disabilities from all around Victoria, all around Australia and in fact all around the world. The reason I mention that is because, again, it has confirmed for me the importance of people with disability actually coming together and talking with each other and supporting each other through their trials and tribulations — so really an affirming experience for people with disabilities to actually talk to other people with disabilities who are standing up for their rights and who are becoming valued members of the community and citizens, and to have those sorts of role models around them. I guess that is our highlight for the year, but throughout the year we have regular network meetings of self-advocates coming together, and parents coming together, talking to each other and supporting each other.

I guess the first issue that we have highlighted here is the need for early intervention strategies. I am telling you from my experience both as a parent of a man with intellectual disability and as an executive officer, as a former principal of a special developmental school and as someone who has been in this field for a long, long time, that the most important thing you can do to support people with a disability is to let them know that they are people with rights and that they are human beings and equal citizens. If you provide support to them and the education and training around that and the opportunity to actually come together and affirm that right, you build resistance against bullying in the first place — because one of the most common complaints we get is about people being bullied out there in the community. We talk about inclusion; we want inclusion for people with disability, but we would like the community to be a bit nicer and a bit more welcoming and tolerant.

The CHAIR — So that is not just amongst kids; that is amongst adults that bullying goes on?

Mr STONE — Absolutely. Absolutely.

The CHAIR — What sorts of things?

Mr STONE — I guess the typical one is the stealing of iPhones or other phones, or shoes. Particularly in some areas of Melbourne we have people with disability who have a hard time holding onto their shoes because they get picked on by gangs of other youths and things. Any vulnerable person is subject to that sort of exploitation. The verbal bullying, the name calling, that sort of stuff is out there. I have to say — and I have got no objective evidence to back this up, other than my own experience — it seems to be getting worse out there. It seems to be that what we used to call manners and courtesy seem to go missing in a lot of places, and younger people are much more brazen, or seem to be a lot more brazen, about targeting and picking on people. We were talking with a group of young people — or not so young; early 20s — with intellectual disability from Gippsland, and we asked the question: what is the biggest problem you have got? They named certain gangs and individuals who were targeting them.

The CHAIR — Just following through with the results of that, when it is at a level that warrants reporting it to the police, what are some of the issues there in terms of access to justice?

Mr STONE — That is where it begins. When a wrong is done to you, first of all you need to have the sense that and you need to know that it is wrong. I have to say that lots of people with disability have grown up believing that they are not worthy, they are not worthy human beings; because they are treated so often as less than worthy they come to believe that about themselves, and so they basically expect it. Am I right? They actually think, 'This is the way the world is', and that translates not just to the bullies on the street, it translates across to, 'When that staff person who is working in my group home comes into my room at night and does things to me, why would I tell anybody about it? Because that is just normal, that is what I'm here for: to be used by other people'. It can extend into families. We are a family-based organisation, strong on parents.

However, sometimes it is the parents and the families who will also exploit the son or daughter or use them as a slave — that is, to do work around the place — rip off their pension and basically exploit them, and again the person with disability, without any other experience and without any other affirming opportunities in their life, will come to accept that as being okay. The reason I say all of that is that the strategy to overcome it is to get out there and talk to people with disability, to let them talk with each other and to give them fantastic role models — people who are actually standing up for themselves and who have jobs, have gotten married and are living positive lives in the community — to show other people with disability that that is possible.

Every year you are invited to come down to Geelong to our three-day conference. Come down and see the revelations that occur there. People just awaken to the fact that they are worthy human beings. We have monthly meetings all around Melbourne and some around Victoria. We have hundreds of people with disability who come together in these monthly meetings to talk with each other and learn about stuff. We are constantly providing education to them. We have speakers about public transport, about emergency services and about opportunities to get involved in the community. It is that sort of program that people with intellectual disability are taking control of themselves. We are positively out there not just to say 'Be included in the community' but to empower people to be worthwhile contributors to the community and also to be confident enough to stand up.

Sorry for rambling on here, but one of the most amazing presentations I sat through at the conference a couple of weeks ago was by this young woman with Down syndrome who was probably about 19 years old. I am sure she will not mind me using her name, because she was giving a public presentation. Her name is Emma Norton, and she stood there and told us about how she used to lack confidence in her life, how she was bullied and picked on in school and what steps she had taken in her life to overcome that so she could now stand there and be a proud citizen presenting to others.

At the end of it I asked her the question, 'What is your advice about those bullies' — because that is something we are seeing all the time — 'and what would you do?'. I was expecting that she would say, 'Get a hit squad' or something like that. She looked at me and said, 'There is nothing you can do'. I said, 'But you have overcome it'. She said, 'The change was me. I had to deal with it. I had to learn to deal with it. I had to learn to become strong. There is nothing you can do about those people'. I do not necessarily believe that. I think there is stuff you can do about changing the attitudes out there, but the profound truth here is that the light has to be switched on inside the individual. She was fortunate to have a very loving, supportive family around her and a great service supporting her growth and development. Not everyone is so lucky.

Mr McKENNA — I think it is true that families can really be make or break when it comes to support. I know we are talking a lot about the conference right now; that is because it is fresh in our minds. I have been through about four of them. Keep in mind you have a huge area at Deakin University, with 1300 people. Everyone is having a great time. A lot of support workers are there, and they are there with a number of people.

I am glad to say that they are isolated incidents, but when it happens — gee, it stands out! There have been occasions when we have witnessed bad support workers just treating people badly. Through our lens on this sort of stage we think, 'Wow, how dare you do something like that and treat that person like that in front of so many people?'. I guess that is one concern: it is happening out in the streets, and it is happening in front of people. I guess it is support workers from the old school who do not understand and use the old medical model of, 'I am the nurse; you are the patient'.

To support what Kevin is saying, what we are doing now as an advocacy organisation is giving people the power to feel better, but it has to be a two-way thing. If I quickly jump on the other side of the fence, where you have the police and the courts and what have you, they are struggling. It is a tough gig for them. Even with a person with a physical disability, I am always getting questions — 'I never know whether to go up and help' and 'What do I do?'. I am changing the subject a little bit now, but there are a lot of gaps in the area of supporting around training — how do you deal with, what triggers do you look for, where do you go, what role does an independent third person play?

To summarise my little spiel, law supports are still needed. There is the idea of reducing the recidivism rate, especially for people coming out of prison. That is a huge gap. It is not rocket science; we know the problems there.

Mr STONE — John, remember that guy? You and I were walking down the street in Brunswick. A couple of months before we had been to Marlborough unit at Port Phillip, and we met this guy.

Mr McKENNA — Yes.

Mr STONE — Then we met him walking down the street in Brunswick. You were chatting with him — what is he doing with his life? 'Nothing.' Who are you talking to? 'No-one', usually.

Mr McKENNA — It is a real tightrope for them, yes. This is the work I was doing when I spoke at the last inquiry — work at Port Phillip Prison, the Marlborough unit. It was just a coincidence that I met this guy and they sort of knew me — 'Hey, Macca! How are you going?'; 'I am good'. It was great to see them out. I asked, 'How is life going?', and he said, 'All right', but he sounded nervous in his voice. It is not all of that substance abuse either. It is about what supports are now out there for him. Does he go back to mum and dad? Does he go back to his mates? He was unsure.

Mr STONE — I felt he was slipping back into the same. The fact that he was where he was — you know — slipping back in. When I was talking to him I was seeing the need. I wanted to take this guy into one of our groups and sit him somewhere where we could actually talk and be supported, rather than just being out there — —

Mr McKENNA — Travelling trains.

Mr STONE — Travelling bloody trains — excuse me!

Ms GARRETT — The clear thrust of what you are saying is that one of the major issues is when individuals are butting up against the justice system, and one of the major hurdles is the lack of confidence and support even to get to the first stage of finding out what rights are et cetera. Is that correct?

Mr STONE — Yes. I think it is. We are motivated by that; we believe that. We developed a program called the My Rights Training Program. In addition to the networks we support et cetera, we try to get out there and teach people about their rights. They are very fundamental human rights — the right to be free, the right to be respected and those sorts of things — and we link that to the Charter of rights and responsibilities. We are out there talking to people about what it is to be a responsible citizen. It is not just about having rights; it is about the responsibility to follow the law and obey the rules and that sort of stuff.

That program is not funded or supported. We are hopefully putting something together at the moment. This is not a plug for us to get funding to do it, by the way; it is just an example of the work that we believe is absolutely critical and necessary across the state. People with intellectual disability need to have a foundation that they can stand on that says, ‘Yes, you are a human being. Yes, you are a citizen of this state. Yes, you have rights’. You can teach that to them and you can teach it in schools et cetera, but without that sort of base, when they look inside or look in the mirror what they are often seeing is all this stuff that has been said to them over the years about being retards and worthless — all of that negative stuff. As an advocacy group we have to work overtime to help create that sort of foundation. Our main role is as an advocacy organisation responding to crises and situations where people have been abused, exploited, victimised — —

The CHAIR — Do people come to you specifically on the issue of access to justice because of dealings with the police, the courts or lawyers?

Mr STONE — Yes. They are looking for support through different stages, either as victims or as perpetrators.

The CHAIR — What sort of things could we suggest to assist the situation in relation to the justice system and the various players within it?

Ms McLEAN — My particular area of expertise is in advocating for those who have challenging behaviours, both at home and within the support system.

Mr STONE — You might need to describe what ‘challenging behaviours’ actually means.

Ms McLEAN — They have a history of being aggressive toward others, including their family members. More often than not they are on the autism spectrum. They also engage in self-injury, and often property damage is also something you will see in their history.

In answer to your question, I think the first place we need to start is the police force and also looking at the relationship between the Department of Human Services and non-government organisations in supporting these extremely vulnerable individuals. Some of them cannot speak so they are not able to verbalise their needs, but I would have to say that their behaviours are a form of communication and certainly need to be listened to. However, more often than not the response is in relation to the face value of the behaviour rather than looking at what lies behind it, and there is very strong empirical evidence to show us what lies behind these behaviours. We end up with scenarios, some of which I have shared in our report. They include, for example, a family whose son or daughter is highly anxious, so some of these behaviours start to occur. They are not able to cope within the home environment, so their only option is to call the police. Unfortunately, the response from the police is not always helpful and is often traumatic.

Mr NORTHE — Darianne, in the submission you talk about some of the things that New South Wales does maybe in contrast to Victoria. Do you want to speak to those quickly?

Mr STONE — I will speak. Darianne is mum to a young man who has been described as challenging, and I guess her experience is fairly indicative. Parents are often the people who best know the person with the disability. They know their triggers, and they know their ways of communicating. If you do not mind my using your son, he has regular involvement with the police.

Ms McLEAN — Including last night.

Mr STONE — Including last night. If it were not for Darianne and her husband, I despair to think of what would happen to him over the years. Because of his parents’ advocacy and because they have insisted on being included and talking to the police and being present when their son is around, the situation has been ameliorated. Often what happens is that a person with a disability may be picked up by the police, who may not be aware of what the triggers are and what he or she might be trying to communicate and who may not even be aware of their particular disability. The police may know that an independent third person is required to be there in the taking of a statement. They may know that, but it is my experience that they may not as well. They are not allowed to phone someone to come in and support them in the making of a statement. The ITP is not necessarily there to support them; it is to support the process.

Often a person with a disability needs someone they trust and who knows their ways of communicating to actually be there. One of the things the New South Wales police allow for is for a person with a disability to have a nominated person present in the taking of a statement or in giving an interview. There is an elderly couple in Geelong whose son has been incredibly problematic over the years. One of the things they say to us is that their son presents so capably in many ways; he can fool people. But they are aware of all the particular issues he has to deal with — even just understanding what other people are saying and processing information. For them not to be able to be there to support him in understanding stuff through those processes is soul destroying.

The CHAIR — Darianne, when your son gets picked up by police who do not know him, how does he go about explaining or communicating that he is — —

Ms McLEAN — Generally speaking, not very well because usually in that moment he is highly escalated.

The CHAIR — So the police think that he is drugged or on alcohol or —

Ms McLEAN — Not so much that. It is a variety of issues. He is currently engaging in what could be seen as unlawful behaviour. So he is going into shops, and he is taking items and not paying for them. It is always the same items; he is very particular. We have worked really hard with the police. We have informed them, we have given them lots of information, we have given them a directive that they have on the LEAP database in terms of how to interact or not interact with our son to avoid escalation.

It is extremely difficult because he moves around a lot so it is not as though we can just work with our local police. Last night it was Box Hill. Another night it could be Nunawading, another night it could be Greensborough and another night it could be Broadmeadows. On some occasions he will walk into a police station voluntarily, at the end of the day, because he knows they will ring and he will get his way home, and part of the issue around this is that he was in the supported accommodation system for 10 years and for a long part of that time he was locked up because of his history of wandering, and he still got out constantly.

The CHAIR — So he goes on public transport?

Ms McLEAN — No, he walks. To all of those locations.

The CHAIR — And would something like a card assist him, that you could hand to a policeman?

Ms McLEAN — Yes, and we are doing that currently. He is currently taking ID with him. It is just that the police often have not got the first idea how to interact.

The CHAIR — What does the ID show?

Ms McLEAN — His name and a contact number.

The CHAIR — And an indication that he has a disability?

Ms McLEAN — No, but there is certainly that on the database, and we have certainly worked really well with the Eltham police. They have been terrific in that we met and we have put a profile together, and they have actually hand delivered, in uniform, this information to shopkeepers that might be targets of our son. And that is helping. And we are trying to change that problematic behaviour, but the problem is that the knee-jerk response is to lock him up, to get this nuisance out of the way — 'It's annoying; it's taking up our resources' and so forth — but we discovered after seven years that you cannot teach him these principles if he is locked up. He self-harms and he does significant property damage.

Mr STONE — And he gets out anyway.

Ms McLEAN — And he gets out anyhow. It is a real problem, this issue, because families are put in a position where it is just a no-win situation. Because of these particular behaviours it gets to the point where families cannot cope without help.

The CHAIR — So has he gone through the court system and been charged?

Ms McLEAN — No, he hasn't, amazingly. And it does not take long to figure out that there is no way that you can prove intent on a criminal basis. The fact that he turns up to police stations with a bag full of the items and tells you that fact means that we are not able to use the normal consequences to modify that behaviour, and we are certainly doing a lot of work in trying to figure out what is behind the behaviour. But it is very reliant. So last night he ended up obviously taking some items, the security got involved, they rang the police and he ended up being physically restrained, which has horrendous outcomes for him because of a trauma history.

He was put into a divisional van and taken back to the police station. They chose in this instance to keep the items from him and not let him have access to those, and it escalated and then he was restrained again, and then eventually he was dragged into a divvy van and taken home. The support worker who turned up to pick him up indicated that they were not following the protocol that had been given to them. Because you need to know this stuff. You need to know that you cannot say certain words or he will just escalate. And it is not his fault; he has no control over it.

Mr STONE — One of the great things about it, because we quoted that case as a positive story in our submission, is that we see the light here in establishing partnerships between the police and the justice system and families and people with disabilities and actually exploring strategies. At the moment we complain about the justice system and the police being insensitive to or ignorant of the needs of people with disability, but there are also plenty of examples of where this sort of interaction leads to better practice. A problem is that it does not actually get translated upwards, and we do not see it reflected generally. So it is dependent on some committed individuals to pull it off. That is one of the reasons we have recommended the setting up of a justice advisory group, because we think networks and organisations like ours have something to offer — these sorts of experiences to offer. If we were able to sit down with police and others at a high level and say, 'Look, let's try this stuff' and to develop some expertise within the force, that might radiate outwards, but that has to happen at a higher level, not just at the level of Eltham, you know?

Ms GARRETT — Would you think there would be some benefit in the establishment of officers charged with dealing with people with intellectual disability, like the multicultural unit et cetera? It is high level — —

Ms McLEAN — Yes, they are supposed to have those now.

Ms GARRETT — So they are supposed to have those — —

Ms McLEAN — Yes, each unit has a liaison person. But I would have to say that some are better than others.

Ms GARRETT — Is that centrally coordinated properly?

Mr STONE — Not that we are aware of.

Ms McLEAN — Obviously, I guess, given the outcomes that we are getting — —

Ms GARRETT — Which is your point: you would like to see a — —

Ms McLEAN — Yes. With one of the case studies I gave here, there was just an absolutely horrendous outcome. I have just done a week of training with a renowned organisation worldwide in supporting people with challenging behaviours. If they try a whole lot of other approaches, in the end if there is a safety issue, they do train how to do restraint in a respectful way and with dignity. The maximum period of time that is recommended a person be restrained is 3 minutes. In this young man's case he was restrained for 2 hours on the floor. This is a young man with autism who cannot speak.

Mr STONE — If you are not aware, there are cases in the UK at the moment that are going through court of people being restrained to death — actually dying with people sitting on top of them.

Ms McLEAN — The dilemma I see that we have here in Victoria is that we have the Office of the Senior Practitioner, who oversees the use of restraint and seclusion, and that has been a positive thing; it has helped in a lot of ways. But because they have brought out an approach where there is no restraint, what is tending to happen now in these situations is that the support staff are not skilled enough, so in the end, when these behaviours are occurring, what do they do? They ring the police, who do use restraint and are not trained in these specific situations.

Ms GARRETT — Do you think that needs to be revisited?

Ms McLEAN — Absolutely, because the Office of the Senior Practitioner will claim that Victoria is heading toward a restraint-free policy. We will show you evidence of where restraint is still occurring, but it is the police who are doing it. It is really unfair to them. We are setting them up to fail, because they do not have the understanding and the training that the Office of the Senior Practitioner is certainly putting into the disability support system.

Mr STONE — I guess on these sorts of issues we lack a forum to debate them and contribute to systemic planning around them. We are dealing with the consequences, but we do not really have a way of being able to channel our experience positively to contribute to the solutions. We do think — for example, Darianne mentioned the training she has just done with a guy by the name of Bob Bowen, who developed the Mandt System on trauma management et cetera — there are plenty of answers out there for doing things better that the whole system could benefit from, not just individuals.

Ms McLEAN — My son gets stopped just walking along the street. He is not doing anything wrong, but because there is a history the police see him. We pride ourselves on heading towards an inclusive state, but all facets of the community need to embrace that, and predominantly the justice system, because these people are at very high risk of ending up interacting with the justice system on a regular basis.

Mr STONE — I guess just to summarise our submission, we talk a lot in there about the need for self-advocacy support networks and for advocacy. We are an advocacy organisation, so you would expect us to say that, but the reason we are so passionately committed to what we do is that we actually see the power of effective self-advocacy support and advocacy. We are part of the solution here. We help people through this stuff; we are the ones who stand in court and support people through this stuff. But we see so little respect for or recognition of or commitment of funding to self-advocacy support and advocacy support. We all limp along on the smell of an oily rag — and some of us do not have even an oily rag.

If there were a greater investment, it could be particularly in networks supporting people with disability to come together, to support each other through this stuff and to be educated and trained about their rights and opportunities and then in a role of advocacy itself. We are informal; we are not lawyers. We are mums and dads and people with disability who believe in this stuff. We are the ones who can help make the justice system a lot more accessible and a lot fairer for people with disability, just by the fact that we are there, looking out for them, but there are not enough of us.

We are known as the peak advocacy organisation for people with disability and their families. We are funded for all of Victoria for individual advocacy with two individual advocacy units, which allows us to pay for one and a half advocates for the whole state and some office and admin. So we have to be creative in all the different ways we can get funding, and we are doing okay. However, we do not get to Mildura — we do not get to many parts of this state that lack advocacy coverage. It is the same with Court Network, and the victims support people, who have six support people for the whole state. That is just crazy.

I guess if there is one thing we would want to say to Parliament it is: respect the role of advocacy and self-advocacy. It is not just jumping up and down out there, whingeing about the world; it is actually a creative and constructive part of making this stuff work. I would say: value it.

Ms McLEAN — Yes. Partnerships are absolutely vital. That is certainly what we have learnt in our personal situation: having case meetings including everybody, including the police, because it is unfair to expect them to effectively support him when they are ignorant of the circumstances and the need in that situation. I know that resource-wise it is really difficult for police to support that at least, to be part of it. If a vulnerable person in a particular area is likely to have some interaction with the police, I would think that forming a partnership with the local police and the liaison person and ensuring that they have the capacity and the time to be able to commit to that makes a lot of sense, because we cannot always control the behaviour of these individuals. There are so many factors that can contribute to why they behave the way that they do, and it is never black and white; it is always very complex. I would have to say that in most of the cases I deal with it is trauma based. If we are responding to these behaviours in a way that adds to the trauma — —

Ms GARRETT — It escalates.

Ms McLEAN — Yes. It just becomes a vicious cycle.

The CHAIR — John, do you have something you wanted to say? We have a few minutes to spare.

Mr McKENNA — Alternative dispute resolution: we talked about what is working right now in the justice system, and we know how people are directed to do mediation before coming to courts. That works. You find a good mediator. I have done the course myself, and I know that that is a language, it works and it is effective. So we know there is a model that is good. So it is a matter of modifying that model to have an alternative instead of going through the courts for people with an intellectual or cognitive disability. It is not unusual. It would be an easy tweak to modify it and get it up and running. If it is about saving money and saving stress and all of that, one thing that comes out of this discussion is: let's look at the alternatives. We have spoken about empowerment of individuals, but it is all about, 'Okay, I'm empowered now, but I still don't want to hop in that cop car and go to that court', so go down this path as an alternative. You will still make both sides happy and satisfied. Let's get some learnings out of this. I stress that as a really good concept.

The CHAIR — As far as intellectual disabilities go, is there a commonality between people with intellectual disabilities or is it so diverse that you cannot really come up with a system that catches everybody?

Mr McKENNA — It is diverse.

Mr STONE — It is incredibly diverse.

Ms McLEAN — Because they are people first.

Mr McKENNA — That is right.

Ms McLEAN — They have an intellectual disability, but they are people first. So like all of us, we are all very individual, as they are. Unfortunately the response groups them together.

Mr McKENNA — It is about their history, it is about medication and it is about what they know and what they do not know, and good days and bad days.

Ms GARRETT — What support they have got.

Mr McKENNA — That is right.

The CHAIR — All right. Thank you very much for coming today.

Ms GARRETT — Thank you very much. That was very helpful.

Mr NORTHE — You put it very well again.

Ms McLEAN — Thank you.

Mr STONE — So that was an open invitation for you to come to Geelong next year; okay?

The CHAIR — All right.

Ms GARRETT — Make sure we get the invite.

Mr STONE — We will make sure you do.

Mr McKENNA — If you want to find out about a conference, go to www.johnmckenna.com.au.

Mr NORTHE — I thought it would have been just 'Macca'.

Mr McKENNA — This is my news that I put out. Quick plug.

Ms GARRETT — It is in the transcript!

Mr McKENNA — It is a very effective blog that I do once a week on a range of disability-related issues. So I invite you to have a look.

Ms GARRETT — Thank you.

The CHAIR — See you later.

Witnesses withdrew.