

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Melbourne—Tuesday, 14 July 2020

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

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Mr Tim Quilty

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Lee Tarlamis

WITNESSES

Ms Nada Nasser, State Director,

Mr Troy Crellin, Program Manager, Social Enterprise, and

Ms Kea Bamblett-Edwards, Mission Australia.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I declare the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues public hearing for the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria open. This is a reminder to please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this session of the hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands each of us is gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee, or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues on the committee participating today and thank those who have provided apologies.

Thank you for being here. Before that, I would like to make some formal declarations for you. I just remind you that all evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. However, any comments repeated outside the hearing may not be protected. Also, any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of the Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website. I just want to remind you that when you are provided with the transcript, please take the time to go through that, just in case you are misrepresented or there is a mistake in the transcript, so that you can correct this before it is published.

Would you like to have a few minutes of opening remarks before we have some questions for you and discussion? Thank you.

Ms NASSER: Sure. Thank you very much, Tien and committee members, for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am really pleased to be here to represent Mission Australia alongside my colleague Troy Crellin and Kea Bamblett-Edwards, who is a participant in one of our social enterprises in Melbourne, at Charcoal Lane. I hope some of you have been there and know about it. I will make some brief remarks initially and then hand over to Troy to tell you a little bit more about our work and introduce Kea.

Before we begin, I also would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands we are meeting on today. I am on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and Troy and Kea are on the land of the Kulin nation. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and future and, given the focus of today's proceedings on young people, it is really befitting that we also recognise the importance of young people like Kea, who is a proud Yorta Yorta and Wurundjeri young woman, who are the future leaders.

Mission Australia is a non-denominational Christian organisation that delivers evidence-based, client-centred community services that focus on ending homelessness, ensuring people and communities in need can thrive. Last year we supported about 160 000 people through 519 services across Australia. In Victoria we supported 8000 people through 43 services. Many of our services in Victoria work directly with young people and focus on prevention and early intervention. I will give you a couple of examples, and some of those are already listed in our submission: examples like the Navigator program, which works with significantly disadvantaged children and young people aged 12 to 17 years to re-engage back into education; programs like Youth Learning Pathways, which also supports young people to live in a more connected and meaningful life through health and wellbeing support as well as education, training and employment. We also have two social enterprises, Charcoal Lane and Synergy, both providing training and employment opportunities for vulnerable young people, and Troy will talk a little bit more about these shortly.

From our experience nationally in working with vulnerable young people and also particularly in Victoria, we know that a supportive and stable home environment is really essential for good physical and mental health and also has a positive impact on educational and employment outcomes, so we are really pleased that the Victorian government is taking this quite seriously and looking at ending homelessness and today's focus on young people in particular.

Mission Australia's *Young People's Experiences of Homeless* report found that 13 per cent of Victorian young people who responded to our youth survey in 2017 experienced homelessness. For the first time, Mission Australia's youth survey in 2018 asked young people whether they felt there were any barriers that may stop them from leaving home and living independently. What we found was that seven in 10 young people who responded to our survey said that housing costs as well as financial stability and the availability of housing are all key barriers to them moving on to independence, so really this demonstrates that housing affordability is a significant issue for young people, coupled with issues of financial security.

As our submission indicated, we believe that there is more that can be done to prevent and end homelessness, including for young people. First and foremost we need more social and affordable housing—at least 6000 new social housing dwellings over the next 10 years. We have been working alongside the sector in calling for this level of increase in social and affordable housing. This needs to include models that are proven to work for young people, like the foyer model.

When it comes to youth homelessness, though, housing alone will not fix the problem. What we need is more holistic responses that address it at its root cause and turn off the tap. What we need to do is prevent homelessness but also prevent the flow into homelessness. So what does that look like? That includes early intervention, so programs that allow early identification of homelessness through schools in particular. Sometimes that is where some of the earliest risks of homelessness are identified. The Geelong Project is a great model that we believe should be expanded even further. I know it has been expanded recently, but that is a really great model, and I know you heard about that through these hearings as well.

It is really important that we stop exits into homelessness from out-of-home care—out-of-home care is one of the main contributors into the homelessness system—and so extending supports to young people leaving care and helping them stay in care if that is appropriate for them to prevent a sharp cliff into homelessness when young people turn 18.

The other response that is really important is to include youth-specific detoxification and rehabilitation to ensure early intervention and to increase the prospects of recovery. And while it is not possible or safe for many young people to return home after becoming homeless, we believe that reuniting with family and programs that help promote young people connecting with extended family and community are also really important. They are important because they help young people's sense of belonging as well as their long-term social capital.

Finally, I just wanted to say we are currently really concerned about the disproportionate impact that the pandemic is having on young people. The unemployment rate both in Victoria and across Australia and of course across the world is rising, and this will only increase the risk of their homelessness. More job opportunities and employment and training supports for young people are needed. An economic stimulus provides a really vital opportunity to invest in social housing and affordable housing on the one hand, but at the same time it helps generate much-needed jobs.

That is all I will say as my opening statement. I will now hand over to Troy to tell you a little bit more about our work and also to introduce Kea.

Mr CRELLIN: Thanks, Nada. My name is Troy Crellin, and I am the Manager of social enterprise programs here in Victoria. That includes Charcoal Lane and Synergy Auto Repairs. For those of you that do not know the programs, Charcoal Lane is a restaurant that works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. We employ 30 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in our program per year and make delicious food—another important part. We are readily available for anyone that wants to come down to the restaurant after lockdown. Synergy Auto Repairs is a paint and panel shop. We work with young offenders who have been involved in vehicle theft, and we use their dismantling skills for good instead of bad in a paint and panel setting where they are able to re-establish their skills and develop a bit of a pathway into apprenticeships.

That is a partnership with Suncorp and Mission Australia and the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council.

What we see in those environments is a lot of young people who are experiencing homelessness. Some of our young people are unaware of the impacts of overcrowding in their households and some of the other impacts that they experience as young people. Prior to COVID we had 17 young people in our Charcoal Lane program. That increased to 25 young people during the COVID lockdown period. What it shows is the trust that a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have in our program and have in the work that we do to help establish pathways, whether it is into Jobactive or into housing. We work very closely with a lot of services to try to support young people as best we can to manage the barriers that get in the way of work, and homelessness is a big one that often comes up with the young people that we are working with.

For our Synergy students I think it is a major issue for young people in the justice system. Their access to housing is very limited. There are 55 transitional properties that young people can access—that is, young men. There are zero for young women out of the justice system, out of youth justice. What that means is for me, from a personal level, my very first day of meeting a young woman in our Synergy program was going down to a caravan park to collect her stuff because they found out she was 17 years of age and she was too young to stay in a caravan park by herself. We had to help her move back into a residential care unit, where she knew she would return to young offenders. She knew she would return to drug and alcohol use living in that suburb and that area. That is a tough start. Today that young woman is actually working in Queensland and works in a Suncorp shop in the paint and panel industry and has come a long way. But sometimes these issues around homelessness can actually impact on their ability to heal and to grow.

Importantly, I want to introduce Kea and acknowledge that Kea is a future leader in the Aboriginal community. She is a great young woman. I think she first connected with us at Charcoal Lane in 2010, and we reconnected last year—a long-lasting relationship with Kea. I just want to thank her for sharing her experience today and thank her for putting herself out here for everyone in this meeting. I am a little bit nervous, so I am just kind of acknowledging that it is a big thing. I just wanted to say thanks to Kea and acknowledge her contribution today. I might hand over to you, if that is okay, Kea.

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Hello, and good afternoon. My name is Kea Bamblett-Edwards and I am a Yorta Yorta Wurundjeri woman. I pay my respects to the traditional owners of the Wurundjeri people and the members of the Kulin nation on the lands on which we meet. I pay respects to the elders past, present and emerging and everybody in this meeting today. I would also like to say thank you for allowing me to be part of the parliamentary inquiry.

I would like to share just a little bit of my story today to help those who do not really know much about what it is like to obtain and live in public housing and the struggle some of us have to get the appropriate safe housing we need for ourselves and our families. My journey in the public housing system has not been the easiest road. I was on the priority housing list for around six years before I finally got my permanent housing. The reason I was priority was that I was pregnant with my first child and myself and my partner could not afford private rental. It was difficult being pregnant and not knowing where we were going to live in the long term. But I was lucky that I had my mother, who let me stay with her in her two-bedroom unit until housing became available. It was cramped, but at least I had a roof over my head. But not everyone has this sort of support.

I got my transitional housing around seven years ago. Then, a year and a half later, I finally moved into my permanent home. At first it was okay. We had two more children. But then things started to change. I lost my sister to suicide, and that is when the drug use and family violence started. It became unsafe for myself and my three children. I separated from my partner, who was the perpetrator of the violence, and he would not stop showing up to the house, so I had to call the police. The police got child protection involved, and they took away my three children in December 2018. As a mother I love my children and did everything I could to protect them, but it was not enough. Although I had reached out, I could not get the help I needed at the time to address the trauma I had faced and ensure safety for myself and my children.

After my kids went into care I could not stay in the home. The violence I experienced there left me with memories of feeling unsafe, which has affected my mental health and my recovery from substance use. Because of this I stayed at friends' and family's houses as I could not stand to be at the home. I put in a priority transfer and a request for a reduction in rent as I was not staying at the home nine months ago due to feeling

unsafe because of the continued family violence, but I am still waiting for a response. In that nine months I continued to pay the rent and bills as well as having to give my friends and family money for staying with them, which has really made it difficult. What is really concerning to me is that I met my housing worker for the first time in November last year and asked him, 'Are you my new housing worker?'. He replied saying, 'No, I have been your worker for the past five years'. It is extremely important that housing workers get to know their tenants in their properties as some of us really need help but do not know who to talk to about it. It could have also helped to speed up the priority transfer, which I am still waiting on today.

I am in the process of getting my children back into my care, but I need safe housing before this happens to make sure my children and I have a home I can raise them in. I am a single mother, and looking at my budget and expenses I think some families may struggle to afford to live in public housing because sometimes the rent can be more than what some families can afford. The rent is a third of the percentage I get paid. Even if it was private housing, I would get judged because of our past history or where we have lived and the jobs we have had. Public housing needs more affordable housing for families because after the rent is deducted, we barely have enough to feed ourselves over the period of time until we get paid next. Unless parents have worked out a budget that is suited for their families, they are struggling to support themselves and their children and end up owing hundreds of dollars or being kicked out for not being able to pay the rent that is owed.

I am now at Bunjilwarra youth healing centre for Aboriginal youth to overcome drug use and trauma and finally be drug-free so I can get my children back into my care. I want to live in a place that will help me build a life with my children and know that we are safe from going through some of the things that we have over the last two or so years. Having a safe home for my children is a big part of my recovery, and without that I feel it may jeopardise all that I am working so hard to overcome. I read a quote every day from a past resident, a young person, and it says, 'You cannot heal in a place that helps make you sick'. And it is definitely something I totally agree with. I am still dealing with all this today and have tried so hard, and it really does not work. That is why for people struggling with housing there needs to be more houses, facilities and workers willing to help not only young people but everybody dealing with housing issues.

I would like to say thank you to Troy Crellin from Mission Australia and the workers at Bunjilwarra for all the help they continue to give me and for asking me to talk about the struggles I have dealt with in trying to get housing and I continue to deal with. I would like to say thank you to everybody here today for listening to my story.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, Kea. Thank you very much for sharing your story; it is very personal. I would also like to congratulate you on the achievements that you have managed so far, and all the best wishes for your future.

Thank you to Mission Australia. Thank you to Nada and Troy for your time and for your submission. Young people are very important, but also particularly disadvantaged during COVID. In the mental health that is going alongside with COVID-19, a lot of young people are affected because of their anxiety and because their future is uncertain and so on and so forth, so thank you very much for the work that you have been doing to help that cohort.

In your submission one of the recommendations that you proposed is coordination and collaboration between different service providers for mental health, for substance abuse or for prisoners who are exiting back to society, so we would like to hear from you to see how well the present situation of such coordination and collaboration is going, and is there anything that we should do to further enhance that? In particular, there may be some overlapping and at the same time there may be some gaps—maybe some lack of data or sharing of data and so on. So what is your view about that? Either to Nada or to Troy.

Ms NASSER: I am happy to start, and Troy, feel free to jump in. I guess one of the things that—if we look at COVID—COVID has really brought to the fore is the importance of collaboration and the importance of organisations working together. We are seeing this across the spectrum. I know more recently with the lockdown with the towers that there has been a huge collaboration effort, with multiple organisations working together to support the tenants in those towers as they deal with the situation.

In relation to homelessness, because of the complexity of the problem around homelessness, particularly around youth homelessness and really all homeless people, there is a whole range of complexity around their needs and

issues. It is really difficult to compartmentalise—one organisation provides the housing, one organisation provides the out-of-home care support and one organisation provides the crisis accommodation. It is really important that those organisations are working together so that we have a seamless system and so that we can prevent the cycle of homelessness. I think there is already a lot of collaboration. There is a lot of collaboration that is already happening, and we see that on the ground. Our work in Dandenong, for example, and a lot of the programs that we operate they are operated collaboratively and in partnership with multiple organisations, so I think that already happens.

One of the barriers to collaboration—sometimes it is the funding structures where you have got different funding programs that are siloed. It is very rare that you see holistic programs where there is funding that is provided to cover the gamut of support that a person might need. I think that is looking at holistic supports, particularly place-based, where it is locational—you know, you have a community and the focus is on that community and the needs of that community and partnerships across the spectrum. There are some really great models—you know, collective impact and those sorts of models where the focus is on a community working together to support disadvantaged people within the community. I think there is already a lot of collaboration that we can build on, but certainly if some of our funding programs became less siloed, that would be a great help. Troy might have some additional comments to make.

Mr CRELLIN: Thanks, Nada. I agree with everything Nada said there and certainly that collective impact—I mean we are a training and employment space, and we cannot do our work without the support of housing, without the support of AOD facilities and without the support of other organisations stepping in. It would be great to see those types of relationships incentivised by government. I think it would help us to work more closely with other organisations. Certainly from a social enterprise perspective, we want the experts in the field to be working with young people. What we have is young people that trust us, and we want to be able to work with services that we can trust to do their role well as well. Incentivising that through government would really help encourage those collective arrangements and support mechanisms like collaborative kind of work, definitely.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, Troy. Thank you, Nada. Fiona Patten, our Chair, is not able to join verbally, but she has sent me some questions. First of all, she would like to thank Troy and Nada for submitting and also say to Kea what a strong woman you have become. The question that Fiona has is: how many places do you think we need to have for the young people particularly leaving youth justice, and do the existing ones already have any wraparound services or not? Thank you.

Mr CRELLIN: I am happy to answer that, Nada. I think in the youth justice area there are a lot of gaps. A lot of young people in youth justice—I know a lot of them—are naughty kids that did the wrong thing and got caught for it, and the other naughty kids did not get caught. That is the difference between the kids in youth justice—but it always comes with a risk of violence. There are a lot of organisations and a lot of services that will not support young people out of the justice system because of the risk of violence. I think there are some statistics out there that say many youth justice participants come from child protection backgrounds. They make up 10 per cent of our homelessness. That is an important figure to think about. It is important for us to consider where young women and young men are going to after they leave youth justice. If they do not have proper support and proper housing to go to, what are they going to go back to? They are the things that I think we really need to consider when thinking about our most vulnerable members of our community. When stealing a car is a good option, things are not going very well for you. They are the kinds of things, I think—there is a lot of work that needs to be done in that space, certainly, around young people in the justice system.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. Fiona also has a question for Kea. Kea, you said that you could not get the help that you needed. So what was that help that you needed, and what should we do?

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: The help that I needed was to find safe and affordable housing for myself and my children, as I was affected by family violence. There are not a lot of places that are out there that we can go to and feel safe that it is not going to consume you—especially young mums like myself. You definitely need some more places like Bundoora and people like Troy Crellin that we can feel safe around and know that they are going to try and help us as much as they can.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. We have about 15 minutes, so could I ask, Wendy, if you have any questions?

Ms LOVELL: Thank you all for your presentations. I am going to ask my question to Kea because we get to hear from service deliverers all the time; we do not often get to hear from consumers of services. Kea, I guess that we both come from the same area—I am sitting here in Shepparton. I know your family very well. Kea, I am not going to ask you about the solutions as in provision of housing or anything like that, but from a consumer's perspective of services what could change to make it easier for you to navigate your way through the system? You talked about your housing officer having been your housing manager for five years and you not even having met him—those sorts of things. What could make it easier for you as a consumer to navigate the system? And also, just as an addition, are you dealing with DHHS for housing or with Aboriginal Housing?

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Well, DHHS because of the child protection with my children, but the department of public housing I have been in for five years and it has been very hard to get in contact with my worker and—

Ms LOVELL: Sorry, just in addition to my question about what would make it easier for you to navigate, just as an additional one, is DHHS skilled enough to deal with people culturally? So do you feel they deal with you culturally?

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Yes, they definitely need some Aboriginal workers working within the department of housing to assist young Indigenous people—just to understand the backgrounds that we come from and just to definitely try and understand how hard it is for young Indigenous youth to get public housing and to try and access that, because there is not a lot out there for us.

Ms LOVELL: And what would make it easier for you to navigate that system?

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: I do not know. I guess people, they hear stories like mine and a lot of other young people out there. Just to be able to see that young people are trying to reach out for help—a lot of people just turn their backs to it. It is definitely a thing that is happening a lot in my community and communities outside mine. There need to be a few more workers that have knowledge about Indigenous youth and how hard it is.

Mr CRELLIN: Sorry, Wendy, can I jump in there? I think what is important here as well—and thanks, Kea, for those words—is I think it is also important to note that for a lot of young people, and we are talking about 16- to 25-year-olds, navigating these systems is hard because there is no point of reference yet around understanding. To your point around navigating the system, I guess I have worked with the system for a long time so I have knowledge in that area, and it is about trusting relationships, really, at the end of the day. You know, I thank Kea for sharing her story because I think it shows that there are people at the end of this. Children do not flourish when they are traumatised by adults. Young people flourish when they are supported, so it is about developing trusting relationships. If I think about Synergy and Charcoal Lane, they are both safe spaces for young people that they flourish within because there is care, because there are people around that have kind of got your back and want to see you succeed. They will give you a sandwich if you have not eaten anything. They will do whatever it takes in terms of supporting. You have to build those relationships first to be able to understand the needs holistically of a young person to be able to support them around their housing needs. I am not sure if Kea's housing worker knows the full complexity of what she is managing. I mean, we are talking about nine months waiting for a housing transfer for family violence. It is not good. Really I do not think it is down to an individual just deciding they do not want to press the button on that; I think there are gaps in our services that really need to be addressed.

Ms LOVELL: Absolutely. Thanks very much, and good luck, Kea, with your housing and particularly with getting those little ones back.

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Thank you so much.

Mr BARTON: I have got a statement, just a quick one. Thank you for your submission; it was fantastic. And Kea, thank you for being so brave, because it is difficult to come out and talk about these things. I have got a daughter your age, and you think how you get dealt some bad cards occasionally in life, but you play what you can and things will turn. All the best.

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Thank you so much.

Ms VAGHELA: Thanks, Nada and Troy, for your submission, and thank you, Kea, for your time today telling your story. You are very courageous. I can understand it must be a very difficult time. I am a mum, and I can understand without your children it must have been a very, very difficult time for you. All my wishes are with you. I am not going to take too much time, because we have a limited time available today. My question is for you, Troy. You spoke about Charcoal Lane. It was very interesting to hear about that program. Is that program just run at Mission Australia or is that being run at other organisations as well?

Mr CRELLIN: Charcoal Lane was developed in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and Mission Australia in 2009. The program was developed to address labour force exclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. You know, 1967 was the referendum for Aboriginal people to have the right to vote and the right to work. If we think about 1967, that is my parents' era of developing and forging their pathways towards a career, and for many of our students it is their grandparents who had the first access to work. It was developed around a need and part of our reconciliation action plan as Mission Australia was to develop what Charcoal Lane is today. Ten years—we are super proud of that. But what it kind of points out, I guess, is what social enterprise can actually offer young people. It can offer a pathway into starting a career. Kea is a gun front-of-house staff member, and she is amazing in terms of her skills in hospitality. That will hold her and sustain her for her entire life, and guess what? Hospitality works really well around having kids as well, because it is a 24/7 industry and there is always work. I think that with the social enterprise programs, by design our initiative was to really set up around work, but what happens with that is when you are addressing the barriers to work, you actually find yourself delving into these areas of homelessness, and it is a major factor.

Synergy is the same. It does the same thing. We have a 70 per cent success rate in that program of young offenders, young people previously offending, going into apprenticeships and into work. That is pretty amazing, considering the national average is around 50 per cent. What we are doing is developing and harnessing a passion that young people have for cars into a career pathway. They are important things. I note your municipality that you work across, and a lot of young people come from your area, around the Werribee area, to join our program. There is lots of work in that industry, in the paint and panel industry, but more than anything else these programs for me connect young people to one another and forge long-lasting relationships and friendships and help other young people to see that their circumstances are sometimes similar, because maybe some of the mechanisms that kind of exist for us put us into disadvantage.

The first thing we do is restreaming young people in Jobactive providers who have been asked to do 38 hours of work that are managing significant trauma. There is no way that they are going to be able to achieve these goals, so stream A, stream B clients who then cannot meet their requirements of work probably need to be restreamed to disability employment or stream C clients to actually reduce their hours to then be able to meet their requirements of work and achieve what they can achieve. We just put this bar on everybody to achieve at this level, but it is about capacity building. Let someone build to that level; do not expect them to reach that straightaway.

Ms MAXWELL: Thanks, everybody, for attending today. It has been a fantastic, informative hearing. Kea, I am just going to direct my questions to you and to say: I congratulate you on taking those steps that you have to empower yourself so that you can have your beautiful children back.

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Thank you.

Ms MAXWELL: Through a lot of these hearings we have spoken about early intervention, so I am really interested to hear what your thoughts are on early intervention and at what time do you think intervention could have prevented you from where you are today. Or do you feel, given the trauma and tragedy that you had in your life, that you had to actually take this trajectory to be able to heal and grow?

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Well, I was engaged with an Indigenous program for—I actually lost my kids, and I thought maybe that they would see the call-out for help that I was trying to say but did not really have the chance. But it is definitely a thing to try and acknowledge before things happen. Like, a lot of workers do not really know when that is happening. Like, they do not really pay attention to the cry out for help from young people. So it is definitely something that could have prevented me getting into the position that I am in today. But, yes, nobody really can prevent it but ourselves, but definitely talking out to your family, friends, workers and stuff is a big thing for young people, and it is hard, but we have just got to learn to know that

people are there for us. I have been lucky to have some supports that have been there and helped me through it, like Troy Crellin and people like Bunjilwarra and my family. But, yes, some of us are not so lucky.

Ms MAXWELL: And I really hope, Kea, that when you get your children back the supports that you get then are also seen as an early intervention for your children because of what they have gone through and what you have gone through, being removed. So thank you so much.

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Thank you.

Mr TARLAMIS: Thank you, Nada and Troy, for your submission today. And, Kea, can I thank you for your strength and courage in sharing your very personal story with us today. It really is important that we hear firsthand from people that have experienced the system. It is part of what this public hearing and this inquiry is all about. It is about trying to identify the issues with the system and the problems within it so that we can try and make some recommendations that will have real and lasting solutions to the problem so that we can try and reduce future instances of people like yourself having to go through these circumstances. I wish you all the luck in the future going forward with getting your children back and going forward in life. Given the strength that you have shown today, I am sure you will go ahead in leaps and bounds, and I wish you all the best.

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Thank you so much.

Mr TARLAMIS: In terms of questions, there was discussion about collaboration and how within the service sector there is a willingness to collaborate but in many cases the problems come out of the funding silos, essentially. If you had the ability to change things tomorrow, where would you start? Is there a point that you would start at in terms of addressing those issues to try and remove those barriers so that more collaboration between the agencies could occur?

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: I am not really sure how to answer that.

Mr TARLAMIS: It is probably more a question for Troy or for Nada—

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Yes, sorry.

Ms NASSER: I am happy to comment about that. I think Kea's experience really highlights the importance of having a key worker that follows the young person or follows the person rather than the person having to establish new relationships at every service. As we said, the problem of homelessness is a complex one, and it does require a range of different interventions. If a homeless young person has a key worker or a key support worker, that that worker is the person that helps them to navigate the system I think would be a great start.

The challenge with funding, then, is that often the work could be in schools. It could be through the mental health system. It could be through the AOD system. It could be through the child protection system. It could be through housing. So because it intersects with a number of the program areas, the challenge from a funding perspective is who funds that all, and for that reason we do not end up with that level of coordination from a consumer and from a client perspective.

I think there is a lot of collaboration in terms of organisations working together. I know Mission Australia works very closely with quite a number of partners. So there is already a willingness and a level of practise of collaboration. I think the challenge is that bit: if you can get some joined-up funding to allow a consumer or a person like Kea to have someone who is a support person who can work with them along the journey through their journey of recovery until they achieve independence and until they can thrive.

Dr CUMMING: I would like to thank Troy and Nada for their presentation. Kea, I would like to share with you that I am a single parent. I went through domestic violence, and I did that as an adult. I cannot imagine you being so young and trying to navigate the system that we have currently. I wish you well in your healing, and thank you for giving us that personal story, because it will go a long way for us as a Parliament to look for the solutions that we need for you and others. From the bottom of my heart I really thank you for sharing and being so personal with us.

But, Kea, I am going to ask some questions to drill it down a little bit more. Listening to a lot of what I have heard today and reading through a lot of the submissions, there are a lot of key things that keep coming out. But for myself I would just like to hear your experience. What service did you go to first? Was there a number that

you knew of? Was there something within your primary school or high school or from your family? How did you first find out where you should actually go to? Because for myself I feel there must be another way—a number or something that everyone can just go to and then they get all the services—because there are so many wonderful services that are out there working in little silos, not necessarily connected. I have heard many anecdotal stories about DHHS and the department of housing and the like, but where did you go first, and how did you navigate it yourself?

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Well, growing up after a little bit of family violence and having to move around, trying to access housing with my mum—I have an aunty who works for VACCA; that is a service that helps young people with child care and child protection as well. I was lucky and fortunate to have family members that tried to help and could help me access that. And along with Troy Crellin—I have been working with him since I was 15, so I was lucky enough to have a person like him to help me go to all those services and reach out to people that could try and help me and get me to where I am now.

Dr CUMMING: Thank you, Kea. And Troy, thank you, because obviously the social enterprise is an important part of making sure that our youth actually have a job—I represent Western Metro, and we have 15 per cent youth unemployment at the moment—having a job, allowing for housing. I guess one more question, Kea, around the stigma and judgement. Obviously that is a big theme for youth—coming forward, not feeling stigmatised, to tell people that they are homeless. It is easy to hide, couch surfing, sometimes, not even getting connected to services because they are quite embarrassed to tell people at school or otherwise what is going on for them at home. Is there some insight that you have, Kea, around things that might help?

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Being a young mum and with my three kids it was not something that I could really hide. Having three kids and having to move back home with my mum, my family heard about it from people from my community. So it was definitely a big thing, for community members to come and reach out to me and let me know that there are services that I could access to help me and my children. It was a little bit unfortunate that it kind of happened the way it did, but young people hearing my story know that there are places out there. But there are definitely not many facilities where we can go to and we can feel safe and share our stories and be able to get help. Definitely we need something more, yes.

Dr CUMMING: Yes, and some more work around less judgement, I guess, and stigma.

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Yes, definitely. Being Indigenous, and I think it is an expectation of that broader community, like outside our community. I have a lot of family, luckily, but not a lot of Indigenous youth have that. So yes, it is definitely a judgement from other people. You think it is going to come from family, but family are not really—they are the ones that will—

Dr CUMMING: Trying to help.

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: But yes, I am lucky in that sense.

Dr CUMMING: Good luck, Kea.

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I am conscious of the time, so Kea, would you like to make some closing remarks or a statement before we close off this session?

Ms BAMBLETT-EDWARDS: I would just really like to thank you all for having me here today. I definitely hope that a young person sees this today and knows that there is definitely help out there. You have just got to reach out and let your community know that you are struggling. But it will get better.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you very much for sharing your personal story, and also thank you to Nada and Troy for representing Mission Australia. Thank you very much for the submission today. Thank you, everyone.

Witnesses withdrew.