

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Children Affected by Parental Incarceration

Melbourne—Monday, 9 May 2022

MEMBERS

Ms Fiona Patten—Chair

Dr Tien Kieu—Deputy Chair

Ms Cathrine Burnett-Wake

Ms Jane Garrett

Ms Tania Maxwell

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Ms Nina Taylor

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Dr Matthew Bach

Mr Rodney Barton

Ms Melina Bath

Ms Georgie Crozier

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Enver Erdogan

Mr Mark Gepp

Mr Stuart Grimley

Ms Wendy Lovell

Mr Tim Quilty

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Lee Tarlamis

Ms Sonja Terpstra

Ms Kaushaliya Vaghela

WITNESS (*via videoconference*)

Mr Leigh Garrett, Chief Executive Officer, OARS Community Transitions.

The CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. I declare open the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Children Affected by Parental Incarceration.

May I first begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal people, the traditional custodians of the various lands that we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families, and I particularly want to welcome any elders or community members who will be participating in this hearing today or who are joining us online. I would like to welcome everybody who is joining us online today for this very important inquiry.

My name is Fiona Patten. I am the Chair of the committee. I am joined today by Dr Tien Kieu, the Deputy Chair; Mr Rod Barton; and Ms Cathrine Burnett-Wake.

We are very pleased to be joined for our first session this morning by the Chief Executive Officer of OARS Community Transitions, Leigh Garrett. Leigh, welcome to this hearing, and thank you for joining us.

Mr GARRETT: Thanks very much, Fiona.

The CHAIR: Leigh, if I could just first explain that all of the evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege, and this is provided by our *Constitution Act* but also by the standing orders of the Legislative Council. Therefore the information that you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you were to go elsewhere and repeat the same things you may not have the same protection. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

I do not know whether you can see, but we have got Hansard in with us and our AV team with us. They are recording this session. They will provide you with a transcript after this hearing, and I would really just encourage you to have a good look at that and make sure we have not misheard you or misrepresented you. Ultimately that transcript will become part of our report but will also be available on our website.

We would really welcome you to make some opening comments, and then I will open it up for committee discussion. Thanks again, Leigh.

Mr GARRETT: Thanks very much, Fiona, and good morning, everybody, both in the room and online. I really appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today on what is a really important issue. It has been important to me for well over 35 years, which has been the extent of my engagement with the criminal justice system here in South Australia.

I would also like to acknowledge that I speak with you today on the lands of the Guarna people, the people of the Adelaide Plains of South Australia, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

As I mentioned, the organisation I work with has been delivering support and services to people who are disadvantaged and have been in contact with the criminal justice system for over 135 years. Sometimes I feel 135 years old. In 1996 we introduced the concept or framework of restorative justice into our organisation as an underpinning of, I suppose, our operational procedures and philosophy. I have spent seven years in the Department for Correctional Services and 28 years as the CEO of OARS Community Transitions.

There will be lots of reports you have read and others who will speak to you about many of the core issues that live around this particular problem, and I will try to introduce some things that maybe others have not thought of—so here we go. We have seen—and I have seen—really thousands of children and young people impacted by incarceration as we have tried to work with those who have offended and those who are in prison and in the community. One of our major responses was the implementation of a family centre at Yatala Labour Prison, which is the South Australian high-security prison. This provided both pre- and post-visit support for parents and children as they were visiting their loved ones—mainly fathers and, regrettably, increasingly more their mothers who have been incarcerated in recent years. This was a really important facility. There are many of these around Australia, and we have a small service run mainly by volunteers, but I cannot really stress enough

the value of that type of services; it is absolutely critical. Regrettably, we had to close it down when corrections introduced their anti-smoking policies into South Australian prisons. Many families and friends of prisoners are smokers, so they all disappeared out the front gate and bypassed our centre, which was really, really disappointing. We also ran a visitors' canteen inside the secure visits area, and that has also been done in other places. It is very challenging for correctional services authorities to provide a child-friendly environment in a high-security prison setting—you know that as well as I do—but corrections actually had some playground facilities attached to their visits area, and when we had the family centre out the front I think that things were pretty good.

I think the consequence of all of those things is that I am really worried about the desensitisation impact on children going into prisons. I think that I worry about the fact that prison really does not provide any prevention or any mechanism whereby the children of offenders might think that they do not want to go to prison. That is a really terrible way to say that, but I hope you know what I mean. I do worry about that level of desensitisation. It is an issue that I think we need to deal with. It is very difficult, I agree, but I think it is an issue that we need to deal with. The competing variables or priorities of security versus child friendliness in a high-security prison are really difficult. At our prison at Cadell, which is an open-plan, low-security prison, of course things are a whole lot easier—there are not those really in-your-face razor wires, cameras and uniformed people in such high numbers.

Everybody has talked about preventing incarceration in the first place. The fewer people we put into prison, the fewer children who will be impacted, and that is simply just a basic principle. It is certainly my view that we incarcerate too many people in South Australia and too many people in Australia.

Restorative justice is an area that we have had a lot of involvement with, and it can provide the means for offenders to learn how to repair the harm associated with their offending not just to the primary victims of their crime but also to reconcile with their families. I think with post-release family reconciliation we still have a long way to go with how we manage that for fathers and also for mothers.

We have just had a report released in South Australia on Friday by the commissioner for children and young people, called *Join the Dots*, considering the impact of parental incarceration on children and young people. I think that is a report that you will obviously get your hands on.

I think also there are issues around stigma for young people and children at school attached to the incarceration of their parents. We have a very, very long way to go with that, and I think once again community education and potentially the utilisation of restorative justice processes could be quite helpful in that regard.

I think that the problem of housing post release for offenders is making a major impact on children. We have a severe shortage of housing everywhere in this country and an even more severe shortage of housing for offenders who are released, particularly women who want to get their children back. A stable family post release is really critical for appropriate and high-quality offender reintegration. Of course that is subject to safety for everybody. So I think we need more visit times at more convenient, child-friendly times in our prisons. We need, certainly, opportunity for support pre and post visit. We should have split visits where opportunities can be provided for parents and partners to be able to be together without the children and then introduce them either first or later. We certainly need visit centres outside of the prison walls. Internet visits are I think a really important outcome of COVID. And I think also for men in prison we need to do a lot more work around educating them about how to be good fathers. You can be educated about how to be a good father, but if the post-release reconciliation with the family goes wrong, well, you will simply ruin that opportunity.

Sentencing issues are critical. I know I am running out of time, but what I would like to say is that it is my view that we need to have criminal justice systems which focus on repairing the harms to victims as much as they are focused on providing treatment, rehabilitation and support for offenders. I think there are many, many, many children who live with the harms associated with their parent's crimes forever. And I think, again, ways and means of utilising restorative justice processes to assist repair that harm would be very helpful. So we must and can do much better to reduce the harms to children and young people as a result of their parents committing crimes and going to prison or even receiving community-based sentences. I would like to recognise Shine for Kids as a critical organisation in this role in Australia. The other thing I think is really important to recognise is the role of NGOs is very important in relation to these matters post release because trust is vital, and we have

worked with very many men and women who would not speak with governments about the crisis that was going on in their post-release lives simply because they did not trust them.

So, Fiona, I think that is what I would like to present—a few other things, different to some others perhaps—but I am very happy to take questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much, Leigh. That was a very good quick whip-around of a whole range of issues, so we very much appreciate that. We have got a little bit of time for questions. I think the first one, from when I was looking at your website and when I was first listening to you too, Leigh: what is working for children? Are there any programs that you think actually have been evaluated that are showing us that this is protecting children from, as you mentioned, the desensitisation of prisons but also being able to maintain their resilience during the time that a parent is incarcerated or when that parent is released? Are there any really great examples of a program that just seems to hit the spot?

Mr GARRETT: Look, I think there is a program called Caring Dads, which enables fathers to have a better relationship with their children. It presents opportunities for them to communicate with their children and, you know, try to maintain a relationship with their father. You would all be well aware that many children blame themselves for the incarceration of their parents—unjustly and unfairly. When you can manage a relationship inside prison in that sort of way, I think that is absolutely crucial. I do believe that the ability, particularly when men are incarcerated, for their partners and children to have a caring and sensitive approach provided to them by prison staff and a place, pre visit and post visit, to go should be foundational. Again, you would all be aware visits are really potentially volatile times in the lives of families, and whilst a prison authority, if something goes down that is difficult in the prison visit, will watch and manage the offender as they get transported back or moved back towards their cell, of course the family that is leaving the prison walk out the door to nothing in most cases. The rate of post-visit suicide or attempted suicide in prisons is not trivial. Certainly the rate of post-visit violence is pretty high. And we do not have any data—I am not sure if anybody does, and if they do I would love to see it—about what the consequences for mums and children, particularly, are after they have walked out that door and a visit has gone poorly.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Leigh. Yes, of course. You were saying those sort of pre- and post-visit conversations—so that is for the person in prison as well as the family?

Mr GARRETT: Certainly it is just for the family. The department for corrections here would prepare for the visit, but we have had many, many women and their children come to us prior to going into the visits area if there might be bad news that needs to be conveyed. Certainly for mothers with children who are young and it might be the first time they have gone into prison, I think it is a really essential opportunity to provide some support for that initial visit and then some opportunity for feedback and care post. Mums are conflicted obviously. They are sometimes devastated themselves but are trying to do the best possible thing for their child. They do not want the child to see them in distress. Our service was able to provide a confidential case management or counselling room and the kids were off playing in the playground or with some toys away from Mum and sometimes dads as well. Grandparents are another matter, where many are particularly visiting women in prison where they are elderly and are trying to manage their own grief with people in prison but at the same time trying to assist their grandchildren work through all of this. So that is another really critical area. We just do need to be—and I have not seen it really anywhere—careful and sensitive in our sentencing, and I think we have seen some progress on that in South Australia over recent years. Yes, it is difficult to work with the complexities around child-related harm and the amount of time maybe a mother might have to spend in prison. The issue of babies in prison is a vexed one—very difficult. Probably we do not have time to talk as much as we would like to about that, but it is very complicated.

The CHAIR: Yes. When a person is first arrested, quite often that is in the home, and so the children are involved right from the very beginning of that process. When we have asked about, you know, ‘How many parents are in prison?’ or ‘How many primary providers are in prison?’, we kind of get a sort of, ‘Oh, you know, lots’. Do you know if South Australia is kind of collecting that data? Is there something that happens when a parent first goes into custody or is first arrested that is positive, or do you think there is something that we should be doing either at the point of arrest or even at the point when they go into custody?

Mr GARRETT: Look, I think there is. The issue of privacy gets in the way here enormously of course. As a partner you may not know that your partner is in prison for days, if at all. Even when they shift prisons you can

easily lose track of where your partner is. It requires communication from your partner inside the prison out to you to actually let you even know where they are. Now, look, I get the issue of privacy, but surely we could do better by at least maybe having offenders provide a consent to release that type of information. Maybe you might need an NGO intermediary to facilitate that process in an appropriate and sensitive way. I skipped over my paragraph about arrest because of the time constraints. But I think South Australia is doing that better than it has ever done before. I know SAPOL, our SA police, are really highly sensitive to that, but you cannot protect every child from the horribleness of a bust-in arrest when an offender has had a very violent and difficult background and past and we do not want to put the lives of police officers at risk as a result of it. So, you know, I think we will be talking around that particular issue for decades. But certainly with the level of sensitivity to the issue—child protection is now involved, which it never was years ago—I think there are some reasonable things happening.

The CHAIR: I am not aware of what South Australian police are doing. So does that mean that you have got child protection there very early in the piece or the police are very cognisant of it and it is in their guide as to whether there are children on the premises?

Mr GARRETT: Absolutely. And if that is really clear, child protection will go along with the police, particularly if it is the primary carer who is being arrested. I think that is really important. Going back to the numbers, I do not know what the numbers of parents among prisoners are in South Australia, and many of them do not want anyone to know that they are of course partners of prisoners. So, you know, it is a tricky business to get that data, and we are not a huge organisation so we do not really have a capacity to gather that data—and even less so now, when we cannot deliver that service at Yatala prison because of the smoking bit. By the way, I am not denigrating the change to the smoking policy in any way shape or form, but there has been a significant consequence.

The CHAIR: That is fascinating. We have not had that mentioned to us before. If I have got time, I will come back for a final follow-up question, but I will turn to Deputy Chair Tien Kieu.

Dr KIEU: Hi, Leigh. Good morning, and thank you very much for providing some information today. Also, I would like to thank you and the organisation for 135 years of service.

Mr GARRETT: Thank you.

Dr KIEU: You should get a telegram from the Queen for that.

Mr GARRETT: I think so.

Dr KIEU: This is a very important issue that we are looking into: the welfare of children who have parents incarcerated and the trauma they may have experienced when the parent has been arrested and they were witnessing that or the stigma and the support that they require. Also, according to some statistics children of incarcerated parents are six times more likely to come into contact with the justice system than others who have no parents in prison. Let me start with a question. You have a program for visiting in the high-security prison. What is the impact of that from the prisoner point of view? And also, do you think that it could be rolled out further to a wider system of prisons after some of these first trials that you have?

Mr GARRETT: Thank you for that question. We had that facility and service, but it no longer exists. But from my perspective—and I do not know how many thousands of prisoners and offenders I have spoken with and our teams speak with—we see 3500 people come to our service every year as offenders. Many of them are desperately worried about the lives of their family and children from inside the prison walls. Visits and the odd phone call or two provide the only instrument whereby they can connect with their family, and with their children it is even more difficult. As prisons over the journey have become more intensely crowded and we have seen doubling up of cells, one of the things that we have not necessarily seen keep pace with the numbers of people inside our particular prison is the space available for visits and the time slots available for visits. So, you know, these are really critical issues for starting to ensure that we care more carefully for the children.

Can you just go back and ask the first bit of that question again, because I just lost my train of thought for a second?

Dr KIEU: Sure. Did you evaluate that program?

Mr GARRETT: No, we did not evaluate that program. We received a small amount of money, and we used volunteers. This was not something that we were able to address. It was really a very small pilot program, and by the time we got to the point where we might have been able to convince authorities to fund it, it became redundant because of that smoking issue. Now, if we could find a facility that was outside the grounds, where people could come and not be subject to that smoking constraint, I think that would be an opportunity for the future. I am utterly convinced that better quality visit areas and services and support for families pre visit and post visit are absolutely crucial for the betterment of both partners and young people and children. I am absolutely and utterly convinced of it, and I consider it something that every correctional authority in this country should consider really, really well.

We do know that—

The CHAIR: That was one of our committee members, not someone just jumping in randomly. Welcome, Ms Nina Taylor.

Mr GARRETT: I think it was maybe Casuarina Prison in WA that had what I consider to be a state-of-the-art visit centre. It was designed and built into the prison. Outcare, which is an NGO similar to OARS, actually ran that facility. It had creche facilities; it had all of the sorts of things you would need for visitors. I do not think they do this anymore but they actually ran the visits booking system as well, so the first thing somebody would see coming into this high-security prison was a visitor-friendly environment with friendly faces not in uniform, and that would give you an opportunity to prepare for what was to come, which may have been good and may have been difficult. They had split visits so the children could be brought in at a later time. The length of the visits was longer, which enabled that to occur really well. That is where I got my idea about the facility out the front of Yatala, and we just used a small existing building for that service.

So no, I do not have the statistics. We do quite a bit of work in schools, teaching schools and children how to reconcile harms and bullying with restorative justice principles, so we do get quite a bit of feedback from schools around the numbers of children and young people. Of course it is anecdotal, it is not a study, but it is certainly not trivial, particularly in some socio-economic groups and in some physical locations in suburbs of great disadvantage in South Australia.

Dr KIEU: Just one quick question: you mentioned about the post-release family reconciliation and particularly that housing is a very strong factor in helping the released prisoners as well as their families. Do you have any evaluation of that—for example, the reoffending rates of the prisoners who have been put into that program and the impact on the children in particular?

Mr GARRETT: Look, I think there is data—I do not have it to hand—which highlights quite clearly that post-release accommodation is absolutely crucial for effective reintegration back into the community. I think that is intuitive. The impact on children of that particular issue I have not seen any research about, and we do not have that research. Of course the other issue that is really critical is when maybe a main breadwinner in a family is incarcerated, the partner and children are often left homeless because they cannot afford to live because there are not two incomes coming in. So again, we do not have a handle on the number of families who are made homeless by the incarceration of another person. I am sure there is some data around Australia somewhere on that. Some of your other presenters may be able to speak with you about that. But certainly in my experience if particularly a mum is coming out of prison, obviously the first thing that she needs to have any chance of getting her children back is a stable place to live and some support to manage that post release. We do deliver support in a number of our funded programs to women being released from prison with their children, but again, it is not something that we have been able to get a handle on in terms of data or to evaluate. We do not have that much money.

Dr KIEU: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Cathrine.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE: Good morning, Leigh. Thank you so much for coming along and speaking with us today. There are a couple of things I would just like to drill down a little bit more on. I know Fiona asked you some questions about the concerns you had in respect of the desensitisation of children, and something that you said really struck me—that prison does not provide a prevention mechanism to deter children from wanting to

go to prison. You have spoken about these pre- and post-visit supports. Is that how you think the desensitisation would be addressed, or have you got other ideas of how that could be addressed?

Mr GARRETT: I think the preparation for a young person to go into a prison is important, and hence the visit centre could provide that. The pathway to the visits area is normally typified, in high-security prisons, obviously, by large amounts of razor wire, cameras everywhere and large numbers of uniformed staff. I think that would be utterly shocking for a young person initially and quite traumatising. And then the process the young mind goes through—and I am not a child psychologist—to get to a point where that becomes irrelevant is really, really, really difficult. At one level we want to provide a physical environment where the visit centres are placed which does not require access through such a stark, almost violent, physical environment which, for young people, would be really scary. So on the one hand I worry about the trauma attached to that, and then I worry about how long it might take for that, in a sense, not to be so traumatic—which I think it would need to be for that child to actually be able to cope with going into prisons—and then the longer term impact of that desensitisation.

Of course with young boys who come out of families with men in prison—I know in South Australia there are many young people who think they are not a real man until they have done some time in Yatala, Yatala being the high-security prison I am referencing—it actually becomes a badge of honour to emulate your father, most particularly in this case, and that it is a tricky one that I am not absolutely certain how to get around. In summary, that physical environment could improve markedly. In an ideal world you might have a visitors area that is not necessarily inside the secure perimeter. In a high-security prison that would be impossible. In low-security prisons, such as at Cadell prison, where men are not constrained by walls and razor wire, they will have a picnic out on the grounds. So as you transition away from low security back into the community, that is a fair and reasonable way of enabling some connection back to family in a more reasonable way. I mean, the reason we ran the canteen inside the prison at Yatala was to have some sense of normalcy around a little table that was bolted to the floor and chairs with chains so they could not be thrown around, so that there could be some giving and receiving of food and even some sense of normal behaviour in a pretty difficult and fabricated environment. So that level of desensitisation is a really tricky one, and I do not have a silver bullet for that one, I am sorry.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE: You have said plenty, and I have certainly learned a lot. Just something else to follow up on, you talked about family reconciliation and how there was a long way to go post release. Tien asked the question about accommodation, but what other suggestions do you have that may assist in family reconciliation post release?

Mr GARRETT: I think we need to teach offenders and we need to teach partners how they can relate to one another and get some structured support into the family environment to ensure that there is a way in which that family can be reconciled to one another. My view is that the restorative justice framework provides a mechanism that is structured and sensible and not difficult to learn about how harms that have been perpetrated on secondary victims of crime—that is, families and children—can be repaired in such a way that that relationship can be reconciled. Now, of course so many offenders burn so many bridges during their offending careers if we do not fix them the first time. That becomes increasingly more difficult when you have had your partner go into prison three times in six years and the devastation that comes with that. That is really difficult to reconcile, and part of the problem with that in my view is the lack of hope that comes from both parties about, ‘Can this ever be okay ever again?’. Certainly the first time someone comes out of prison back into a family I think is a really critical time for us to pay attention to those really soft mechanisms and ways in which reconciliation can occur, but it is in my view again a really, really important matter. I think as I say the restorative justice framework can be of assistance in that regard, and we use that in our own services. We use that with schools, as I have said previously. So housing, because there is no point trying to do that if you have got nowhere to live, is the first and most critical starting point. Does that get that—

Ms BURNETT-WAKE: Yes. Thanks, Leigh. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Yes. Thanks, Leigh. Many of us were on the inquiry into homelessness, and we just heard this loud and clear. It is so crucial. Rod Barton.

Mr BARTON: Thanks, Leigh. I think your contribution today has been fantastic, and I have written down about 10 things I could talk about for an hour on each one with you, with your experience. But what I have put

right up across at the top there is ‘Compassion’—compassion how we approach this, compassion how you are working. My colleagues here have touched on most of the things that I wanted to talk about. I just want to go back to the post-visits trauma, something I know a little bit about. What is your personal experience? I feel this is an area where it is such an important part for the kids, and we are not really understanding the significance of it. What do you say there, Leigh?

Mr GARRETT: Rod, I think you are right. I volunteered at our visit centre regularly. The first three years I was in the visits canteen every weekend, with my wife, watching, looking, listening and learning about what I was seeing in that visits area and certainly not quite as much inside the facility. But child friendliness and compassion are really important components of anything that we do with those who are around those who have offended. Now, I understand the community’s attitude sometimes about having no compassion whatsoever for those who have created the crime, and I have worked with many, many victims and fully understand how they might feel about this. But you have read it a hundred times, and I will say it—that these children are the innocent victims of their parents’ actions. They need to be treated with a high degree of compassion and support, and if that means a little more compassion being showered upon the parents then so be it in that really harsh and difficult environment.

Honestly, in the 35 years I have been around the system, massive improvements have occurred in this state, and I am not all that familiar with others, around the care and support the Department for Correctional Services in South Australia provides for its families, partners and children thereof. I would like to see the government provide some more resources to consolidate that work. There is a long-term pay-off in humanity, and there is a long-term pay-off in cost as a result of exercising that level of compassion and hopefulness. When I was working with young boys and young adolescents whose hope for life was to go to Yatala, to a high-security prison, because that would put them on a status pedestal that they thought was absolutely crucial for their long-term life—it is almost tearworthy.

So we do have a long way to go with those sorts of values and attitudes in prisons across the country. We know that some of the Nordic countries have much more sophisticated, much more heavily focused rehab and treatment prisons where fewer people are in prison—it is only those that have committed a really serious crime—and that is something we need to do in terms of our sentencing regimes and our political awareness and understanding of sentencing, because in this state over the last 20 years the number of crimes which have as an option a sentence of imprisonment has increased massively. The length of the sentences has increased massively, and the longer somebody is away from their family, from an economic, social and emotional sense the worse it gets.

Mr BARTON: Yes. We know this. Chair, I was just going to ask, when we did the homelessness inquiry, can we remember what the percentage was of women coming out?

The CHAIR: Coming out directly into homelessness? A considerable, considerable number.

Mr BARTON: It was absolutely staggering, and we just wonder how you can possibly get going after coming out on those things.

Mr GARRETT: Well, you get going by going back to prison, because that is the safest place you will get three meals a day and a bed.

Mr BARTON: Yes. What a sad position we are in. I am sure we can do better.

Mr GARRETT: We can.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Leigh.

The CHAIR: And joining us via Zoom is Ms Nina Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you so much. It is really, really interesting and such well-informed work that you are sharing here today. We really appreciate it. With some of the ideas that you have been expressing I really wanted a bit better understanding of the post-prison support services that you provide. Is that what is, in a way, influencing what you are sharing here today to some extent, and what sort of evaluation you do on those services as well?

Mr GARRETT: Sure. We provide, I think, probably Australia's most comprehensive post-release accommodation and support service, and of course our work with reconciling families is clearly a part of that. We do run what is called the home detention integrated support services program. That is a program funded by the Department for Correctional Services in South Australia, where every person who is on electronic monitoring, whether it be bail home detention or bail electronics or rear-end home D or other intensive supervision orders, comes to us and we provide wraparound support services to them. We assess them and then provide wraparound supports, and that includes financial counselling, housing and homelessness issues, mental health, general case management and drug and alcohol supports. This is part of a broad thrust by the Department for Correctional Services in South Australia to do better in supporting those who are on electronic monitoring. That service has been evaluated by the New South Wales department of criminology, and the evaluation of that is available. I cannot remember the exact number that it reduced repeat offending by, so forgive me for that, but you can find that in the report. It was quite significant, but importantly it also saved \$35 million over two years of cost attached to just the correctional services component of reoffending. So if we get that right, we would probably be able to have some more money that we could allocate to assisting or reducing the harms to young people.

We also have funding to provide drug and alcohol intervention and support. We did run a program for domestic violence perpetrators called Don't Become That Man. We are struggling to keep funding for that, but we have set up a therapeutic community for domestic violence perpetrators whereby, rather than women being asked or forced to escape their family home—and all the dislocation and disruption that results from that for them and their children—SAPOL is now referring men to a small program that we operate that has got 19 beds plus a five-bed therapeutic community to provide treatment and support for those men and provide safety for the women so they do not have to escape their own home and go to a women's shelter. So we have had quite a bit of involvement with, obviously, families around that process as well.

But I am sad to say that there is a level of—'ad hocery' is too strong a word. We are in a position where we just try to find ways to get funding to deliver things that nobody else is doing and hope that governments and correctional authorities will pick up on those services and funding opportunities over the long term.

And we do do some evaluations of that. We run a program for child sex offenders called COSA. This is a support and accountability service for child sex offenders who are released back into the community. That keeps children safe in the community and provides both support and accountability. Now, we have got funding from corrections for that for a pilot program. We would hope to see that funding extended further. I think we are the only group in Australia that runs this COSA program, and COSA runs across Canada and in the UK and has been evaluated extremely positively as a mechanism for reducing repeat child sexual offending.

So I have probably forgotten a few things. We run a bus service to Cadell prison. Cadell is 200 k's from Adelaide, and on the weekends we provide a subsidised program to get families up to Cadell, many of whom are poor and who would never be able to get there apart from that service. We had shut that down during COVID, but we are just starting it up again now. So it is simple little things which give families the opportunity to reconnect and keep in touch in, you know, simple ways but important ways.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you.

Mr GARRETT: Does that answer your question?

Ms TAYLOR: Yes, very broad ranging. Yes, thank you. I really, really appreciate understanding better the incredible work that you do. And the only other thing I was just going to say is I can see it is a really fine and delicate balance, and a lot of what has already been discussed—in that with a child on the one hand discerning, yes, probably better not repeat what the parent has done but at the same time respecting the parent, that they are hopefully doing their best to overcome what has happened—it is a really fine line. I think it is more a psychological question, but it is a really fine line, isn't it?

Mr GARRETT: Well, I think for me that highlights the dilemma I used to find when I was in the prison visits canteen watching a visit going on. There was a man with a nine-month-old child, bouncing it up and down on his knee, you know, loving that child perfectly, and that child was obviously too young to understand what Dad had done in his life—or Mum in her life. But for an adolescent going into that environment—and I have seen this and witnessed it—with Dad trying to tell this young person how they should behave out in the

community, you can just see this look of bewilderment on their faces, ‘Well, okay, here’s the example you are setting me and here you are preaching to me about how I should behave’.

So, you know, all those things can be managed if there is someone looking for that. But no-one is looking for that. There is no set of eyes upon the complexity of that relationship, either necessarily in the prison or outside. Now, the social workers in the prison—if the offender takes an issue like that to them, they would certainly get an opportunity to talk that through with somebody, but then the connection of talking that through from inside the prison and travelling through those walls and boundaries to manage that outside in the real world with the real family is a really, really, really, really difficult thing to do. But you have got to see it first, and we do not see a lot of things because the children are invisible, in a sense.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr GARRETT: I hope that makes some sense.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Nina. Leigh, when you were speaking about that restorative justice approach to families and family reunification, how early are you starting on that? I think when someone is ready for release—maybe the opportunity to do this was very early on in the sentence or very early on in the custody pathway.

Mr GARRETT: Look, we have only really started very recently on that journey of utilising restorative justice processes for family reconciliation, so I do not have any feedback about how successfully or otherwise that has been done. For me the punishment paradigm exists in our criminal justice systems, where the community thinks that the only thing that is required is to punish: ‘Rehabilitation and reintegration, blah, blah, let’s not worry about that too much, but let’s get the punishment done’. The thing that we would hope, and I certainly would hope, is that one day we focus more on repairing the harm than just focusing on punishing the perpetrator and then trying to rehabilitate them after that punishment has occurred.

Certainly I am not a prison abolitionist. I think we need prisons. There are some incredibly dangerous people who need to be strongly cared for and managed in order not to create more victimisation. But I talk with all of the schools we work with and other agencies and groups. If we can just focus on repairing the harm and providing an opportunity for the harmer to actively participate in the repair of that harm, that seems to me to be just a fundamental instrument that we fail to recognise and understand and could provide a capacity to deliver in our schools, in society in general and most certainly in our criminal justice systems. If you look at the behaviour management processes inside a prison, mostly they are punitive. They are rules based and ‘Do this, get that’. I think as a community at large and as a criminal justice system we need to pay massively more attention to repairing the harm. In families that is absolutely critical, and there needs to be education right from the beginning in those families in a sentence of incarceration, particularly if a partner has committed crimes two or three times to go to go back into prison. If we want that relationship to be sustained—and of course some women do not want that relationship to be sustained, for a whole pile of legitimate reasons, whether they be domestic violence related or otherwise, or a lack of hope that anything can ever get better—then I think we are doing ourselves a disservice as a community. These are complicated social policy changes, and I am not pretending they are easy, but that change of focus in my view is primary.

The CHAIR: I think if there is any committee group that is cognisant and aware of the complications and the multifaceted issues, it is this committee. We were at a women’s prison the other day, and they said this month 97 per cent of the people entering that prison were victims of crime as well. So I think we know that in fixing that harm we actually have to quite often fix the harm that had been perpetrated against that person as well.

Mr GARRETT: Absolutely true.

The CHAIR: Tien.

Dr KIEU: Thanks, Chair. Leigh, I should just mention the children and the family of incarcerated persons—secondary and forgotten victims. Particularly the children are more often than not subjected to bullying, and particularly with social media it is now so widespread. It could be cyberbullying. Do you have any experience

of that, and how could we or should we deal with and support those children being subjected to bullying in person or online?

Mr GARRETT: Look, I do not have much experience in terms of online bullying, but the work we do in schools shows absolutely clearly that you do not have to be a child of an offender to get bullied and harmed seriously at a school, but when you add that variable in there is no doubt that the amount of bullying and the potential consequences of that escalate quite significantly. Schools are getting much better at understanding some of the impacts for children who have parents in prison and are trying desperately in South Australia I think to work to that framework. But once again I think one of the challenges we have in schools is if the parents do not get restorative justice but the school does, there is another compounding conflict in the way you manage behaviour across those two environments. So we think we need to get schools much more intimately involved in understanding how restorative justice works. Again, it is not a silver bullet. It will not fix every problem, just as it will not in the adult criminal justice system, but if across families and at school we can provide some mechanisms for those young people to become resilient and we can protect them as far as possible from other people even knowing about the fact that they have got an incarcerated parent, that is preferable so they do not have to be exposed to it. But I think it is incumbent on schools to do some more work in that regard both from a student counselling and student wellbeing perspective as well as potentially utilising restorative justice processes.

I remember 30, 35 years ago going past Yatala prison with a friend and his two children. They said to him, 'What's that place?', and my friend said to his children, 'That's where all the bad people are'. That shocked me and upset me. That is what we do to people who have offended: we just label them as bad people and we label their children as bad kids. That is a deep social problem we have in our Western communities but one which I think we can do some work on to improve. Certainly we can do it in schools for young people and children to reduce the likelihood of them being bullied, isolated and socially dislocated.

Dr KIEU: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Rod.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Leigh. Just two little, quick questions here. Is there federal government funding available for you guys?

Mr GARRETT: Look, we get some federal government funding, Rod, for our drug and alcohol services, but because criminal justice is a state-based service delivery, it is really difficult to get federal government funding for these sorts of things. We will be working in partnership. We are just developing a good partnership with Shine for Kids. We do some work in WA with them, and we are hoping that they will be able to come to South Australia soon to work in partnership with us. I think they may get some access to federal funding that we might not be able to. But, yes, we constantly face that dilemma of not being able to access some of the really big bucks for the work that we do.

Mr BARTON: Yes, Shine for Kids are doing great work around the country. I am just wondering, apart from Shine, is there a body that you can all hook into nationally where, 'This is working for us, you should try that or this or that'? Is there anything official being done around that?

Mr GARRETT: Look, there is a regular conference called the Reintegration Puzzle conference which really focuses significantly around perpetrators and offenders and has also had some involvement with young people and harms to children, but no. About eight years ago I tried to bring together all the NGOs like OARS into a national group so that we could really have a strong voice federally for some of the impacts—that is, drug and alcohol and mental health—but we just could not get that over the line. We are all a bit too parochial. There were six or seven NGOs that we tried to join together. My strategy now is we are doing a bit of work in WA; we are not going to go into states where NGOs already exist. But I think we could and should talk with each other more about this particular issue, not just as groups like Shine and others who are focused entirely on the kids, and that is one of the reasons why we wish to work with them in a more sophisticated way in South Australia, to bring the dimensions that we have along with theirs to ensure we get better outcomes—very early in that journey however.

Mr BARTON: Thanks, Leigh.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Nina, do you have any quick follow-up questions?

Ms TAYLOR: No. I think that is good because we are right on time, aren't we?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Ms TAYLOR: That is fine.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Nina. Leigh, thank you for mentioning the Reintegration Puzzle. I think it is a really innovative approach, and it is trying, as you were suggesting, to bring together the people like yourself from every state and try to consolidate some of the practices that are happening. It is a great conference; I highly recommend it.

Leigh, thank you so much for your time today and again for all the work that you and your organisation do. As I mentioned at the outset, you will receive a transcript of today's hearing. Please have a look at it and let us know if there are any changes that you would like to make. Again, thank you very much for your time here.

Witness withdrew.