

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Inquiry into youth justice centres in Victoria

Melbourne — 14 June 2017

Members

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Witnesses

Mr Warren Eames, Acting Director, Youth Support and Advocacy Service;

Ms Sarah Nicholson, Manager, Sector and Community Partnerships, Centre for Multicultural Youth; and

Mr Gatluak Puoch.

The CHAIR — I would like to welcome everybody who is here today — those who are about to give evidence and those who are watching in the audience. We are conducting a public hearing of the legal and social issues committee. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

What we have been asking witnesses to do if they wish is make a few brief comments — no more than 5 minutes, if we can keep it to that. If you do not wish to, that is fine as well. Then we will open it up to questions. We are in your hands. Are there any comments that you would like to make to start with? Otherwise we can just go straight to questions.

Ms NICHOLSON — I think we have all prepared a short introduction. Is there a particular order in which you would like us to speak?

The CHAIR — No. Whatever you are comfortable with.

Mr EAMES — My understanding was that we would make a brief statement for about 5 minutes and go from there. Are people familiar with YSAS? Do I need to give a quick 30-second overview of YSAS?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr EAMES — Forgive me; I will just read from this, then. The Youth Support and Advocacy Service, or YSAS, is Australia's largest youth-specific community service organisation. We are committed to putting young people first and enabling those experiencing disadvantage to access resources and support they require to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. We are a Victorian state government-funded organisation providing predominantly youth drug and alcohol services from multiple locations around metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

I have been asked to present to this committee based on YSAS's experience of working with young people in the community setting who are recidivist offenders and who are generally characterised as high-volume offenders committing serious and sometimes violent crimes. As I understand it, the committee is particularly interested in hearing from us in relation to the work we do with young people from new and emerging communities, and often those who have had a refugee experience. A lot of our services are based in Dandenong, so it is sort of an inherent part of the work of all services that we provide there.

I acknowledge that there are diverse and conflicting arguments as to appropriate justice responses to youth crime. I am not necessarily here to add to that argument. Moreover, I aim to discuss how services provided in the community setting can be more effective than they currently are and which can lead to a reduction in the frequency and severity of offending by young people and ultimately a cessation of offending altogether for some at-risk individuals.

I preface this by acknowledging the hard work of community-based services agencies working with young people in this cohort. The problems these groups of young people are experiencing are obviously complex and multifaceted, and workers are trying hard, but due to a number of factors, such as crushing workloads and sometimes restrictive program eligibility criteria, there can sometimes be a limited range of interventions that they can implement.

We acknowledge that it can be deflating and exasperating for the community in the face of seemingly constant critical instances of youth crime. Incarceration appears to be our most readily available and obvious tool to manage this. However, it is inevitable that these young offenders will return to their communities at some stage, and it is here that effective work can be done to create the conditions where young people can thrive and create prosocial pathways — that is, if the supports available to them are better calibrated. This in our view means that community supports are intensive and highly responsive to needs at fateful and critical moments, are able to work within the family context and are well resourced.

The current suite of community support service offerings to young people in this cohort are limited in their ability to achieve prosocial outcomes. In recent years YSAS have been able to develop and test innovative approaches to achieving outcomes which provide opportunities for individuals to form positive self-identity, and which reorients their view of themselves from antisocial to that of a valued social contributor. Some of

those opportunities were presented through initiatives like the Victorian state government's integrated services pilot, better known as Services Connect, and other small pieces of innovative projects through small grants and philanthropy.

The key ingredients for success in our observations to date are simple — this is a YSAS view, I suppose: highly skilled and experienced youth workers who are empowered to work with fewer limitations, such as less restrictions around service eligibility for clients and families; smaller case loads and reduced organisational risk aversion; these same workers being authorised to coordinate and broker for resources and other supports at critical moments; and permission for these workers to provide broad-ranging support to the parents of these young people and also other family members as required.

I realise now that I am probably exceeding a 5-minute limitation, so — —

Ms SYMES — Everyone does.

Mr EAMES — Okay, great. Well, I probably have another 2 or 3 minutes here.

I just wanted to create a picture, or paint a picture hopefully, of what an intensive support response might look like and how it might impact on outcomes for young people from this target group.

In terms of intensive and responsive service, from an adolescent developmental perspective young people from this cohort are often all at sea, stumbling from one critical event to the next in an environment of chaos and with minimal guidance from informed adults or mentors. They are vulnerable to setbacks and do not always understand the impact of their offending on either their victims or indeed their own future prospects. They are often disengaged from most mainstream environments — I am sure you have already covered this in terms of school and employment — and have low hopes of success in these areas. Of course this only serves to compound further entrenchment in disengagement.

Our experience has shown, though, that these challenges can be overcome. I think sometimes there is a sense of hopelessness with what to do with these young people. The type of service intensity which we have been testing includes things like daily contact and support over an extended period of time, perhaps for as long as two years or even more. Young people who are involved in repeat offending, or those who demonstrate all the precursors of doing so, that we have worked with often underestimate the value of compliance with legal processes. Additionally they do not always see the purpose in following through with individual action plans to achieve goals — goals which they have.

Through a project currently underway at YSAS we are creating an authorising environment for workers to undertake activities such as daily transport to appointments for both young people and their other family members — things like reminder phone calls and text messages, multiple rescheduling of missed appointments, intensive advocacy with professionals from other agencies and institutions, working with peer groups, working after hours, working in public spaces and working in people's homes.

The thing that I think is important to note here is that these types of strategies are increasingly difficult for agencies to undertake. In order to work this way we have had to lower our threshold for risk aversion. This is not easily achieved, but can be done and does achieve results. It requires a combination of elements, chief among which are capable workers who are able to make good judgements in the field and are well supported. By being well equipped with brokerage resources, these workers are able to be problem solvers and are seen as useful allies and sources of support at difficult times for young people and families. They are readily accessible and able to drop what they are doing in order to respond to need at critical moments. This builds trust and a visible prosocial connection in the community and provides an alternative to antisocial decision-making and instead provides an avenue to contemplate prosocial options in difficult moments.

I think I have well exceeded my time now, so we can obviously speak to more of what I might have had to say here. Let me hand over to my colleagues here.

Mr PUOCH — I want to thank the committee and the Parliament for giving me the opportunity to appear before you. My name is Gatluak Puoch. I am a member of the South Sudanese community. I am appearing before you today to represent the voice of young people and the community as well. I am not running any organisation, but my current and past experience I thought may benefit you today. I would like to submit a

couple of things to you. I know within the list of the terms of reference there are up to eight of them. I am happy to touch on number 3, which says:

reasons for, and effects of, the increase in the numbers of young people on remand in the last 10 years ...

I would also like to touch on the last, which is number 8. It says, and I quote:

any other issues the committee consider relevant.

What I consider relevant and I want to share with you is a causation — I call that causation. What causes young people to end up in detention centres or on remand? I see the remand and detention centres or jail as a result, not the cause, and that is why I want to share what I have heard from young people in the community as the cause.

I will be submitting a couple of things to you. One is work experience as a contribution to securing employment. A number of young people that I have met are really struggling. When they are hunting for a job, the first thing that comes up is, 'Do you have work experience?'. Not every child is lucky enough to have a parent that really links him or her up with a factory or a local job that can give them firsthand experience so that they can secure a job. So the question is: if a young person does not have the opportunity, where do they go? Where do they start to get work experience so that they can secure a job? When a young person fails to get a job, they do not have any identity. They are regarded as worthless. They get teased by those who have the privilege to have a parent who links them with work and perhaps have got a job. They see themselves as useless. They end up forming an identity of their own. They end up in custody. That is one.

Number two is the issue of social security assistance or family benefit suspension. When a young person is not engaging in a day program, which is, for example, a school or getting a job, Centrelink will chase them. That might result in social security suspension. Young people need transport. They need material things. They need to travel to the recreational activities where they go. When the money is suspended, young people will seek ways to get financial support. One of those ways, I think, is what we are seeing today — that young people, especially the Apex group, are breaking into family homes and shops and stealing precious items, and then those items are purchased from them by people who you could call dealers. That also increases the level of young people getting into crime. The question is: can anything be done about it?

My other point here is what I call maybe muddling the community attitude and behaviour. When young people begin to get into trouble, they become bad I think in the supreme eyes of the public. Whether it is service providers, whether it is police, it becomes extremely difficult. They see themselves as people who are no longer wanted or will never be productive. They will seek other ways for themselves to be heard, and to also show people like us that, 'We are here existing and we can do something that hurts you'.

My other point is about involvement of young people, especially the newly arrived refugees into Australian schools, based on their age and the state of their knowledge. This has been an extreme issue of concern. I am aware of the services that the authorities have been providing to maybe help them gain a bit of an education and knowledge, but the question is: is it enough? Has it been successful? Could anything differently be done? Because if I am a 17-year-old and I am being transitioned into a class where there is another 17-year-old who was born here or perhaps came when they were two or three years old, the learning gap is very different. That will perhaps cause me to see myself as not performing well in the class, as stupid. I will get teased. I will not want to remain in that environment. So imagining myself in the shoes of those young people, I think it is also something that is causing young people to end up on the street, leading to crime, then jail, and costing the state a lot of money for their rehabilitation and also keeping them in custody.

The other concern is to have consultation with the community. A lot of parents are really raising concerns that they are not being involved in a number of programs that would help their children cope. They mention policies that govern youth justice direction. They also refer to diversionary programs. They also refer to rehabilitation, pre-release transition and post-release support programs. I have heard such information during my voluntary engagement with the community, and I thought it might be a privilege to raise with you what that really entails.

My last point is that I happened to be at Dandenong train station about three months ago when a young person approached me and said, 'I see myself as useless even though I have Australian identity documents; I feel that I am not Australian'. I said, 'Why?'. He said he is not being heard. He feels like his voice is not being heard. I went further and asked, 'In which way do you want to get heard?'. He also referred back to the employment that I spoke about. He said he has a family back home. He wants to get a job so that he can support them and he can

also support himself, and also to be able to get access to true work experience as an Australian. He said, 'The documents that I have are not enough to identify myself as Australian'.

I realised that that might also be an issue where we can identify kids as Australian, but being Australian may mean different things to them. It may mean the fact that they want to contribute to our economy. They might want to create the identity of being known for good things that they are trying to do. I guess that has also been very tough.

I just link it up again with the Apex issue. The majority of Apex kids that are engaging in those activities have been born here in Australia. But I guess they also see themselves as not Australian, because they do not have the privilege of getting things that can confirm their true identity as Australian, and I am referring here to doing well at school, having the public seeing them as potential contributors to the country and the economy and also having the teachers treating them not just on the basis of their status as refugees but as kids who have been through a traumatic experience.

That is why I referred to my number three of modelling the behaviour and the attitude of the public. I know this might be a very daunting task. The authorities and the Parliament may not go anywhere with it, but that is something that we can all pay attention to.

The CHAIR — Thank you for those comments, all of you. They are much appreciated.

Mr MULINO — Thanks very much, Mr Puoch, for your evidence. You talked about a lot of possible causes. One in particular I wanted to ask about was the experience of refugees in school, which is a real challenge. I am just wondering, are there any particular programs that you are aware of that are working well to support kids that we should look at and learn from?

Mr PUOCH — I would refer to Dandenong High School. I think Dandenong High School has taken a step further in terms of treating refugee kids, I think maybe, with what you might call care and respect, and paying attention, listening to them, rather than telling them, 'This is what you should do'. That is the school that I am aware of.

The other thing that I notice has been a commitment of parents encouraging their children to attend after-hours homework training or homework classes.

Mrs PEULICH — Homework centres?

Mr PUOCH — Yes. I am not sure whether every refugee kid is getting access to this, but I think it is also a good process that the refugee families might need to be encouraged really by their school to embrace. If there might be an inadequacy of this homework club being provided, maybe the state may channel more funding into this. But I think there is also a need for the encouragement of the parents to make sure that they give up some of what they like, or the activities and things that they engage in, to make sure that these kids are really being given the privilege to attend these homework classes and to communicate what is concerning them to the teachers, and also teachers being able and humble enough to listen to them rather than seeing them as people who may not be making progress. I am not saying here that teachers have that attitude, but I think it is something that we may all encourage to do so.

Ms NICHOLSON — If I could just step in there, one of our programs that we run in collaboration with Foundation House, which is a trauma-focused counselling service, is the MY Education program. So RESP — the refugee education support program — works intensively with schools to address some of the capacity issues that Gatluak has mentioned. Also, our Learning Beyond the Bell program supports more than 300 homework clubs across Victoria to provide culturally appropriate, responsive education support for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Those programs themselves are funded in various ways, through philanthropy and through the school budgets themselves. There are opportunities now for the refugee wellbeing supplement funding that has recently been announced to be used to support homework clubs, and we have evidence of the fantastic outcomes and benefits of that individual support to the young people and then the wraparound support for the families to become engaged in that education. If you think about our children, we sit down with them and read books every night, but some families do not have the skills or capacity to do that, so this is an opportunity for that.

Ms SYMES — Thank you for appearing today. Just following on, I guess, from Mr Mulino's questions, I was just looking at material on the Empower Youth program that I know YSAS are running and also the Young Pasifika program that I think you guys are running. I assume you can sort of tailor them a little bit to your own circumstances, so apart from a media release that tells me what it does, I am actually more interested in how it works on the ground.

Mr EAMES — Sure. You are correct in referencing Empower Youth. I think possibly a more interesting program that is a bit further down the track in terms of its implementation is a project called the Transformer project, which seeks, I guess, to take an immersive sort of approach. This the project I referred to where we have had to kind of create an environment where we take more risks in the way we work with young people and their families who are often trying to navigate often unfamiliar territory in terms of complex legal processes and helping families to understand the importance of positive engagement and overcoming those cross-cultural gaps that open up between young people who are immersed in a local youth culture versus parents who are really coming to grips with, 'How do I look after my child in this area?'

This Transformer project is really focused on those young people who are not currently engaged in any prosocial mainstream, so they are not in school, they are often involved in the justice system or they are really likely to be involved in the justice system. They are the kids who are identified as antisocial, I suppose, spending time in public places, spending time in public places late at night, putting themselves in positions where they are vulnerable to going with the groupthink, I suppose, in what we call fateful and critical moments.

The idea is that the worker has the capacity. They have to be skilled workers; they have to be people who really know the system and who have a strong capacity to build the relationship with the young person who is often not expecting to get help or even — —

Ms SYMES — Yes. So how does the connection happen then?

Mr EAMES — Youth workers have, I think, a very unrecognised and underestimated ability to form trust and build relationships. They are often unencumbered by a statutory overlay, which is significant for the young person. Those same workers have that capacity to work within the family context, and in this project they are resourced enough to be able to help resolve problems, pressure points, within a family.

If you think about it, young people in this cohort are often in families where there are multiple siblings, there might be a single parent or a kinship carer, living in crowded conditions. Employment is tenuous, so there are financial pressures in the house, and when the young person comes home with yet another charge the conflict continues to escalate. The idea with this project is that the worker is in that space and able to work with often the mother to resolve current and live pressure points — resolve issues. It might be around finance. It might be around helping with getting the younger sibling re-engaged with school. It might be helping another child to go through a complex primary health problem. They are trying to bring the pressure down from 10 to 7 so that when the young person who is the target of the program comes home the chances of them coming home to a more stable environment gives them the opportunity to develop what you might refer to as good behavioural habits.

It takes a long time for young people to develop a pattern of prosocial decision-making. The idea with this project is that that worker has an unusual level of capability to respond at fateful and critical moments where a young person is vulnerable to an antisocial decision and work with those young people to support a prosocial choice, and to do that consistently.

But I think that capacity to bridge that gap, that cross-cultural gap between family and the young person, is a really critical element, and I think Gatluak is absolutely spot-on — that that is the crux of it. When families are going through these traumatic processes, difficult processes as a family unit, we need to do whatever we can do to put some scaffolding around that. Often it is around practical help. It is not necessarily about a family therapy environment or centre-based counselling; it is about getting in there and having some way of guiding and navigating young people and families through these difficult circumstances. So that is the Transformer project. It is just underway. We have got another 12 months of funding on that project, and I think that is the challenge.

There is lots of innovation out there, and there are things that work. It is about recognising that there are opportunities to invest in this relatively small cohort of people that we are talking about. We can produce outcomes. We just need to be able to make that commitment to an investment in that type of approach, which is

difficult because there is not a lot of evidence available to us to demonstrate this. In many ways it is an emerging area of work, so our challenge as an organisation is: how do we evaluate these innovative approaches and demonstrate that it is worth investment?

Ms SPRINGLE — Thank you for your presentation today. It is very important that we hear from people who are working on the peripheries of the youth justice centres. I am interested to hear your reflections on what we are consistently hearing is a new cohort of very violent offenders in the youth justice area. It does not appear that there is a huge amount of evidence around who they are and in what way they are different to the cohorts that were coming through youth justice in the last decades. I just want to get a sense of whether you agree with that assessment — that there is this new cohort of offenders — and, if so, what you think their demographics are, and perhaps why they are different to what they have been in the past.

Ms NICHOLSON — If I could just talk perhaps from a refugee and migrant background perspective — seeing as I would not profess to speak on behalf of all young people — we run a program in collaboration with Victoria Police, YRIPP, which puts volunteers with young people in the police station when they are being interviewed by police and they do not have a parent there for them. It is a statewide program. Our data from that program says that multicultural young people are less likely to be involved in offending than their Australian-born counterparts, but there are particular cohorts who are over-represented as a proportion of their numbers in the community. They are, unfortunately, African-background young people and the Pasifika-background young people — so Maoris, young people from Samoa, the Pacific Island communities, of which there are some 20-odd representatives with that name Pasifika.

I think your question is perhaps a bit around Samoa having a role supporting the United Pasifika Council of Victoria, which is a new body trying to develop a community-led response to some of those issues in those communities across that whole community. Interestingly I looked at some of our cultural background data in preparation for this morning, and the more newly arrived communities — so our Burmese communities and Afghani, Iraqi and Iranian communities that are now arriving as refugees or have been for the last few years — are not at all showing in our data as over-represented, so the problem is perhaps particularly isolated to these communities.

Gatluak has talked a bit about some of the issues in his community and why they may be represented there. The Pasifika community has its own set of issues. Some of them relate to their visa status. They come here as New Zealand citizens and cannot necessarily access the range of benefits that other people holding different visa types can. They do not have access to Centrelink, for instance, so there is a hand-to-mouth type of existence there that creates a whole lot of problems, and then access to further support services can be an issue as well; some federally funded supports are not there. In terms of that community there are a lot of issues. Whether that community is more predisposed to violent offending, I would not want to say. The police data and the crime stats agency data says there is a problem with more violent offending compared to what it was, but whether it is those cohorts who are more predisposed to that, I would not want to say that.

Mr PUOCH — Thank you. It is a good question. I think there is a lot of evidence that proves that there is new emerging offending behaviour from the young people. We have noticed that in the media, and in one way or another they have come to our attention. I guess the question is: what caused them — if they happened to be like that, what is the issue there? I met voluntarily with a couple of young people, and my interest was: what is the problem? Again I want to draw attention back to what I touched on a while ago: that the employment issue is another issue. The young people are saying, ‘I am not getting a job here. School is not that great for me. What does life mean to me?’.

Ms SYMES — Can I just ask a question on that. Are you talking about young people who want to have part-time work and school or people who want to leave school to work? Where is the employment? Is it the pathway? I am just a little bit unclear. Is it young people wanting to go into work and leave school that you are talking about?

Mr PUOCH — I think there are some young people who are studying and want part-time jobs, and there are those who disengage completely from the schools and just want to work. I think it is a combination there.

Ms SYMES — Yes, okay. Both; sure.

Mr PUOCH — Then with that there is the issue of not having work experience — not getting a job. Then the young people will be like, ‘Okay, what else do I want to do?’. Then they find themselves somewhere else, which is hanging around with bad guys and ending up in jail or breaking into family homes, taking precious items and selling them to people that will buy them for whichever price. And young people really indicated that there are some bad kids there that really happen to be the motivating factors here — that people are getting that stuff, and there are people who give them some financial incentive. That motivates their actions, because they know that if they will get it, somebody is out there waiting for it. They will get it, and then it will be fine. I guess I am agreeing that there is violence that is really happening there. Again, what to do with it? Can the young people be engaged by making sure that they are being linked in with work experience and can get a job and become busy, and then they will not have time at all to catch up with people that really perhaps are brainwashing them negatively?

Mrs PEULICH — Thank you very much, Gatluak, and your own personal story should be an inspiration to all who perhaps see the odds against them.

Mr PUOCH — Thank you.

Mrs PEULICH — What astounds me is that we do spend a lot of money on services and yet we fail so miserably. It is not just now; it has been happening for a long time, and there are some great examples. The problem is: how do we actually build the system with capacity? Whether it is parents — in particular parents in transition from one society to another — the cultural conflict; it does not matter, it will always play a factor. So how can we help parents in the parenting of their young people in often a very different lifestyle, different value system? This notion is even in my own culture — parents in my culture cannot believe that a parent does not have the right to access information about their child who is over 18. They just think that that is just extraordinary and that it disempowers them from being able to assist if they are disengaged. Are there some things that we can do to actually help parents be more effective in their parenting, which hopefully will also translate into having fewer of them ending up in the justice system? Perhaps, Gatluak, that might be a question best directed to you.

Mr PUOCH — I think — great question again, Inga — there is a western cultural discourse of understanding adolescent behaviour. That may not be the case with a number of migrant communities, and let me speak on behalf of my community. A lot of my community have little understanding of what constitutes adolescent behaviour. When a young person reaches the age of adolescence they shift to a different behaviour, and that behaviour requires particular skills, as you said, as to how that person should be handled. It may not necessarily need aggression. It might require working alongside that young person so that their needs are being addressed — not to just accept anything that the young person requests but also to understand and explain in a way that if things are not available, why they are not, and if they can be accessed, how they can be accessed. I think, like I touched on a while ago, it would be good to have some program for parents who need to be educated about adolescent behaviour.

That adolescent behaviour, that if a young person demands a thing there should be a particular way of approaching it, not just cutting ties, not just failing to understand what the young person is saying, because culturally there are some cultures that just shut down the young person, ‘We don’t have enough here’. Maybe it might be a demand that the young person needs shoes or excursion transport where all money might have been sent to the family overseas because they are suffering. That requires a different explanation to the young person, rather than saying that, ‘No, we have nothing here. Go away. We do not want it’.

I think it would be good of course to have more consultation with the parents so that they can address to you here what they are struggling with and what needs to be done. What I am saying here may not necessarily be the bottom line. What Warren or Sarah may be saying in terms of a services perspective may not even be what the parents themselves may tell you. So I would encourage the committee to maybe consider another aspect of organising a small group for I think group facilitation with parents so that they can also explain to you so that you hear their voices as well.

Mrs PEULICH — Warren, you mentioned the need to recalibrate our services to allow services such as some of those that you spoke about to work with the families. Is that the obstacle? Are there no services that actually do that, especially with this highly specific target group?

Mr EAMES — Yes. I think that there is no doubt that there are services that are established and set up to deliver a family support response, but I think the type of intensity that Gatluak is describing does not really allow the current service system to respond with that level of intensity, I suppose. Organisations have got a constant pressure to meet KPIs, to meet targets, and often it is difficult for them to recalibrate. Services often see where the work really needs to go but are limited in their ability to respond unless they can kind of establish those projects of innovation that unshackle them from those types of inherent restrictors, I guess.

I reckon the stuff that you are talking about, Inga, is on the money. How do you do it? We say things like, ‘Work alongside the family’. What does that actually look like? What actually happens? I think of a case that we are currently working with where a single mother has nine children in the family and has one of those children currently incarcerated and the next child down following the same trajectory. The mother is in a tenuous employment arrangement whereby she works as a labourer in hospitality — a chambermaid, I believe — and is inundated with the needs of nine children within her family: kids dropping out of school, kids with intellectual disabilities, children who are pregnant and two of her children who are on a pathway to a life of recidivism. All of this is kind of coming in for somebody who has lived in the country for 12 years and she is really having to get to grips with understanding, firstly, what services are available, what they do and what they are entitled to.

Where we have seen some impact, particularly with the younger child who is on the same trajectory, is a two-year period of working intensely with the young person — as a youth worker — but also establishing the type of relationship with the mother so that the mother might feel equal ownership over that working relationship. The mother sees that she has a connection to somebody who is well connected in the system, can make things happen and can solve problems. Over that two-year period the sort of stuff that Gatluak is talking about, around that dissonance between the way we think about adolescent development, what young people need to thrive and how parents can overcome that cross-cultural gap, that worker has had a two-year opportunity in that working alongside to reframe how the mother provides her support and what role she can play within that.

So that young person who was initially the referral or the client of the service and who was right at that tipping point — had been arrested multiple times and had very much an anti-establishment disposition — two years later has completed a certificate II in carpentry and now has a vision of himself, an identity of himself, as a young labourer, somebody who wants to become a bricklayer. But two years ago, as I said, he had an anti-establishment attitude, and it was all about finding satisfaction in all the wrong areas.

Mrs PEULICH — In the meantime you have also helped a mother who has got another six kids to raise.

Mr EAMES — Yes, yes.

Ms SPRINGLE — I just have one quick question in relation to this issue and funding of these sorts of programs. Is ongoing funding the problem? Is that what you are saying?

Mr EAMES — I never want to dismiss the valuable resources that are available in community services. Absolutely I think in lots of ways services are well funded.

Ms SPRINGLE — In an ongoing capacity, Warren?

Mr EAMES — I think that our limitation is sort of restrictive parameters around things like service eligibility. For example, some services might have quite specific age restrictions or reasons for taking referrals. Our own service, if you are 22, not under 21, you are not eligible for service, even though you might be right in front of us and we can see the need is there. If your substance use does not hit a certain threshold of risk, then you may not be eligible for service.

So I think allowing organisations or agencies to reset and have some capacity to respond to need in local areas would go a long way to allowing us to provide the sorts of responses that are useful to people. Around the ongoing funding, some investment in evaluation and building an evidence base for the effectiveness of those types of programs would be great, but often innovation occurs because you have got good operators in the fields that are testing new ways of working.

Ms SPRINGLE — But the reality is that to allow you to build that evidence base, when you have got something like the Transformer project, where you say you have got another year's worth of funding, and then sometimes that will roll over — the government will offer more funding to keep that going and other times they will not. So is that still — and I have not been in the community sector for a few years now — a problem that is common?

Mr EAMES — It is an ongoing challenge. Something like the Transformer project that I just spoke about was opportunistic. We had an underspend in another program area. We had a worker who was working in this way, and the organisation was self-funding, so we had to create this opportunity to join those two things up. Our challenge as an organisation now is, if we believe this is an effective way to work in the community, how do we sustain that work? So we as an organisation, yes, are constantly engaged with those types of challenges.

Ms NICHOLSON — Could I just throw another one in the mix? In terms of funding for refugee and migrant-background communities, the settlement service sector only works with communities for the first five years of settlement, so that is a huge issue for our African communities who have been here longer than that in that they do not have a culturally specific service. The Pasifika community do not have access to the settlement services; they are not considered to be on a settlement pathway in terms of being able to access those services, so they do not have the same access to services that a refugee community has. They are federal issues, but in terms of a gap in the service sector, particularly around a family support service, there is a gap, and we do not want to see that gap being filled by child protection services, because in terms of the context of this debate you know what happens, unfortunately, to young people who end up in that system; they cross over.

The CHAIR — Thank you. I think we are going to have to draw to a conclusion now. We have simply run out of time; in fact we have run over time. Thank you very much for the evidence that you have given today. You will be provided with a transcript for review within a few weeks.

Witnesses withdrew.