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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES**

**INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AND LOW COST RENTAL  
ACCOMMODATION**

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**At Sydney on Wednesday 8 April 2009**

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**The Committee met at 9.15 a.m.**

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**PRESENT**

The Hon. I. W. West (Chair)

The Hon. G. J. Donnelly

The Hon. M. A. Ficarra

Dr J. Kaye

The Hon. T. J. Khan

The Hon. M. S. Veitch

**PAUL GODFREY VAN REYK**, Community Engagement and Content Manager, National Homelessness Information Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 221, Petersham 2049, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** We appreciate your giving us your time this morning. Would you like to make some opening comments before we ask questions?

**Mr van REYK:** I will start by explaining what the National Homelessness Information Clearinghouse is and how it works so that you get a sense of what I can offer by way of information today. The National Homelessness Information Clearinghouse was established in August 2008 under a contract from the Federal Government's Supported Accommodation Assistance Program to a company called Energetica, which is a small business which primarily develops IT services for the not-for-profit sector. They have that contract until June 2010. The contract basically provides funding for two staff days per week to develop content and engage the community in the aim of the site.

The site's aim is to be a single source of information in Australia for homelessness data, homelessness research, responses to homelessness and policies and programs developed around homelessness. It takes not only Australian information but also international information. It is meant to be an interactive site so the proposal that we are working on and working to is to make sure that it becomes a place where those seeking to address homelessness in Australia at all levels, both government, not-for-profit and private, can post successful programs they are running, engage in discussions about building professional practice and publish research. We also regularly promote events around homelessness and keep track of news on homelessness around the country. That is the primary function and we have been operating since August 2008.

For your information, since then we have had 20,000 visits to the site, which is pretty good, and that it is a site in a sector that unfortunately, I think, is still a bit technologically reluctant. That is something we are certainly trying to break down. About one-third of those visits have been from people in New South Wales. It is not just city-based; I checked today and we have had visits from Armadale, Grafton, Dubbo, Bathurst, Taree and Orange. It is quite widespread. The site is based on open source software. It tries to look for the best developing software in interactive technology, positioning ourselves for the new NBN network that is about to be rolled out. We would like to be at the forefront of that.

My job as content manager and community engagement manager is to keep the content flowing and to be as up-to-date as we can on what is happening in terms of homelessness responses both nationally and internationally, to attend forums and conferences and post material from them, and to be the community engagement person, which means that I am the one who is responsible for keeping track of where stakeholders are up to and actively seeking information from people who have information to provide. For example, the most recent thing we did was that I attended a one-day forum last week put on by Mercy Foundation and the City of Sydney called "Housing When?" We have just developed podcasts of all talks delivered there and they will be on the site tonight. That is the kind of stuff that we do. We go to a conference and put up all the information so that it becomes available not just for those who attend the conference and not six months down the track when someone remembers to put them on the site but as immediately as possible.

That is the context, I guess. The information that I can talk with you about is certainly not around the key worker aspect of your inquiry but very much about an aspect that is emerging, not so much preferred but evidence-based successful approaches to chronic homelessness.

**CHAIR:** How would you define, first, homelessness and, secondly, how would you define social housing or the social housing market on both the supply and demand side?

**Mr van REYK:** Let us start with homelessness. It is a contested area, as you know, in terms of definitions. The classic definition that is currently used as the basis for a number of Australian programs, including the rollout of the Federal Government's white paper, was developed by Chamberlain and is about three kinds of homelessness—primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary is the one that most people are evidently concerned about—the chronically vulnerable homeless or rough sleepers, if you like. Interestingly, I heard yesterday at that forum that the City of Sydney is working with a different kind of notion of homelessness, which looks at the idea of home in three contexts—home as a notion of the self, relating to the physical environment, and relating to the community. I think it is a more valuable way of looking at it because home has more meanings than simply not having a physical structure. It means not having relationships within the community that are fundamental to stabilising and normalising a person's life. The kinds of models we are

seeing emerge now are very much recognising the symbolic and identity issues around homelessness and not simply the day-to-day survival aspects of homelessness.

In that regard we need to look at homelessness certainly for those on the streets but I take the point also made by Madge McGuire, from Catherine House in Adelaide, at the forum the other week, that simply looking at chronically homeless who are street sleepers can define out a lot of people who are homeless. Her particular concern, and one that has been ongoing in my 20-odd years in the sector, is for hidden homeless, particularly women experiencing domestic violence who do not necessarily end up sleeping rough, because it is one of the particularly unsafe places for women to end up, but nonetheless have poor options in terms of how they deal with the actualities of homelessness—the relationships aspect of homelessness, the identity aspects of homelessness and certainly the safety aspects of homelessness. They are being forced into trading sex for homes—we know there is evidence of that—or continuing to live in dangerous relationships.

Similarly we have to remember that there are a large number of young people who are the classic couch surfers, if you like, who are not evidently on the streets but I think are definable as long-term chronic homeless. The other group I have concerns for, which I think is ignored—this comes out of some work I did on the North Coast when I was looking at a State Environmental Planning Policy [SEPP] network there—is what I call the chronically episodically homeless who are vulnerable to homelessness. This is a group of people who live in what we would call public housing and who clearly spend the bulk of their income meeting their housing debts. Every time there is a small family crisis that means an upsurge in family expenditure they are threatened with not being able to pay the rent and hence with eviction from either private or public accommodation. I think they are a very hidden group because what tends to happen is that they have short-term solutions that are classically cash handouts for quick-fix rent payments but certainly not long-term solutions to the fact that another crisis is going to come along and that yet again they will be in that situation.

When we think about homelessness we have to be prepared to be very broad in the way we conceive of it. Looking at that notion of the self and the physical space and the relationships as being fundamental is useful. I have also been doing some work with the Association to Resource Co-operative Housing where we looked at cooperative housing as a way of affordability for people who would otherwise be in public housing in particular. What emerged from that form of housing, which consciously seeks to develop community and neighbourliness within a housing company, is that people enjoyed a stabilising of their life in ways that enable them to address the other parts of their life that are getting overwhelmed by homelessness. For many people homelessness does get in the way or overwhelms their life. We are looking these days to solutions based around establishing people in a home, not a shelter or a refuge, so that services can then be put in place to deal with the longer term or critical aspects that are interfering with their development of self, family, identity, community relationship and so on.

For me that is where social housing falls. As we know, the cost of social housing has only really been articulated fully in the last few years. We have always talked about public housing or council housing. The unfortunate aspect of that has been to see it as a residual form of housing. The trend now is not to see it as a residual form but to see it as an essential part of housing policy at local, State or Federal level. For me that is where the social aspect comes in. We need to be seeing housing as a social need, which if addressed has long-term benefits. Stop me if I ramble too much.

**CHAIR:** No, this is excellent. Do not stop.

**Mr van REYK:** You will probably hear this today because I know you will be hearing from Sue Cripps from Homelessness NSW and Felicity Reynolds from Mercy Foundation. I am sure they will alert you to some work done by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, otherwise known as USICH. They have recently looked at 65 cost-benefit studies in the United States of what is now being called the "housing first" model, which is to provide people with State-based housing or affordable private rental, and support services, versus supporting them on the streets. They are finding extraordinary economic arguments for shifting the focus towards housing people first and then providing services. If you look at the material from USICH, I have a round figure here that across 65 studies they found that if you do what is currently being done, which is shelters and outreach crisis-type services that have no transition into permanent housing in a different mode, you are looking at a range from \$US140,000 to \$US250,000 per year per person in health and mental health care. So that is the drug addiction services, that is entry into emergency and into hospitals, that is emergency health kinds of services, that is crisis payments, and all that.

If you go to this model where we are looking at shifting to housing people in affordable housing and then providing services as wraparound to them where they are, the cost comes down to somewhere between \$35,000 to a maximum of \$165,000. That is a huge drop in the kinds of services that we are talking about. One of the concerns we have as a sector—and I speak as a person from the sector because I worked in the sector 25 years before I took on this job which now I see as moulting the use of the sector—is that, as we know, with the Federal initiatives under the National Affordable Housing Agreement, the national package on homelessness and the economic stimulus in January, we have an unprecedented opportunity for using vast amounts of money, the figures of which vary from \$9 billion to \$17 billion depending on how you can act together, to address in the social housing sector an alternative way of dealing with what are bound to be either a long-term economic drain, by continuing to do what we are doing, or a long-term economic benefit by providing a stabilising and normalising function through which we can then get people who have the capacity, once well housed, to address issues that affect them and that are a drain on the State's programs. We can get them to address those and therefore that will lead to a lesser drain on the State in the long run.

Again I reflect on information from a program run by Dr Sam Tsemberis and others called Pathways to Housing which, in the United States in New York, deals again with the most chronically homeless. I know that I am talking about the most chronically homeless, but I think that these are things that can apply also to housing women in domestic violence situations and housing older young people who can manage themselves in private accommodation. The basic principles articulated in this model are that you give a person a house that is theirs to maintain and keep forever. It is not intended, as current public housing policy is, that they will somehow look at to move them from that into some other accommodation. This is their permanent accommodation, be it either through private rent through a landlord who agrees to be part of a program, or publicly provided social housing, or community provided social housing premises. It is theirs. What you do is that you do everything that you can to help that person maintain the premises because we know that once that person becomes homeless again, they fall back into the cycle that we have tried to rescue them from.

The Brisbane City Council is currently doing quite an effective program for this. It is quite a small one. It has been doing it only for the last four months or so, but it is getting some good results with really hard core street sleepers. The program is operated, as I said, on the basis that this is the person's house. The only thing that will have them kicked out of the housing is if they fail on their rent, and it is virtually impossible for them to fail on their rent because quite often their rent is paid of course out of their pension or their allowance or through some kind of garnishee scheme where the person cannot expend that money. What that means is a number of things in the programs that are run. People have a choice about their accommodation. The accommodation is provided in normalised situations. It is not about building ghettos of the homeless. In a lot of these, in most of these if not all of these new projects, homeless people have housing within a neighbourhood or within a block of apartments that is also housing for other affordable housing or indeed high-income housing.

The notion is to begin a process of social integration by normalising these people's lives. Again, the results are clear. What happens is that the communities in which these people become housed start to perceive the person who is being housed not as homeless, and therefore as somehow disreputable, or a criminal, or whatever, but as a person who was homeless but now lives in housing and has the kind of problems that anybody else might have. They may have a psychiatric problem, they may have an addiction problem, but that is a problem that anybody can have and can be dealt with. Changing these kinds of perceptions starts then to allow the person to get some of that selfhood back and some of their identity back and allows them to again take these steps that are required to bring around their recovery, their rehabilitation, their social integration back into community life.

Again I reflect on the stuff that I know from the work I did around cooperative housing where I investigated work that is done on the concept of neighbourliness and the practice of neighbourliness. It is one of those kind of American terms and it sounds like, "Oh, yeah, what is he saying?", but what it is about is the capacity for people to be encouraged to do the simple daily acts of people in the community, and connection and safety. The simple act of saying hello, the simple act of cooking a meal for the person next door, and the simple act of looking after their house keys while they are on holidays—those kinds of really simple tasks make for a neighbourhood and make the social integration mean that when a person does have difficulties, there is a network around them that is not a state-funded health service, that is not a not-for-profit-funded service, but it is what we have always been aiming for—a community of people around who also provide that kind of connection and that kind of integration.

I think these are the ideas that we are looking at in these models around housing first that I think are the ones that we are looking at for housing first, and where the evidence is that clearly emerging that success will

come certainly with the volume of homeless. There are multiple figures in Common Ground, which you probably have not heard of and undoubtedly will hear more of around the table in your hearings. It is a program that initially started being based on simply housing people who are already well on the way with dealing with the issues that work for the homeless. It then decided to focus on those most vulnerable and most chronically homeless. I am just looking at one of its programs, and it achieved in 20 blocks surrounding Times Square in New York in a two-year period an 87 per cent reduction in homelessness. That is a remarkable outcome that any of us would think is fantastic as a turnaround, and that is dealing with the most chronically homeless.

**CHAIR:** Could you describe for me or define for me "it". You said that "it" had achieved.

**Mr van REYK:** This program, Common Ground.

**CHAIR:** Yes, but—

**Mr van REYK:** Common Ground is the sort of project I am talking about that takes along the person, provides them with a house that is rented for them at an affordable rent, and then there is a wraparound series of services. There might be a psychiatric support service, there might be a mental health support service, and there might be a drug and alcohol addiction support service. There are two things from that—

**CHAIR:** So there is a coordination—

**Mr van REYK:** Exactly.

**CHAIR:** There are four basic issues of sourcing the house, the geography, the actual permanency issue, and the neighbourhood issue.

**Mr van REYK:** Absolutely, and the support.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Is there a paper that describes that program and the outcomes?

**Mr van REYK:** Yes, there are several. "If you go to our website"—no, if you look at the Homeless Information Clearinghouse, we have the papers that are on there and the presentations that we do, and there are Web links to Common Ground, to Pathways to Housing, and to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness [USICH]. You will find a lot of descriptions of a range of programs around this. There are two things I want to highlight from it. You are right to talk about the coordination aspect of it. One of the concerns is that we will again roll out a strategy for dealing with chronic homelessness that is all about housing and forget about the other support services.

I was disappointed in the forum that I attended the other day in that while there was somebody from Housing New South Wales there, there was nobody from New South Wales Health. This is the most significant sector that needs to be providing support services for who we are talking about as the chronically homeless. I have been around long enough to have seen memorandums of understanding written over and over and over again between government departments that really ought to be coordinating around tackling the vulnerable and homeless in this coordinated, supportive way but that failed simply because the resources are not put behind these kinds of memorandums. I will be real clear and say that we can take on the housing first model and we can spend all the money on the community sector or the government sector or whatever to build the houses or acquire the houses and put the people in there, but if we do not have the capacity for providing the support services from either the government sector or the non-government sector, particularly for mental health and addiction services, they are going to fall over yet again.

**CHAIR:** The Holy Grail is the whole-of-government approach.

**Mr van REYK:** Absolutely. It is at this stage the only way forward. It is clear from all these studies that that is necessary. I think that is clear. The other thing that I think is interesting that we are starting to do now is something that again Common Ground has developed, and which you will find on its website—a tool called the Vulnerability Index. Why they did this is that they realised that if you go to the community and say, "We're going to address homelessness. It is this big", nothing happens; but if you focus on the most vulnerable you probably achieve the greatest result, and then you can actually go from there to stabilising them and spending the resources on gradually moving the pool out. I reflect on a time a number of years ago when I was up doing

some work with the housing estate at Inverell. I went to a meeting of a number of government and non-government organisations up there who had come together to work out how best to deal with some of the issues emerging on the housing estate at Inverell. At that stage I looked around and I realised that what was not happening was that these government agencies were not talking to each other about the five families they knew that were the most difficult and the most intransigent, and they were all dealing with them. Lo and behold, if they all sat around jointly and said, "For the next six months, we are going to focus all our energies on sorting out these five families", a significant change would happen on that estate. They agreed to do this. They did it. And the change happened.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Was it because of the privacy laws that the departments would not talk to each other?

**Mr van REYK:** It is two things. It is territorial. You will find that a number of departments have "my client", and they think, "My numbers are not going to be so good and if my money is dependent on numbers"—yes?

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr van REYK:** There is I think also a mistaken notion currently, both on the part of government departments and in the non-government sector, about what the New South Wales privacy laws say about handling information around common clients. Our privacy laws do not say that you cannot talk together about a person's situation. They simply say that you have to get the person's permission to do so. In my experience, people are quite happy, if they think there is going to be a result and if they think that information will be handled professionally, to allow people to talk jointly. What happens is that there is a need for a tool that assists people to identify who they have dealt with.

Recently the Council of the City of Sydney did its street count again and I think they came up with 200-odd rough sleepers in the inner city. If you could make even half of those 200 people not be there the next time the count happens, think what a magnificent contribution that would be. It simply means departments that are responsible for that taking the bit between their teeth and saying, "Okay, let's make sure that we have the mental health services, the addiction services, the housing and whatever the services it takes." The current financial downturn mantra, "Whatever it takes", is again becoming the driving force here. For too long we have not done whatever it takes. By doing so, as I have said, I think we have got ourselves in a bind where we spend a lot of money on not reducing the numbers of homelessness people. Speaker after speaker the other day said that what has happened in fact is that homelessness has become a growth industry. We spend on more and more resources without making a dent in the numbers.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Can I ask you about the trends in the homeless profile. Are there any growing trends that we, as a community, should be aware of?

**Mr van REYK:** There are two areas; one, we are continuing to fail those with complex issues, the mental health-addiction side of things. A long-term feeling is that when deinstitutionalised, I am a supporter of, we did not put in place the structures to deal with the needs of those people in terms of housing and where they are ending up and unfortunately what has happened in the way that public housing has gone these days is that those people are becoming the difficult clients in public housing and so their capacity for maintaining their public housing is again reduced and they get continually into that pool of homelessness.

If you talk to any homelessness service, particularly the crisis services, they will say that the proportion of those who are chronically addicted or with complex mental illnesses has climbed through the roof. The public housing system, the mental health system, the emergency system and the hospital system do not want them and they should not be there. The other trend is that I am worried for those people who are emerging as two things: the ones who were cushioned within the financial structures and are no longer so. I am referring to the elderly self-funded retirees is one particular group that is critically emerging now, those who are in the home mortgage area of chronic episodic homelessness that their mortgage repayments were so high that if they have two kids who suddenly need a big output of money, there goes their mortgage for this month or next month or whatever. We are hearing that that is the other situation.

There is always, of course, rural areas. We know that the impact currently of the drought and the economic crisis on rural population is critical. One of the biggest challenges of the Housing First type model is how do you adapt this for rural New South Wales where first, the housing supply is abysmal and, second, where

community attitudes which may be different in the city environment where they may be more willing to have a Housing First type client next to their nice little house in Wagga Wagga but the services as well. We know that rural New South Wales is incredibly poorly serviced with the kinds of necessary outreach mental health and physical health and addiction services.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** There is not only a shortage of outreach services.

**Mr van REYK:** Absolutely.

**CHAIR:** Did I hear right yesterday when we heard from Housing New South Wales who said they did not have a shortage of housing in the regional areas.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** It was along those lines.

**Mr van REYK:** That would be news to workers in the sector who find it always incredibly difficult. The waiting lists are still high and they still find it hard to get people into housing. There is no solution to the long-term issue, apart from also engaging in private providers as part of this process. Moves that are currently being made to look at how you encourage private developers but also existing private landlords to allocate some proportion of the housing to affordable housing and then down the track the Housing First type housing is a difficult question. It is a challenge but it is one that I think we have to take on board.

It seems to be working in America and you have to look at some of those models. I do know I keep going. It is the area that we continually ignore. On outreach, the other thing I have to say is that two things happen when a person is homeless. They have no place that you can deliver a service to. You can deliver services to people who are currently asleep right now in St James tunnel, which is where people have always been. You can do that but you have to deliver a medical service while commuters are walking past and asking, "What is going on? What is this man doing?" and no doubt taking mobile photographs. There is no privacy whatsoever for a person like that.

We also know that these days it is hard to get a service if you do not have an address or a phone. What happens when you put a person in a house is that there is a place to deliver a service to but there is no point expecting that person to come back to you, which is how our service is still tend to be. We still tend to want a person to come to us rather than go to them.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** On the trends, a couple of us were talking after yesterday's hearing about a couple of photos on the Internet about Detroit where there is a growing trend for tent cities due to the economic situation in the United States. We could not readily identify with that happening just yet in New South Wales.

**Mr van REYK:** You know where it is happening—in caravan parks. Caravan parks are now renting tents to people and they are charging as much as they charge to rent a caravan on site.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** But for a tent?

**Mr van REYK:** For a tent.

**CHAIR:** Where is this?

**Mr van REYK:** Caravan parks in New South Wales, on the North Coast, I saw some recent studies. I am a big advocate of social housing groups taking over caravan parks because what is happening currently again—another trend—is that caravan parks are going upmarket and so are these, traditional places for people who need affordable accommodation, not the best accommodation at least it was a place where a service could come, but they no longer have it.

**CHAIR:** Did you mention a study of that on the North Coast?

**Mr van REYK:** I saw some reports; I have not seen a formal study, but I am certain that if you talk to the Tenants Union New South Wales and you are having a presentation today also from Adam Farrar from the Federation of Community Housing, they will be able to tell you and if you also talk to Shelter New South Wales, they have three places where you will find that information. If you are not doing inquiries on the North

Coast it is probably a good idea to see about talking to some community housing services up there, who will be able to tell you how critical the issue around caravan parks is for them.

**CHAIR:** Could you give an examples of models in Australia or overseas that we should be looking at?

**Mr van REYK:** Housing First is a critical model at this stage. I do not want to be one of those people who says, one-size-fits-all and I always recognise that we will still need crisis accommodation because there are still needs for even Housing First and you have to have property to put the person into and there will still be some people for whom some kind of transitional support is necessary before they can even take on a Housing First type house. There are some people for whom shelters may still, in a minimal way, be a necessary option. So without throwing that away, having that transition where you move somebody as early as you can from either a crisis—what we did wrong, as a person who was a party to it, back in the 80s when we first set up the Support Assisted Accommodation Program was we did everything as crisis and thought that would be a solution and people would go back home. We discovered we were wrong, thought we would support them so we developed medium-term accommodation and we still did not take this step of putting them either back to home or into stable accommodation and they are the only two options. We developed an intervening system that became log jammed.

We focused on a transition in a short period to a long-term solution, be it in the home or elsewhere. That is the type of models that have been developed or planned. Otherwise look at Home Grown in Victoria, which is going that way. When you talk to Mercy today, Felicity Reynolds will tell you the way they are going. I know the City of Sydney is looking at doing a Housing First sort of model. If you look at the cost of what has been done you will ask why is there a question about what the solution here is?

When I talk with women who run the supported accommodation service for women escaping domestic violence at Maitland, the Maitland refuge, Carrie's Place, they will tell you that if they had housing that was safe, secure and affordable for women escaping domestic violence, they would break the cycle of the chronic homelessness that these women suffer, either the real homelessness or the hidden homelessness of having to be stuck in a situation where they constantly get abused. You just see this critical need for an emphasis of housing people who can manage their house and given a modicum of support, not social worked to death but given support that is appropriate when they want it and when it can help them maintain their housing.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I live in Tamworth but when I am in Sydney I live in the inner city down at the bottom of Oxford Street. At five o'clock in the morning I go out from a walk and on the morning like this morning I will see a young fellow asleep in a doorway of one of the pubs. No doubt he has had too much to drink but what alternatives did that lad have apart from sleeping in a doorway?

**Mr van REYK:** Currently, clearly the alternatives would be that he would go to a men's shelter of some sort, the Matthew Talbot Hostel, the St Vincent de Paul, or the Sydney City Mission.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** How many beds are available in the Matthew Talbot Hostel?

**Mr van REYK:** I do not know the figures. You would have to ask them that. The fact that there are something like 200-odd people who are sleeping on the street at the last count, which is a count that is done once a year—I think it was done in August-September—

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Who does that count?

**Mr van REYK:** Sydney City Council does that. They would have the figures. We have to remember, though, that for some people a shelter is not much better for their sense of self than being on the streets. What people like Phillip Mangano from the States and Sam Tsenberis say is, "What people never say to that person in that doorway is, "What do you want to not have you sleep here tonight?" And when they ask that question the answer they got was "A house, a home". When you give them that, then you can say, "Okay, now what can we give you to keep you here?" Then the answers can be, "I do have an addiction problem." "Well, it would be good to get my mental health issues attended to". "Gee, I've got HIV".

It is about asking the wrong questions, if you like, always assuming what the answer is for that person and a big lesson from these people was still ask the open question and then see what you can do to meet the expectations of that person in such a way that you can then deal with the things that you can see, but also what can be done but then they can say "I won't accept you doing something about that right now". A classic

example, not from the housing sector, I talked a long time ago with an Indian doctor, a Bombay rich paediatrician, who decided to do some work in the slums of Bombay with people who had HIV. She opened up a clinic but nobody came. She went to the women and said, "Why aren't you coming. HIV is a really important issue for you and your babies." They said to her, "See that tap over there. That's the only tap for 5,000 of us and the water is foul. You get that tap fixed and then we will come to your clinic." She did and they came to her clinic. The moral being, find out what the real issue is for somebody, fix that and then look at the other things that you might think are important that you can also offer them a fix for.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Can we go back to "I want to house". What do you say the expectation is that they would have in terms of the house? Is it a three-bedroom with a large backyard?

**Mr van REYK:** What a lot of these models are based on is not three-bedroom accommodation. If it is a single person, they look at a reasonable unit for a single person on a modest income as being an apartment that they would feel was good, homely, comfortable, safe and secure. That is all people are looking at. Obviously, for a married couple they are looking at a unit or house that somebody on a modest income would feel was pleasant, safe and secure—something that makes them feel like they have a home. Again, when we look at the studies around the concept of "home"—and they are probably worthwhile having a look at; I mentioned a couple in a paper I did for the Association to Resource Cooperative Housing—

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Is that on your website?

**Mr van REYK:** It is not on that website; it would be on the website of the Association to Resource Cooperative Housing in New South Wales, which I think is [www.arch.org.au](http://www.arch.org.au). It is clear that "home" is very much about security and a sense of a space that is yours. It did not matter what the space was, as long as you could make it yours. When people get housing first under the Pathways Program, they are taken around to places where they can purchase furniture they like, and there is an expectation only that they will keep some basic hygiene standards and damage standards. Otherwise they can live in that space as they like. They can be a bag lady in that space, as they like. They are not back on the streets, and they are receiving support—and hopefully one day we will get some of those bags out of the house. But, nonetheless, it tries to keep them as comfortable as possible, to give them an aspiration that they might have around normal life.

One of the other people who spoke the other day, Rokus Loopik, has tried to put housing first into the Netherlands context. He said he had a look at what homeless people who have been housed for a while do in their houses. He said they watch TV, they cook a meal, they have long baths, and they invite friends over. In fact, they do just what we do. What he was pointing out is that most of the homeless people again have a chance to do what anybody else would do in a house, and that as long as they have a space where they can do what everybody else does, it improves their self-esteem, it normalises them, it gives them the capacity to feel great: I can now deal with stuff that will help me continue to be this normal person.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** If you are trying to assist the 200 people who are homeless in the centre of Sydney and get them off the streets, where do you provide them with their home?

**Mr van REYK:** And that is where the funds that are coming through the National Affordable Housing Program and the National Homelessness Partnership, and also the economic stimulus package, come into play. But we need to be looking at a couple of things: Let us do a warehouse conversion for the homeless, and not for the rich, or let us look at a lot of the empty office space that is around. We know that there is a massive amount of office space that was built but was never taken over. Let us look at conversions of that office space. For affordable housing, that is a mix of the chronically homeless plus the others. Let us look at whether the public housing that we are going to be renovating could be used for that kind of purpose as well. The stock is there. It might not be classically called housing stock. But the building stock is there, even in the inner city.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Does the housing stock need to be close to where the people have been living homeless?

**Mr van REYK:** The evidence is that it is probably a good thing to do that because they do have some connections. Most of them will have already been in contact with some of the support services that are going to continue the support, so that kind of disruption is not a useful thing. So, yes. Could you house 200 people who are chronically homeless in the city of Sydney? I cannot see why not. I can walk around and probably find half a dozen buildings which can certainly be used for that kind of purpose. I really do not see that the stock is an issue.

You have a whole series of architecture faculties in the universities here who are engaging at a theoretic level and at a student project level with these kinds of housing issues. I notice, because I also work with, at times, people like Colin James and Peter Fibbs from the architecture faculties at Sydney University, who would love to become involved in projects that are about not just affordable housing, which they are already doing, but ecologically sustainable social housing. The cooperative housing that has been developed over the last 10 years—have a look at some of those dwelling models. They are extraordinary—really easily replicable.

**CHAIR:** Can we go back to your Bombay and example and the woman who was obviously enthusiastic and a driver, someone who was prepared to do something. Let us assume for the moment we come across a model that is flexible enough to deal with the fundamental issues of supply, geography and permanence, as well as the issues of community neighbourhood and support mechanisms. I am thinking of the example in Bombay. They identified the tap, and they fixed it. What we seem to have a problem with on many occasions is that issue of the driver—that lead agency in the whole-of-government exercise. Do you have any innovative ways of dealing with that?

**Mr van REYK:** I do not think you would have any problem with funding quite effective agencies, frankly, if you put it out there. I know that a lot of the funds that are coming through will go towards the community housing and social housing sector, and I think that is an appropriate place. But I also think a partnership has developed between that sector and the State Government, or indeed local government. I think there is a very persuasive argument to say that local government has been a hidden resource in all of this, in all kinds of ways. Again, Liz Giles made a very eloquent proposal that local government can often have quite an immediate contact with its community because it engages with its community on a number of very day-to-day levels. Rates, rubbish and roads puts you into pretty good contact.

But, of course, local government also has control over a number of public spaces where the chronically homeless reside. You can develop those kinds of partnerships that say Sydney City Council, through its Inner City Homelessness Outreach and Support Service and the various other things it does, which is a partnership between the local council and not-for-profit and State departments. That, to me, is one of those fundamentally significant models to look at and try to replicate in other places.

You might also want to have a look at the Gold Coast, which is currently having incredible problems around homelessness, as we would expect, with self-funded retirees taking on a lot of accommodation. A fantastic homelessness network has been set up there, which again integrates government, local government and non-government organisations who do things like joint referral process, coordinated case management, coordinated case planning, and again are doing an extraordinary job in bringing the range of services together to address long-term resolutions to chronic homelessness.

**CHAIR:** Can you identify that Gold Coast model a little more?

**Mr van REYK:** I can send through to Glenda the contact for that. If you go to our website and look at the papers on the Queensland shelter conference 2009, I think another Liz did a presentation on the Gold Coast model there. We are not short of models, is my message to you. We have the models. We now have, as everybody keeps saying at every conference I go to, a once-in-a-lifetime capacity, with the funds that are coming through, and a once-in-a-lifetime commitment—certainly from the Federal Government and I hope from the State Government as well—to do something serious to change what we have been doing. The models are there, the champions are there, and the lead agencies are there. The structures are there. Phillip Mangano said: We do not need the moral arguments anymore; we do not need the bleeding heart arguments anymore. We know them. If you need the hardline economic arguments, we have got them. There are no arguments left to not doing what we know we can do.

**CHAIR:** So what would stop us?

**Mr van REYK:** Just an absolute lack of will.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Also a lack of insight?

**Mr van REYK:** No. A lack of knowledge about the economic stuff I have been telling you about. We have not had good economic studies done of the costing as they have in the United States. But those models are not that different, I would think, if you applied them here. That information, however, has been put into the

sector, which is why I am putting it in the sector now. I have done that so we can have the discussion about the reality of the economics of this. But you are not going to see that economic return in the next 12 months, if we start doing something now. You are looking at four or five years down the track, and you have to be prepared to say: This is something where we are really prepared to wait for this turnaround. We know we can get an immediate result in getting the people off the street physically. So you will not even see them. The savings will happen in the mid to longer term. But they will happen—the evidence is clear.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** We all thank you for your presentation. It has probably been the most enlightening presentation, in terms of an overview, an evidence base, your previous experience, and your saying what has not worked in the past. We make our recommendations, they go to the Minister, and then the Minister goes to the bureaucrats. The bureaucrats all look after their own positions: their performance indicators, the number of clients, and the way they have been doing things. Do you believe that they understand what the evidence is?

**Mr van REYK:** I would have to say that I think in Housing New South Wales at this stage you have got the chance with the people who are currently running the community housing and social housing aspect. I think they are on the ball. The manager of that unit was at the forum the other day—

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Who is that manager?

**Mr van REYK:** I am trying to remember his name. I will send it to you. He was on the ball. Interestingly enough, Phillip Mangana reflected that what used to be the Department of Housing is now Housing New South Wales. He said: What a great aim, to house New South Wales. I thought, yes.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** I have to tell you, they gave us evidence and did not inspire us at all. I am sorry, they did not inspire me. And they did not touch on the material that you have presented.

**Mr van REYK:** I was a bureaucrat once, and I know that if I was heaved by my Minister to go on something, I would do it. I will give you an example. I recall a wonderful day when I, as a bureaucrat, was taken by my senior manager to sit at a table with the Director General of Community Services at that stage, with the budget coming up. He looked at my boss and said, "My son is running a youth homelessness refuge on the Central Coast. It's shocking. We have got to get more resources for them. What can you give us for a budget bid?" We went away, and in two hours came back with a budget bid for \$10 million. We got it, because the department made it its number one priority.

There are people in those departments who can do that, who have got the ideas, who are just champing at the bit to be given the space in which to do it, and if what they feel is that when they put their hands up somebody will say, "Yes", that it is "Yes, we will", not just "Yes, we can".

**CHAIR:** As you say, the will is around.

**Mr van REYK:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** If there are no more questions, thank you very much for your assistance this morning, it has been very enlightening.

**Mr van REYK:** I will remember to send those details through to you. But have a look at our site, I think you will be impressed.

**(The witness withdrew)**

**(Short adjournment)**

**JOANNE MARY BROUN**, Director General, Department of Affairs, 280 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** We thank you for being with us this morning. Would you like to make some opening comments?

**Ms BROUN:** Yes. Obviously, at the outset, we understand and accept that housing is one of the most significant issues facing Aboriginal people both in New South Wales and across Australia, and that has really manifested by previously poorly constructed and substandard housing, overcrowding, homelessness, as well as reduced access to the private housing market, particularly rental, as a result of affordability, availability and racism, and that continues to be the case. I think any strategies need to address all of those elements.

At the 2006 census New South Wales had Australia's largest Aboriginal population with 29 per cent of the Aboriginal population of Australia living in New South Wales, and 70 per cent of those people live in major cities or inner regional areas, and a large number—more than half—live in the corridor that encompasses Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. That is a point I will make throughout this presentation, because it is worth remembering we are focusing on a largely urbanised population. Fifty-seven per cent of the Aboriginal population of New South Wales are 24 and younger, and 83 per cent are aged 44 or younger; and nearly one-third of Aboriginal households in New South Wales live in social housing compared to 6 per cent for the non-Aboriginal population. Clearly, that is also as a result of reduced access, as I said before, to private rental markets for the other reasons that I stated.

Sixty per cent are in rental accommodation compared to just under 30 per cent for all households in New South Wales, and for the purposes of this inquiry the Aboriginal homelessness rate is 110 per 10,000 people compared to 40 per 10,000 people for the non-Aboriginal population. That is the sort of background. But in terms of where we are heading, the Aboriginal population in New South Wales is expected to increase to over 170,000 by 2011—so it is about 150,000. I will come back to that later because it is a factor of a younger population, greater family formation and those sorts of points.

Population projections indicate that Aboriginal communities in western New South Wales will continue to fall, and Aboriginal people are also leaving Sydney, moving to the north and Central Coast and to some communities on the South Coast. So there is that sort of spread, that sort of movement towards the coast as well from the outer areas. There has been a significant increase of people moving from some of the smaller remote communities in the far west into Broken Hill as well, and, at the same time, non-Aboriginal people moving out of those places. Aboriginal social housing dwelling need across New South Wales was 4,270 dwellings required in 2008 and expected to increase along with that population increase to 4,830 dwellings by 2011, and the majority of that is needed in urban and regional locations.

Both the New South Wales Government State Plan and Two Ways Together, the New South Wales Government's Aboriginal Affairs plan, recognise the interrelationship between access to quality housing and improvement in other areas of wellbeing. In response to a lot of your questions it is important to draw a correlation between other areas of disadvantage and housing. A child is not going to maximise their potential to learn unless they have a safe and secure home, and access to affordable accommodation close to employment opportunities played a key role in improving economic outcomes. Again, that will come up in some of the other responses, because employment, as an element of improving economic participation and wellbeing generally, is critical.

The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report in 2007 found that poor housing conditions associated with most headline dimensions of Aboriginal disadvantage, and highlighted that the importance of housing as a determinant of Aboriginal health and wellbeing includes the quality and the condition of the housing and it can influence those health outcomes. Overcrowding obviously increases the chances of other health outcomes and is a personal stressor as well. Similarly, the New South Wales Chief Health Officer's reports recognised that the physical and social environment that Aboriginal people live in are a determinant of health, and that Aboriginal people are at greater risk of exposure to behavioural and environmental health risks. Poor housing, overcrowding and inadequate basic facilities have all been associated with higher rates of infectious and parasitic diseases.

There has been significant investment at both a national and a State level in both mainstream and Aboriginal specific housing. As I am sure you are aware, on 5 February COAG agreed to a \$42 billion National

Partnership Agreement on Nation Building and Jobs Plan. That agreement includes \$6.4 billion from 2008-09 to 2011-12 for construction of around 20,000 social housing units and maintenance to 2,500 public housing dwellings nationally. So there is a huge investment currently being rolled out. For New South Wales that will mean 6,000 new social housing dwellings over the next three years and upgrades to around 830. As well as having housing benefits to those that require social housing, including Aboriginal people, this investments provides significant employment and training opportunities, particularly through the implementation of the Aboriginal Participation and Construction Guidelines, and I think I spoke about those in the previous inquiry; it is trying to get that added value out of government contracts to ensure we get employment for Aboriginal people in those contracts.

The National Affordable Housing Agreement that commenced on 1 January 2009 will provide \$6.2 billion nationally over five years, and that is an increase of \$46 million over the current forward estimates. Under the new Commonwealth-State financial arrangements, New South Wales continues its considerable commitment to housing and in 2008-09 will provide \$151.1 million over and above its commitment under the previous Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement. Under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness the Commonwealth will provide an additional \$400 million nationally for homelessness over four years from 2009-10, and the States will match that \$400 million agreement. The agreement sets a target for a 75 per cent overall reduction in homelessness by 2013, and a 30 per cent reduction in indigenous homelessness by 2013. It also sets a target of a 25 per cent reduction in rough sleeping by 2013. The New South Wales Government is currently developing a homelessness strategic plan, which will see the implementation of those COAG commitments.

The National Affordable Housing Agreement aims to address individual and structural causes of homelessness. In addition, governments are committed to a genuine reduction in the number of people who experience multiple periods of homelessness. COAG also agreed to, and this is one of the big elements of it and very exciting, a 10-year national partnership agreement on remote indigenous housing. Under this agreement the Commonwealth will provide an additional \$1.94 billion over 10 years. Almost \$400 million of that will come through New South Wales, so that is \$396.8 million, to address significant overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and the severe housing shortage in remote indigenous communities.

While that investment is welcomed, New South Wales is committed to ensuring that the needs of urban and regional Aboriginal communities, which make up the majority of Aboriginal people in New South Wales, remain a priority. What is worth taking note of is that part of this money is only directed to remote communities in New South Wales as well as nationally. So it does limit how much of that money can be spent in those urban areas, which, as I mentioned, have the highest levels of growth and are more than half the population in those areas.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs, which is not a service delivery agency, tends to work closely with Housing NSW and the Aboriginal Housing Office as the key agencies with responsibility for delivering affordable housing. But what we do in that role to improve Aboriginal people's access to affordable housing includes leading the implementation of the State Plan Priority F1, improved health, education and social outcomes for Aboriginal people, and looking at that as a wholistic plan, and Priority F1 includes a specific target to ensure that all Aboriginal communities have access to environmental health systems, and I will talk about that further as well.

Part of that role obviously is influencing New South Wales government agencies in their development of policies and delivery of services to overcome Aboriginal disadvantage, and that is not just with the housing department, that clearly could be with any department trying to influence the development. So it might be access to other services, whether it is in the health department or other departments, facilitating the New South Wales Government Aboriginal Affairs Plan, achieving that sort of collaborative approach of relevant agencies and, again, trying to get agencies to work together and collaborate on addressing Aboriginal issues, but doing that with input from Aboriginal communities and doing it in assessing what are the service delivery gaps and overlaps and review those results and make sure that that is fed back into planning. Housing infrastructure obviously is a key in all of that work.

We also provide advice to the Minister on the impact of these government programs and services and the impact that that is going to have on Aboriginal people, and that includes the department's input and participation in the Homelessness Action Plan, making sure that the needs of Aboriginal people are adequately reflected—and that does not mean necessarily a separate section on Aboriginal people but it means to make sure that the strategies will address specific Aboriginal issues. We have a role in administration of the Aboriginal

Land Rights Act, and you have asked a specific question around that, which I will respond to shortly. A big element of our role is supporting and facilitating the participation and decision-making of Aboriginal people themselves so they have a strong role in government service delivery through regional engagement groups and community working parties and those sorts of structures.

A key program we have been delivering for some time and is due to complete in June next year is addressing Aboriginal communities' housing and infrastructure needs through the Aboriginal Communities Development Program, and to the end of January 2009 that program has delivered 173 new houses and 61 replacement houses; 91 houses have been purchased as part of the program—where that is available obviously—and 698 refurbishment and 321 emergency works. Other parts of that program include a water and sewerage program and housing for health, which is delivered by the health department, which cannot really be called refurbishment because it just deals with the health infrastructure within a house—making sure the toilet is operating, making sure the pipes work, making sure the electricity is safe.

The vision of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs is to achieve social, economic and cultural independence for Aboriginal people in New South Wales. Clearly, that is not something the department does on its own; it has to rely on numbers of other government agencies being more responsive to the needs of Aboriginal people, increasing their understanding of Aboriginal issues and cooperating and collaborating on addressing those issues. So, that is a big part of it and that is the sort of role that we take—bringing agencies together. An example of how this happens in practice can be seen through the development of Two Ways Together regional action plans, which have been developed by regional engagement groups led by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and have State and Commonwealth agencies at the table working on issues identified by community representatives.

The message is not doing it without the peak body representatives or community representatives at the table so that we are not developing up a plan that they are not engaged with and have ownership of those issues. The action plans enable community representatives to work with government to identify those key goals and the actions that will be taken. For example, within the Hunter region better housing was identified as a goal and a range of actions aimed at improving the understanding of the level of housing need in the region, and improving that coordination of agencies. What we continue to find is that lack of coordination across service providers. I have not got too much more.

It is really about targeting where the need is. Some of the data that I have used is as important in meeting the need as just setting up the system. You have to know where the need is, where it is moving to, what the trends are. I would expect that a lot of communities identify housing as a priority for local level action when we do our two ways together partnership community program and we run that out. The planning process being implemented will ensure that communities have a strong voice in identifying those priorities and working with agencies, so having agencies and community at the table in developing that plan.

I think I have mentioned previously the roll-out of our partnership community program, and I will probably talk about that a bit further but we are recruiting to a whole range of positions which I have spoken to you about before. I have also set up a couple of extra area officers if you like to oversight that work and drive that work, so I am going to have an office in Newcastle and one in Dubbo which we previously did not have. That is as a result of having a lot of those extra partnership community project officers out there. Not all of those positions are filled yet. We are in a second round of recruitment. Their first role, once they are out there, is to develop up these action plans with the communities. In some places, they have been started and are at various points, and in some places they need some more work. That is probably where I will leave it in terms of the opening statement. You have sent through a number of questions so I can respond to those as well.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Did you have the opportunity to read both the interim and final report of the inquiry into indigenous disadvantage?

**Ms BROUN:** Yes, I did.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Did you also have the opportunity to read the transcripts of the evidence given by various government departments during the course of that?

**Ms BROUN:** Some of it.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Officers of the Department of Housing gave evidence, and from my recollection they were asked questions about overcrowding, particularly in non-metropolitan areas of their housing stock. Did you have a chance to read their evidence?

**Ms BROUN:** No, I do not recall reading it.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** My recollection of that evidence from the department was essentially that there was a denial of their being an overcrowding issue in Department of Housing stock in rural and regional areas? If my recollection is correct, what do you say about that proposition? I am speaking particularly in regards to housing stock in Aboriginal communities.

**Ms BROUN:** Firstly I am at a disadvantage because I have not read what they have said and I was not here yesterday either so I am taking it on face value about whether it is denial or they might not have the evidence that there is overcrowding. I actually worked in housing for eight years in Western Australia. It is hard to get a grip on the extent of overcrowding in Aboriginal housing for a couple of reasons, one being tenants being unwilling to identify how many people they have got in a house at any point in time.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Absolutely.

**Ms BROUN:** You cannot necessarily rely on the census data as well as we would like to, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] needs to do some more work on that. There is a lack of trust around giving that sort of information whether it is to the ABS or to government about who is in your house at any certain point in time. That is a big part of that problem of saying there is not an overcrowding issue and yet the community would say there is but they are not necessarily confirming who is in their house on any given night.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Is the answer that the anecdotal evidence really demonstrates that in many Aboriginal communities there is a very significant problem of overcrowding in many households? You would almost have to be blind Freddy to deny that.

**Ms BROUN:** The figures we have show about 10 per cent of Aboriginal housing is overcrowded in New South Wales.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** What is your definition of "overcrowded"?

**Ms BROUN:** Yes, I think that is a point worth making as well. What are you calling overcrowding? Is that two people per house? There are Australian standards around overcrowding and it depends on adults or children and all those sorts of things. Is it overcrowding of a large family in a three-bedroom house that might have eight people in it as opposed to three families in one house? There are probably some definitional issues around overcrowding. The statistics are showing that there is overcrowding in social housing and that is quite a small number. It is saying 4.2 percentage of overcrowded housing in social housing in the 2001 census down to 3.8 per cent in 2006.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Are you comfortable with that proposition?

**Ms BROUN:** They are the figures.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** No, are you comfortable with that proposition?

**Ms BROUN:** What I would suggest is that the statistics are not necessarily correct. That does not mean there is a denial, it means, as I said, people are disinclined to actually identify overcrowding in their housing or to identify who is in the housing and how many people are in the house.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Yesterday a proposition was put with regards to the availability of housing stock, and please correct me if I am wrong, again directed at the Department of Housing. I think the general answer to the proposition that there was a shortage of Housing NSW stock in rural and regional areas was a denial of that proposition. What do you say about that?

**Ms BROUN:** That there was a shortage of housing stock?

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** That was the proposition that was put and that was not agreed to.

**Ms BROUN:** The figures I used in my opening statement were that Aboriginal social housing dwelling need across New South Wales was 4,270 dwellings in June 2008 and expected to increase to 4,830 dwellings. Those projections are based on current identified use of social housing, if you like. I would suggest there are different ways you address need and it is not just around provision of social housing. Increasing access to private rental might be one of those ways to do that and, as I said, there are barriers to people accessing private rental, which includes racism. I think we would all be aware that that is the case?

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Yes.

**Ms BROUN:** Affordability would be another issue. The actual accessibility and whether the housing is there—not all towns and locations have a good private rental market. But equally I think more can be done about private ownership and the figures again from our report, and based on the census, were that in 2001, 9,245 households were purchasing or had purchased housing, so fully owned or purchasing housing increased in the 2006 census to 13,157. So that is about a 4,000 difference in the number of people either owning or buying a house. I think that is a way to address the need and the pressure on social housing as well.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Yesterday evidence was given that essentially showed that over the past 12 months ending in January there has been almost a halving of investment in the purchase or construction of private rental dwellings overall.

**Ms BROUN:** Over the whole market do you mean?

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Yes. If that be the case and if that is reflected across New South Wales then if that were to continue that cuts out the potential of the shortfall in the need for social housing coming from the private rental market, does it not?

**Ms BROUN:** I suppose my first point is it is difficult to suggest a general trend from one year's data.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I would agree with that.

**Ms BROUN:** Secondly, the first home owner's grant is currently out there. I would be interested in trying to find the take up of that by Aboriginal people because we have already seen that that is having an impact on the sort of figures that you are talking about, as it was intended to, but I would be interested to know what is the take up of Aboriginal people in that area as well.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Are you aware that data is available that since 2003 there has been a marked flattening in investment of monies in the private rental market compared to in the home ownership market so that rather than it being simply one year, it would seem that there is an increasing shortage of people willing to invest in the private property market?

**Ms BROUN:** No, I am not aware of that.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** If that be the case, would you agree with me that taking into account the large percentage of the members of the Aboriginal community that are forced to rent, that the impact of a withdrawal of investment in the private rental market creates an even more urgent need to look at the provision of social housing for members of the Aboriginal community.

**Ms BROUN:** Firstly, as I said, I think the Aboriginal people's access to private rental markets is limited any way. There are less Aboriginal people in that private rental market. Secondly, whether there is a trend in some of the data is the other point.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Accept that there is a trend—

**Ms BROUN:** but I do not think we could rely on the private rental market to address all the need that is outstanding.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** But the public housing stock is not increasing at the rate of which your figures indicate there is a need for social housing?

**Ms BROUN:** There is a major injection of new funds at the moment which will actually address some of that outstanding need but what I am saying is that while there might be an injection into social housing for new dwellings, and there is, there is also areas we need to examine like home ownership. There is one of your questions around the role of local government and there may well be a role in doing joint ventures with local government to provide some social housing but in a different model on the ground. That is one way this could be done, it could have those sorts of joint venture type arrangements or some incentives to private investors around renting to Aboriginal people.

One of the programs that I was working on in Western Australia was between Housing, private investors and the private rental market to ensure that they improved access to Aboriginal people so that they could actually rent those houses. That meant doing two things: providing support to the tenant and the landlord and the real estate agent in dealing with those tenants. It was a bit of advocacy and liaison between the private landlord and the tenant coming into that private rental market often for the first time. Sort of helping them in through that process but also guaranteeing that you would be there to go and address some of the issues if they arose in that tenancy. That actually did improve the level of access Aboriginal people were getting in the private rental market. I am not sure that covers your question around the decline in the rental market and the accessibility issues though is a big problem.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I take it you have read the whole of Government response to this inquiry?

**Ms BROUN:** I have got it with me yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** In the whole-of-Government response to this inquiry, which I take it you have read—

**Ms BROUN:** Yes, I have it with me.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** —there are a number of programs dealing with homelessness. Given your observations with regard to the problem of homelessness amongst the Aboriginal community, what involvement does your department have with such programs as the Inner City Homelessness Outreach and Support Service, the Signpost Hunter Homelessness Assessment and Referral Service, the Orana Far West Safe Houses project, and the Kings Cross Youth at Risk project? They are referred to on pages 44 to 46.

**Ms BROUN:** Our involvement in those would be limited except in the case of the Orana Far West Safe Houses project, which is in a number of communities where we are working fairly intensively and it is linked to some other work we are doing on the ground in those communities.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** What about the ones in Sydney where a large proportion of the Aboriginal community lives?

**Ms BROUN:** No, we would not really have much to do with those programs.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Why not?

**Ms BROUN:** Because we are not a service delivery agency. We do not have people coming through the door of the department wanting us to help them access those sorts of services.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** With the rollout of the economic stimulus package, which is \$6.4 billion nationally to be devoted to housing and housing needs, because we have seen a previous inequity in where resources are directed and given that the indigenous population lives mainly in the north and on the eastern coast, are you confident that the resources will be directed to the major areas of need or are you slightly worried they will not be? It is a wonderful stimulus package if it is delivered appropriately to where the needs are. What is your feeling? Are you happy with the direction in which it is going or should we be making some recommendations?

**Ms BROUN:** Your question is around the \$6.4 billion overall package and where it gets directed. I would have thought, and I am not going to speak for Housing because it is probably better dealt with by them as to where they will direct the money, they have very good data around where the demand is and where the

growth patterns are. We can provide them with some further information on population projections for Aboriginal people and I think they would take some heed—

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Is there interaction between your department and their department?

**Ms BROUN:** Yes. In terms of identifying need regionally as well. I referred to that project in the Hunter where extra work is being done to identify where the need is so they can target that resource better. That injection of funds is a fantastic opportunity for social housing to hit the spot in the right places. It is really important we make sure it is in the right places. We also have to make sure that it is well built, for a start, and that it is not all built in one location but is interspersed through the community so we do not end up with the housing estate model that has happened in the past. That is a really important point to make.

We want to get as much value out of it as possible. Part of getting the value out of the \$6.4 billion will be maximising the Aboriginal participation in its delivery, making sure there are jobs for Aboriginal building companies and that when tenders are awarded the contractors are required to have Aboriginal employment plans as part of that strategy. It is really important that we get that tertiary benefit out of those dollars. That means employment.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** That sounds really exciting if it in fact happens. Is there a process, or are you confident there will be a process in place, given that this has to be rolled out fairly quickly but hopefully not too hurriedly and in a considered manner, so that your departmental expert opinions will be utilised and you will be working in partnership with the Department of Housing?

**Ms BROUN:** Yes. I have had meetings with the Director General of Housing and the Director General of the Department of Commerce around this. I have followed that up with letters to them to make sure that particularly Aboriginal participation in construction issues and getting some employment value out of those contracts are realised. That must not be put aside in the rush to get the program delivered.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** My last question relates to interagency coordination in this. You cannot just look at housing by itself, as you say. There is health, transport, education and everything else. Are you satisfied that we are beginning to realise we have to coordinate things properly to achieve a certain outcome that is cost effective and socially effective?

**Ms BROUN:** Clearly the population projections I am talking about have impacts on a whole range of agencies, including planning for transport, schools and health services but also local government services. If you are delivering social housing or programs to the homeless, there is a whole range of services that need to be coordinated on the ground. A big part of the department's role is facilitating that and making sure those services are coordinated in a fairly high-level way, because we deal with directors at a regional level to make sure that those programs are being delivered. That is what I was suggesting with the Orana Far West program—working really closely with the key agencies involved in that project, which are the Department of Community Services, Housing, Health and ourselves. Making sure that that is coordinated is a huge part of the activity. Putting a couple of new positions in my department in Newcastle and Dubbo was a response to some of that demand and to improve the high-level coordination with regional directors in those areas.

There is a whole range of other programs coming through the Commonwealth that we also have to coordinate with that activity as well. I think there are some challenges in that. The national partnership agreements on indigenous housing and the \$6.4 billion are not the only money that is going out from either the Commonwealth or the State. There is a whole range of things. There is all the money for schools. Economic development is one of the key platforms we have to work on. We have to make sure the jobs are in the right places as well. Often when I meet community groups and go to regional engagement groups, transport to those locations is really critical. You do not want to set up people where there is no transport service to town and they are isolated even further. That tends to be a key issue.

One of your questions was about social cohesiveness in communities. That is really important. We must remember there is a local government level as well and they need to be part of these solutions. That means it is important for cohesiveness to deal with whole community issues rather than marginalise Aboriginal issues. The indicators might be worse but they obviously reflect some of the other issues that are happening in a local government area.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Yesterday we heard from the Association to Resource Co-operative Housing with a fairly enthusiastic description of how cooperative housing works, which is subtly different from the way that a lot of local land councils do housing. It is more about the tenants owning it rather than the community. Is there a role for cooperative housing within Aboriginal communities to address Aboriginal homelessness?

**Ms BROUN:** I am not sure what your definition of housing cooperatives might be as opposed to the way a land council might operate. Land councils often do manage their housing stock and tenants are involved with that, so often the people on the board would be tenants.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** The cooperative housing model is more where the tenants form a community of interest rather than being elements of a community where there is provision for that community. It is almost total control by the tenants rather than control by the community.

**Ms BROUN:** I think you would find there are probably some Aboriginal organisations and communities that work like that anyway. There is a range of models for community and social housing and all of them might be fit for use in different locations and different communities. I would not exclude any of those models. Even private ownership is one model. Community ownership should not be negated as something that is wrong. It can often have all sorts of benefits for the community, but there is some work to be done on the capacity of that sector to manage housing stock.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Can you describe what that work is?

**Ms BROUN:** There are two things. The skill level of the indigenous community housing sector often needs some extra work. As you mentioned, land councils often manage their own housing stock. Their capacity to do that and their viability as organisations are not consistent. Land councils are some of the best in the indigenous community housing sector but also some of the worst. Some of that comes down to the skill level, some to the model itself, and some of it comes down to the money and subsidies flowing through those organisations. Community housing is not necessarily a very sustainable model. It often needs cross-subsidisation. There is a whole range of issues. One is that there are a lot of community housing organisations and often they are trying to do too much. You often need to combine some of them to get the economy of scale in one sense, not in a monetary sense but in a capacity sense.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** We have heard a lot recently about the transfer of housing to the community sector, specifically from Federal Housing Minister Plibersek but also from the State Government through Minister Borger. I imagine this will have an impact on a large number of public housing tenants over the years—the next decades—and an impact on a large number of Aboriginal people who are public housing tenants. Can you describe what you think that impact will be and whether you think that is a beneficial challenge or is it a change that will disadvantage current Aboriginal public housing tenants and possibly future Aboriginal public housing tenants?

**Ms BROUN:** I have some notes on this. I think it is worth talking about the advantages and disadvantages. I know it is an issue that New South Wales Housing needs to do more work and evaluation on. I think it is a Housing issue, but I will suggest a couple of things more from my experience in housing in Western Australia. One of the areas is the viability of the community housing sector. If you are a very small organisation you are less viable in a monetary sense but also in being able to attract good personnel and things like that. If you can grow that sector through numbers but also through support and training the overall viability of that sector may well improve.

I think that still has to be evaluated by Housing, but you would not go down that path until you knew that was the case. I think a couple of the other benefits that might be realised for Aboriginal people through that—and the Aboriginal community housing sector obviously might benefit from some other viability—is also the choice of a community. I think it is important that communities have the choice of the State housing model if they want to go down that path, or the community housing model. Broadening the choice of people is important. The management of that housing stock closer to the community is probably the other benefit that might occur through that sort of model.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Do you foresee growth of the community housing sector that is specifically focused onto the needs of Aboriginal people?

**Ms BROUN:** There are probably two answers. There already is a large community housing sector.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** I recognise that, but perhaps one that is less connected to existing structures.

**Ms BROUN:** Do I see the benefit? Was that the question?

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** First of all, do you see it happening? Do you think it is a good thing if it is happening?

**Ms BROUN:** I am trying to answer this from the perspective of unless it happens with an overall response around the capacity of those organisations. I do not think you can just transfer housing stock and say, "Hands off. It's now up to them." I think there has to be a lot of work done with those organisations, otherwise you will not realise those sorts of benefits.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** But if the work is done to create the capacity to manage those units and governance and so on, do you see benefits associated with responsiveness?

**Ms BROUN:** Potentially. I am qualifying my answer because until it is evaluated, and you would need to know exactly how that is structured, there are potentially benefits around the choice of the community, control for the community around their housing needs and management closer to the community. Clearly there are some risks in that as well, if it is not done properly.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Jody, in response to one of the earlier questions you were talking about the Aboriginal Lands Council. Do you think the Aboriginal Land Council has a role to play in the provision of low-cost accommodation for Aboriginal people?

**Ms BROUN:** Yes. I will just find the right question in my notes. The short answer clearly is yes. The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Rights Act, which is unique in its operation, sets out the functions of local Aboriginal land councils and the sorts of functions that they may perform. That includes the provision of community benefits schemes. Under the Act, they can do that. However, amendments to the land rights Act, which commenced operation in 2007, provide that new or existing social housing schemes have to be approved by the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council. That needs to occur by July 2010, so we have some time to get them up to speed, if you like.

They have to be able to demonstrate that they have a certain standard of housing management. It provides that the Aboriginal State land council cannot approve a new social housing scheme unless it satisfies certain criteria, including that it is consistent with the local Aboriginal land council's community land and business plan; that the income from such a scheme, which might include subsidies from other sources, is sufficient to meet all expenses of the scheme; and that the likely impact of the scheme on the land council has been considered.

Part of that is how much are they taking on as a land council. Some land councils trying to do a lot of different functions. As I was saying, existing social housing schemes will have to be approved. Almost all of the 121 local land councils manage existing social housing schemes. Some of that is because of the title to former reserves and missions being transferred to land councils, so they do have that role on the ground of managing the housing stock in those locations. Since a number of them have done a number of other schemes and bought or built their own housing stock, or have had other houses transfer to them as well.

Local land councils currently own and manage approximately 2,500 houses across New South Wales. They have a really important role. They are on the ground, as you can imagine: 121 land councils almost covers every town in New South Wales. It is probably worth reminding us that there is a burden in managing that level of housing stock on those local land councils. Without there being some sort of recurrent funding, which was transferred to them in 1983—and a lot of that stock needed some work on it and it is the sort of stock we have been doing work on through the Aboriginal Communities Development Program [ACDP]—you cannot just rely on them without that extra support. As I said, there is some work going on now making sure that land councils are managing their housing stock. If they are getting contributions of funding either for upgrade or for the maintenance with the new housing, they have to meet an Aboriginal Housing Office [AHO] standard before they get that, or the housing stock is actually built in the name of the Aboriginal Housing Office until they meet that standard. There are standards in place.

The other big part of that burden on land councils is that the land that they have is often big blocks of land. They often have their own water and sewerage issues. They are not always connected to the town water and sewerage. Last year in New South Wales the Government committed to investing in a program to maintain and monitor the water and sewerage systems in those discrete communities, and that is for 63 discrete communities. It is committed for a 25-year period and it is close to \$200 million in total value. The really important element of the program itself is that it has been done in partnership with the State land council in recognition that this is land council land and there is a responsibility on government and on the land councils to make sure that the water and sewerage continues to operate. I think it is really important. We have done some capital works but there is no point in doing the capital works if you do not have a program to maintain the operation of those systems on the ground. There are two roles: there is the housing management role, and there is the water and sewerage role.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Do you get an opportunity to enhance the role of the Aboriginal Land Council in the provision of low-cost accommodation?

**Ms BROUN:** I go back to my original point. A lot of land councils are really good housing managers and there are a number of others for which that burden causes problems, and that comes down to the sustainability of the stock, the number of houses, whether they have good personnel, and a whole range of other issues. I think it is hard to take a broad-brush approach, and the approach that has been taken under the Land Rights Act is that it has to be consistent with the community's land and business plan. The land council will decide that for themselves.

A number of land councils have already outsourced that management rather than do it themselves, but that does not mean that they give up ownership. They still have a sense of control over that housing, but we have to make sure that the capacity of that sector is built up. You do not want to have stock on the ground that is not being managed adequately. The aim is to make sure that it is being managed properly, the maintenance has been done, and the rent is being collected. It is the whole package.

**CHAIR:** A lot of that stock was historically handed over in 1983?

**Ms BROUN:** In 1983, that is right.

**CHAIR:** It is not necessarily in the best state.

**Ms BROUN:** That is right.

**CHAIR:** Or well located, et cetera.

**Ms BROUN:** The missions, particularly in those 63 discrete Aboriginal communities, are generally located or were originally located on the edge of town. It is not always the case now. In Coffs Harbour particularly, the mission has actually now been encompassed by the rest of the community, and you will find that that occurs in a number of places.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Dubbo.

**Ms BROUN:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** You might answer question 15 for us.

**Ms BROUN:** This leads to my point about the decisions of local land councils and their right to make that decision. Your first question is about the costs and benefits of subdividing the former reserves and missions with a view to enabling private ownership of land and in some cases improved use of land for housing purposes. The first bit is around what communities want or need. I go back to my point about that really being up to the individual land councils. It is not for us to determine. I do not think it is worth having a blanket approach to this at all. Only those individual land councils can decide whether that is something they want to do. The Land Rights Act in its current form constitutes land councils as independent statutory corporations. But obviously they are being directed by the resolutions of their members. If members resolve to do that, subdivide and sell housing on missions, that is a possibility. But I do not know if you have ever done subdivisions. I have done a couple and they are time-consuming and expensive.

Obviously if you are subdividing a large block of land into, say, 20 blocks of houses on it, there is the road network, there is street lighting, there is sewerage and all of those sorts of things that have to be dealt with. I think it is important to remember that that has to be a decision of land councils and they need to take on board all of that information in making that decision. What is appropriate is the second question. Again it would depend on the land councils themselves, some of which own very valuable coastal land. It may well be in their interest to do that. If they do the cost-benefit analysis, they might come out and say, "This is worth our while to do this subdivision", or they might want to keep that land as a whole and hold onto it as a community. But that is really up to them and that is part of their decision-making process.

Land in remote New South Wales probably is a different equation that you might come to and you might come to a very different conclusion about the cost benefit of a subdivision of that land and what it is worth at the end of that subdivision. Your third question was around whether the Department of Aboriginal Affairs was consulted. Obviously there is some work being done at the moment between the State land council and the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs [FaHSCIA]. The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has actually provided the State land council with funding for a pilot project to do this subdivision in a couple of reserves owned by land councils, one in La Peruse and one in Walgett. They are very different locations, obviously. When we see the cost benefit out of that, then there will be some more information to consider.

That is something that the land council will have to determine off its own bat. It is not something we have had a role in, in terms of the pilot project. We have been kept informed but we were not necessarily consulted on it. It is something between the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the State land council. As long as there is no contravention of the provisions in the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, we do not need to be involved. I think the broader issue in that is around the home ownership issue and how that is dealt with. If it is individual home ownership and if the land council does go down that track, what is the impact on the individual who then owns that land in terms of ongoing maintenance costs and those sorts of things if they have to take on those things? There are those sorts of issues but there are also the broader service issues for a town and there might be issues around making sure that the services are provided and that the sewerage system is going to be able to cope with that sort of subdivision.

**CHAIR:** And the loss of ongoing ownership by the land council?

**Ms BROUN:** Yes. That is an important point. If someone has individual ownership, are there caveats on them on-selling that land?

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Of course not, if they have ownership.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Can I take you to the whole-of-government submission commencing at age 41 and going to page 45, and just taking up the line of questioning from the Hon. Trevor Khan? With respect to these various programs that are specifically nominated, commencing on page 43 and going over page 45, would it be your understanding that indigenous people from time to time may either reside permanently in Sydney or perhaps come to Sydney from time to time and utilise some or all of these services?

**Ms BROUN:** I hope that is the case. I do not have those sorts of figures with me, but I hope that is the case, and I think part of the line of questioning previously was about our involvement as an agency. It is often just as information and we do not have people coming through the door requesting a service.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** You are not a service provider?

**Ms BROUN:** No, but you may well have links in pamphlets and things so people can be informed that these services are there. But if someone was looking for a service like this, there are probably services out in the street that can direct them to the right place rather than it being the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Your first question was whether Aboriginal people are using them. I am not sure of the level of access by Aboriginal people to these programs, I do not have that data, but it is an important issue. If services such as these are funded to provide a service they should also be required to provide that service to Aboriginal people. I think it is important to have Aboriginal-only services that people might feel more comfortable to access but, at the same time, they should not let mainstream services not provide the service, they should also be accessible to Aboriginal people. It should be a requirement of their funding that they need to be providing that service to Aboriginal people.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Putting aside the Orana-Far West Safe Houses Project, which is the one you said you had some general knowledge of, you are not aware whether any of these other services specifically excluded Aboriginal people, are you?

**Ms BROUN:** Not personally, no. I would have to check on my Sydney ones. My Sydney regional manager might be more involved and know more about them than I do, but I do not have that information.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Can I take you to the question now of overcrowding in indigenous housing? I was fortunate enough to be in the inquiries that the Hon. Trevor Khan was also involved with about Aboriginal disadvantage, and there were two reports, as you know. I was interested in the evidence we received from a number of individuals and organisations—and this was something I was unaware of and it has helped me to understand the issue more broadly—about indigenous culture, that with respect to the way in which, shall we say, they live their ordinary lives that community is very important and that from time to time there are events in individual lives and in the lives of the community that bring people together to spend time together, and one example that comes to mind is when there are deaths. For example, there could be the death of an elder and that would bring a number of indigenous people together living under the one roof for a period of time—obviously to experience mourning together and preparing arrangements with respect to the burial, and so on. After that they would be moving on back to where they otherwise reside, in another part of the State or perhaps even to come back to Sydney. Of course, the issue of death is not the only time they come together.

Is it your view that that contributes to part of the challenge in getting some precision on the issue of overcrowding, in terms of what could be overcrowding for a temporary period of time versus continuous, ongoing, overcrowding where you have multiple people under a roof, creating problems like spaces for the children to do their homework, et cetera? Would you mind commenting on that?

**Ms BROUN:** Yes, I think there is a difference between permanent and ongoing overcrowding in a dwelling as opposed to visitors. Visitors can often be in town for six weeks or more, or eight weeks. It depends on the circumstances. It might be accessing a health service, for instance. So people are in town for that business.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** They have come from a remote area?

**Ms BROUN:** That is right. For instance, I know people have to travel to Dubbo to have their babies, and things like that. That might be for two weeks or something might occur with a baby and they have to stay longer. So, they might well be staying with family in that instance. So, there are temporary or transitional services required in a lot of these locations that might be under pressure and not accessible as well. That is an important element for the Committee to consider, what services are there for people visiting from other places to access services. Is there some sort of hostel-type accommodation or small units that might be let on a one-month, two-month, one-week basis rather than having nothing available? That needs to be an option to people, to have that that sort of temporary accommodation available.

In terms of overcrowding in a permanent sense, again it comes down to your definition of overcrowding and whether that is a result of extra families being in the house, why are they in the house, is it whole families or just relations or individuals? I think they have done some analysis of this in some other States and Territories, which may or may not inform the situation in New South Wales. It could be quite a different circumstance. When they do the census-type analysis of overcrowding, the way the question is worded is critical, because it is about who is in the house on that night. As I said, a lot of work has been done by the Australian Bureau of Statistics over the past few years to improve its data collection on census night and involve the Aboriginal community in that work, but it is still not a perfect science. So, the data generally would not be as accurate as we would like, I suggest.

Looking at our construction, if someone wants a house, they do not want to move. You might have a grandmother who has grandkids staying with her. Is that necessarily a bad thing? It might be just an extra bedroom that is required, so we have done some extensions on houses rather than whole new dwellings, and I think that is an important element. Some people choose to stay in a bigger household and be part of the extended family, and I do not think we should impose cultural values on to Aboriginal people. Some do not. We will not make generalisations but we have to have models that respond to different needs.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** But even in western culture that notion of having intergenerational family relationships—living in granny flats, so to speak—is something that happened relatively recently.

**Ms BROUN:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** I am mindful of the time, and I am mindful of the fact that the Hon. Greg Donnelly has been extremely patient in waiting to ask these questions, so I do not want to cut him off.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I can put additional questions on notice.

**CHAIR:** If it is okay with you that they go on notice?

**Ms BROUN:** Okay. The only point I was going to make is I think it is important in the rollout of any program to look at the household make up and we balance our supply to meet the sorts of demands. In some locations it might be single person's units, perhaps one-bedroom units, there might be a high demand for that, so that those individuals can be out of the family home, but equally there might be a high demand for large family homes or family homes with a granny flat attached, all those sorts of things. My experience in housing was we did a mix of all those things, including houses that were two two-bedroom duplexes but with an intersecting breezeway area that was shared and common space. So you had two families. It was basically a duplex designed for two families of the same extended family so that they could live together. It is important to trial some of those models as well. We do not all need to live in the same sort of houses.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** We do need kids with beds.

**Ms BROUN:** We do need kids with beds but I think the definition is about whether you need kids with beds in their own bedrooms as well or is it okay for two or three kids to share a bedroom.

**(The witness withdrew)**

**ADAM FARRAR**, Executive Director, New South Wales Federation of Housing Associations, Suite 301, 64-76 Kippax Street, Surry Hills, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** Would you like to make some opening remarks before we go to questions?

**Mr FARRAR:** Yes, I certainly will. The New South Wales Federation of Housing Associations is the peak industry body for the majority of not-for-profit rental housing providers in New South Wales. There are some others, but our providers manage over 90 per cent of all of the non-government social housing and affordable housing in the State.

I think my first remark is to congratulate the Committee on this inquiry. This is clearly one of the most significant issues the State, the country—and at the moment pretty clearly the world—faces. It is one which, at the moment, has enormous opportunity thanks to a range of initiatives from the State Government but particularly, I would have to say, from the Australian Government. It is a moment when we can really make a difference. Regrettably, I have to say it is also an issue which has been absolutely ignored in public policy for a very considerable time, and we have a great deal of ground to make up. The opportunities and the past neglect, I think, come together at the moment to say that this is an ideal time to have this inquiry. So, again I start by congratulating the Committee.

I do think this is very important. It is probably very useful just to start by thinking about the dimensions of the problem. No doubt you have seen the recent National Housing Supply Council's State of Supply report, the new council established by the Australian Government. Just in broad terms, the undersupply of housing that is affordable to households in the bottom two quintiles of incomes, nationally at least, is around 250,000 dwellings. That is how short we are of a supply of affordable housing. In terms of another measure—the trouble is there are too many of these measures all over the place in trying to get a handle on what is the most useful, but they also report on estimates of rental stress in New South Wales.

In January 2006 in Sydney there were 121,000 households in rental stress and another 65,697 in the rest of New South Wales. Those are fairly significant numbers of households in the rental market who cannot afford to pay for their housing. This table I am looking at actually assesses what the impact of a 10 per cent increase in rural rents would be in New South Wales in all jurisdictions. We are facing those kinds of increases with the pressure on the private rental market at the moment, so while at the moment in Sydney 29 per cent of all renters are in stress—a pretty significant proportion—it would rise to 36 per cent with the 10 per cent increase and 35 per cent in non-metropolitan areas. So the challenge is pretty huge.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** What is the date of that report?

**Mr FARRAR:** This has just been released by the new council; it is February 2009. Having said that, it is pretty crucial to see that we need to do more than we have done in terms of public policy responses in the past. It is fair to say that this State has affordable housing as one of the priority areas in its State Plan. It is equally fair to say that the measures, which are identified there, particularly the key performance indicators in the State Plan, are almost entirely meaningless, and that is not for a moment to denigrate the efforts and contributions made by the public housing system and the fairly substantial commitments of funds by government. It is simply to say in terms of responding to affordable housing and its impacts not only on individual households but on the whole economy, it is not an adequate response.

We do not anywhere have any kind of public policy process that asks the simple question: What happens if you have that undersupply of affordable housing, that number of households who cannot afford to rent; either they cannot afford to pay what they have to pay or they cannot afford to live where they need to live to access the jobs, the schools or the services which they need? So the first question is what is the impact on our society? We know that in terms of our labour market we have massive rigidities, we just make our labour market in New South Wales inefficient, and that is not good for our economy as a whole. For example, we have councils that have to bus their lower paid workers; councils on the North Shore, who bus them from the Central Coast because those workers cannot live where they have to work. Again I will take the North Shore because it is not the sort of area that you normally think about—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Sorry to interrupt because I do not want to break your stream of argument, but you talked about labour market rigidities, then you talked about the requirement to bus people in, in the example you were giving.

**Mr FARRAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** That is not a labour market rigidity surely?

**Mr FARRAR:** I think what you find is that if you cannot attract—bussing people in is an imperfect response. It is a fairly strong indicator that the supply of labour does not easily match the demand for labour. That is a labour market rigidity. A temporary solution to solve that by bussing people over very long distances is an extremely inefficient and partial response to overcoming a structural barrier that people cannot—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I think that is the point; it is a structural barrier because people cannot afford to live, with the greatest respect, in that part of the Sydney metropolitan area, so it is a structural rigidity rather than a labour market inflexibility, surely?

**Mr FARRAR:** Maybe we are getting into semantics. I do not feel any need to have a debate about it. My point is a very simple one. We cannot get the workers we need where we need the workers.

**CHAIR:** Maybe the definition of labour market is different.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I am just trying to get some clarity of term.

**Mr FARRAR:** If you are comfortable with that explanation, that is the only point I need to make.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Okay, I understand now.

**Mr FARRAR:** Going back to the flow, I think the other example, which is another very important example, is that we have future demands for particular kinds of workers, again which we are finding increasingly difficult to meet. In this case it goes to the impact on other parts of our social services, but again I will take the North Shore just as a typical example. The North Shore is an area where there is an ageing population with a need for care workers. Care workers simply cannot afford to live in the area where their services are needed and some of the major charities that are aged care providers are finding that a major problem in delivering the services that they need in a lot of those areas. This is simply a general point about the impact. The individual impacts we know, the impacts of the concentration of disadvantage because people simply have to live where they can afford to live or where public housing is provided and the generational problems that that create in terms of ongoing disadvantage are pretty well known.

So our problem is pretty huge and the kind of question that we need in a public policy sense to ask is: What is the problem and what do we need to do to solve it. Not, as we do currently, to say: would it be nice to increase this or that program? And probably always the answer is yes, it would be. The question is: Is that going to provide a solution to the rather important problem that we have? One last, dare I say, rhetorical flourish: It is worth recognising that the underpinning of the global economic crisis today was housing unaffordability. We would not have had the sub-prime problem in the United States if there had not been a demand driven by the lack of affordable housing, so we know it can have a catastrophic effect. There is a little bit of rhetoric in there but there is a good deal of commonsense as well.

That being said, I think we need to look at what the solutions need to be and I am fairly keen to say that I think we need to, first of all, recognise the size of the problem. Take, for example, the recent economic stimulus package, which is the largest expenditure on social housing over a very limited time frame that has ever been made in this country's history. In New South Wales it will deliver around 6,000 new dwellings. I was just talking about the undersupply, and that is billions of dollars of investment, so we have a massive problem. It is a problem therefore that can only be solved by tapping normal market investment, private sector investment in rental accommodation, and redirecting it to the bottom end of the market where it has never been going.

In the past our private rental market at the bottom end has been made entirely of accidental investors—a term that has been used for a while, mums and dads, sometimes people who are driven by the advantages of negative gearing but are more rational, if you like, than mums and dads, but nevertheless not the kind of systematic investment in a well-recognised asset class that we have in the other parts of our economy. We need that kind of solution. At the same time we need, if you like, a real estate industry—I am trying to use terms that take us out of the government programming kind of language—a part of a real estate industry, which is able to

manage in the bottom half of the market, which is not the place where the real estate industry at the moment directs most of its attention and has most of its expertise.

Here I turn to my members, housing associations—providers whose job it is to provide responsive housing solutions for lower income households rather than for higher income households. So I think we need to generate a new industry as well as new investment, particularly a new asset class. Lastly we need to recognise that you cannot achieve affordable rental housing without government subsidies and this comes to where I think we are in this very, very fortunate moment. One of the ingredients that we have been missing over many years has been some kind of investment incentive which, rather than driving investment into the top end of the market, which is what negative gearing and capital gains tax exemptions did, but instead drives investment into the bottom end of the market.

The Commonwealth Government's National Rental Affordability Scheme [NRAS] is, for the first time, a go at doing that and it provides an enormous opportunity. Our risk is that in New South Wales we will miss that opportunity, where our need is probably the greatest of all States. So the third crucial element is that we need to see the Commonwealth do more but the State too must make sure that we take advantage of that. What I would like to find here is that while the State Government has committed to providing its matching incentives for the National Rental Affordability Scheme for the implementation phase, it has made no commitment to the expansion phase. The implementation phase is 11,000 properties nationally out of a total of 50,000, with the suggestion from the Prime Minister that if that is successful, we would be looking at another 50,000.

We have a commitment to potentially support 11 per cent of the program and New South Wales' share of that program. I would urge this Committee to recommend that the State Government expand its commitment beyond the implementation phase into the expansion phase and if there is a second round, for that second round too, because it is a crucial part of making sure that we have access to the kind of investment at a scale which can genuinely tackle the problem rather than the limited dollars that go into particular programs.

I think those are the broad policy sorts of settings that I would strongly urge: the development of an industry, the creation of a finance market and public investment or at least public subsidies for that investment. There is one last element that I probably want to throw in, in terms of public investment and I want to say quite a lot more later on and I hope you ask the questions about what would actually drive our industry, but ultimately we also need some direct investment from governments.

The NRAS is a one-size-fits-all model. It is designed to work on average across the country. Well, New South Wales-Sydney is not a market that is equivalent to the average market across the country and as a result more is needed in New South Wales. I would and certainly do advocate that the Commonwealth should look at the model so that it reflects the needs of New South Wales, but I would equally urge the New South Wales Government to provide direct investment so that that direct investment can be leveraged, using the NRAS incentive and using debt finance raised by housing associations so that we get the maximum investment into this very difficult market.

New South Wales provided one small tranche of funds in its Affordable Housing Innovation Fund of around \$50 million. I will let you do the calculations of what \$50 million will do in terms of the problem. Other jurisdictions have put in repeated tranches of hundreds of millions of dollars. We need to do something similar. These are quite pressing issues if we are to respond to the affordability crisis and the growth of a genuinely low-cost part of the rental market and without that we will have band-aid stop gap solutions.

Housing associations in New South Wales can provide a major part of that solution. They have the enormous advantage that they can raise debt finance, that they can operate at a local level, interacting with private developers at a local level, interacting on the other hand with service providers. So that the range of responses and needs of low-income households can be met at a local level, with local knowledge, building the local trades and the local economy, and getting local responses. We have a tool which can make a huge difference. Now is a great opportunity to grow it.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Bearing in mind that we are all settled by the history of the way in which we have done things in the past, that that is a given, are there jurisdictions overseas, either within the country or countries themselves, that you think do low-cost housing quite well, if I can use that general phrase? As part of this inquiry, obviously we are able to look at, and be informed by, what others have done, and we want to look beyond the shores of Australia obviously. With your organisation's experience, are there any particular jurisdictions or countries you would direct us to have a look at?

**Mr FARRAR:** Yes, but I am very mindful of your initial caveat. In some of the European countries—the Netherlands is probably one of the better examples—housing associations provide the majority of housing in their country. As a result, they do not have the same kind of affordability problems that we experience. I might add also that some of those countries, at least initially, were insulated from the shocks of the economic crisis because they did not have that kind of toxic debt in their own systems. Australia, actually, has done pretty well for different reasons. But still, it is one of those things which provides ongoing sustainability. The Netherlands is a very good example, but the scale of the difference is so great that it may be very difficult to use.

The United Kingdom is always a useful reference point. Recognising the differences, there are enough similarities. Making the transition to where they are at from where we are at is doable; moving to the Netherlands system is probably not doable in our lifetimes. I think those are probably useful. There are clearly some very good examples from the United States around bits and pieces of programs: their use of inclusion rezoning, and their low-income housing tax credit. There is a range of measures they use which are good models. But it would be wrong to say that they somehow have a better overall aggregate result. At the moment it would be particularly wrong.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** The other thing that governments of either complexion in this State or other States and Territories are criticised for is the slowness with which they arrange for the release of available land for the development of housing. I use that as a general, broad statement. That obviously has implications for low- to lower-cost housing. Do you think that is a valid criticism that can be directed at governments—the way in which and the time they take to release land for development for residential purposes, which includes low-cost housing?

**Mr FARRAR:** In broad terms, no. Clearly there would be examples of delays and ways in which it could be done better. I would not deny that for a second. But, broadly, I do not believe that that is the source of the problem. Take Sydney, for example. The Sydney basin is not, if you like, land rich. It has enormous environmental impacts as we continue to expand, and we have already identified quite significant new release areas. I think a balanced approach already exists. I do not think that that is really the problem.

Access to land does matter. But in Sydney, for example, access to infill sites and increasing densities is going to be every bit as important—perhaps more so—than new release on the fringes. We have to remember that there is a real problem with simply providing affordable housing on the fringes. In the United States some places have moved to a new affordability measure, which does the very commonsense thing of aggravating transport costs and housing costs. If you get cheaper housing on the fringe but have to pay much higher transport costs, the trade-off may well not leave you ahead—in most cases it does not. I think we need to look at a suite of responses, not just new land release.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** We had evidence yesterday—and it links back to one of the comments you made earlier about parts of the Sydney metropolitan area where it is expensive to live, particularly the inner city area. Let us take the example you gave earlier about parts of the lower North Shore. The idea was that it is important to in some way engineer a situation in which people on modest to low incomes can reside because they are a labour base, which is very important for the functioning of that community—whether they be shop assistants, cleaners, caretakers, security guards, childcare workers, or whatever. Is that really a bit of a pipedream idea, or do you think that for the viability of communities that is something we as a Committee should be thinking about in our deliberations in looking at affordable housing?

**Mr FARRAR:** I do think it is important for the viability and the general health of communities that they have a mix of households, a mix of incomes, and a mix of occupations. But I think it is also Utopian to say that everywhere will be, if you like, an even spread of every household. There will be, of course, different precincts with different characteristics, and we would expect that in any interesting city. But I think you can have that observation and at the same time say, "But we do need to ensure that in each community there is access at least to some level, and certainly to the level of meeting the service and employment needs in that region", without saying everything has to be the same.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Your organisation is a peak body?

**Mr FARRAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Can you advise the Committee what are the governance structures of your constituency? Obviously they are not-for-profits. How are they structured? What are their individual governance structures?

**Mr FARRAR:** They are all not-for-profits. Increasingly they are becoming incorporated as companies limited by guarantee. Although, initially most of them were either co-ops—not in the sense of a rental housing co-op but just in the form of an incorporation—or mainly associations. But the trend, certainly for all the larger ones, has been to shift to being companies limited by guarantee, and to provide that kind of regulatory oversight under companies law.

They are all governed by boards of directors. There has been a fairly significant shift over the past, I would say, six years, but possibly a bit longer, away from the community organisation management committee. This is a sector that has moved from being a cottage industry, with all the kinds of cottage industry characteristics, to being reasonably robust small businesses. A significant number of our members now manage over 1,000 properties, and they have many millions of dollars of turnover. We are talking about reasonably robust small businesses, although there are some that are still very small and very local. But most of us have moved to expertise-based boards. They have pretty strong backing in terms of their governance practices. As an industry body we have been developing and supporting governance for quite some time. For example, for a number of years we have been brokering in specific training for directors in housing associations from the Institute of Company Directors—and we have a strong relationship with the Institute of Company Directors—to bring that level of governance in.

There would be a mix, obviously. I will think of some examples. One housing association has a director who introduced total asset management to the New South Wales Government. Some have people who were the managers of infrastructure investment from AMP. There are a lot of former chief executive officers of local authorities. You are getting pretty high-calibre people. I am picking the eyes out of that, of course. And there will be governance failures in every business; we see them at every end of town. But a focus on governance is a strong focus; it has been for a number of years. It is well supported, as is the strong and robust training in practices in the sector.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** You spoke about the shift from the incorporated association status to the committee of management model, more and more moving towards the corporations law and the companies limited by guarantee model. Why has that shift taken place?

**Mr FARRAR:** I have to be honest and say that some of it is driven by government. In New South Wales—and this is a trend across the country—there was a tender for a number of providers to be identified as growth providers, and they were then going to benefit from particular additional resources. It has not necessarily played out quite as well as that, but part of the conditions of that were that they changed their form of incorporation. But a number of them are doing that independently anyway. It signals to potential partners, particularly in the private sector, that they know what they are getting. They know what to expect, they know what regulatory oversight they can rely on, and that means it is much easier to do business.

Also, I think some of them simply wanted to lift the bar. Again, a focus on quality is something that this industry has had for some time, and the sector itself, then supported by government, drove the introduction of an external QA assessment system well before there was formal regulation. I am now talking about specific regulation for community housing. This sector has driven quality assurance and later has been a strong proponent of robust accountability.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** When you talk about quality assurance, you are talking about at the ISA 9000 level?

**Mr FARRAR:** ISA 9000 normally applies to industry rather than to human services. Most human services, like childcare accreditation and aged care, have their own sets of standards that they have developed industry on, as have we, but they are nationally recognised standards.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** What is the shortage of affordable housing stock in New South Wales?

**Mr FARRAR:** Do you want a number?

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Yes, I do.

**Mr FARRAR:** I am going to have to qualify it because there is no scope for a number. Can I briefly explain why? The reason that it is difficult to give an absolute number is that different kinds of responses might produce different solutions. For example, there is an absolute shortfall—and this is probably the best measure; it is the measure that has been developed by Professor Judy Yates, who looks at the low income two quintiles of households and says: How much housing is there that is currently available at rents which would be affordable to those households? It then looks at the shortfall. I do not have this data for New South Wales, but let us say it is more than one-third of the aggregate number.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Let us conservatively say it is one-third of the number.

**Mr FARRAR:** All right. The total number for those two quintiles is around 71,000 nationally. It is 146,000 for the bottom quintile, but as you go up there are people who have more affordability so you may get more stock in, and that is why the number falls. But there is a second factor, and that is that while those dwellings exist a very high proportion of them are occupied by people who could pay more. As a result of that, the number goes up to around 250,000 nationally. Let us say in New South Wales, that is an undersupply of 80,000.

Because each part of the market has different dynamics, that is an aggregate undersupply in rental stock. If you break it up by area, you get a bigger number, simply because you cannot just move it around to average it out. So there may be an oversupply in this area but that is not much use if you are looking for housing over here. But that aggregate number is a pretty good starting point.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** So 80,000?

**Mr FARRAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** It is a frightening number, I think you would agree?

**Mr FARRAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Under NRAS, and I am not being critical, do I take it that is assumed to produce something in the order of 30,000 dwellings in New South Wales?

**Mr FARRAR:** Over 10 years, yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** But the 80,000 figure is the current figure of what is the shortfall?

**Mr FARRAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** We heard from Professor Bill Randolph from the University of New South Wales yesterday, who, amongst other things, indicated that there had been a decided flattening in investment in rental accommodation since about the middle of 2003. Is that your understanding of events?

**Mr FARRAR:** Yes, and that is part of what has been driving the increases in the prices in the rental market. That is cyclical, and you would expect—you would hope—that we would get to the other part of the cycle. But underlying that is a long-term structural increase in housing costs, which then flowed through into the costs in the rental market. It is shown too—and, again, this report is probably useful, it has got a trend of the long-term returns on investment in the rental market—because of the cost of providing new rental housing and the inelasticity on the demand side, we are seeing a decline in returns, and the lower those returns go the lower the investment.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Could I suggest to you that Professor Randolph's evidence yesterday, and indeed the ABS statistics, would seem to suggest that between July 1991, which was the start of his graph and January to July 2003 there had been more or less a steady increase in investment that roughly paralleled investment in owner-occupied dwellings, but that from about the middle of 2003 there has been a change in investment patterns, so that whilst owner-occupied dwellings have continued on the same trend line, roughly, the trend line for investment in rental dwellings broke and instead of being parallel has now flattened. If those statistics are correct, that would suggest that it is not a cyclical event but a behavioural change in the private

investment market away from the provision of rental dwellings. Would you like to comment? Would you like to have a look at the graph?

**Mr FARRAR:** No, I can visualise the graph. I am speculating here, fairly clearly as, I guess, is everybody—

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Professor Randolph was as well.

**Mr FARRAR:** One of the drivers in investment in rental housing is always a relative attraction between property and—

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** The share market.

**Mr FARRAR:** And we are just in an unfortunate time when neither of them is looking particularly attractive. But normally you will see that shift between the two. That, I think, does drive if not a cycle at least a sort of pendulum from time to time, and that may be partly what was responsible for the shift. But beyond that, and certainly at the moment the other thing which drives a dramatic change is the inability to get access to credit, so we are seeing at least development stalling because developers simply cannot get the financing for their projects. So I think a couple of those factors coming together can make a huge difference. But ultimately I think what we are looking at is a straightforward problem of the returns on investment, and those returns are just not adequate.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** If your sector were looking at attracting private finance through NRAS or some other government scheme, to meet, let us say, 10 per cent of the shortfall of housing in New South Wales—so, 8,000 dwellings, on the rough calculations, that we would need—how much, and we will assume it is private sector finance or public sector, how much finance overall would your sector need to attract to provide those 8,000 dwellings?

**Mr FARRAR:** Again, one caveat before I start. I just turn to the sort of US experience where the low-income housing tax credit drove a very substantial increase in development of low-cost and affordable housing. Even there, with a program that has been running for a very long time, in order to make it work they have to package up a whole range of other incentives. In the US they have funds which are provided by local government, by the Federal Government, around urban renewal, so they will access those funds to provide some initial investment. Similarly, in Australia, people will try to attract, for example, donations of land or relatively low-cost land from local government. So part of the initial equity gets parcelled up in some other way, if it is possible, and we do not have as many opportunities—although with more robust inclusion rezoning policies we might be able to do better on that side.

Then you are looking at what you can raise. Again, in the UK, roughly the kind of leverage that government got for its investment was it started off investing about 60 per cent of the remaining finance that had to be raised and the other 40 per cent was debt-financed. It was very, very clearly driven by government, that this was something they wanted to do, and over the first 20 years over £20 billion of investment was lent into the housing association sector because of a change in the Act, a change in the government policy and the creation, if you like, of a well defined mortgage market for housing associations, and most of the major banks recognised it as a product that they developed and they understood. By the end of that process the balance had shifted: government invested about 40 per cent and about 60 per cent was debt-financed, taking into account that there is, if you like, another component upfront that helps.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I do not want to cut across you but if we can go back to the question? If you were to provide 10 per cent of the shortage—that is, 8,000 dwellings—irrespective of the source of that finance, what sort of funds would be required by your sector to provide those 8,000 dwellings?

**Mr FARRAR:** Eight thousand by around \$300,000 per dwelling, so we are looking at—I am always going to be a decimal point out—it is \$2.4 billion or \$24 billion. I am hoping it is \$2.4 billion.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** So \$300,000 per dwelling is the sort of figure you work on?

**Mr FARRAR:** Yes, and that is what the stimulus package has been working on.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Those are frightening numbers by anyone's calculation.

**Mr FARRAR:** They are, although you have to remember that the existing portfolio of rental housing, and I am now thinking about across private rental housing, is billions and billions of dollars worth investment. We are talking about shifting investment from one end to the other rather than completely drawing in totally new investment.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for being with us; it is greatly appreciated. We have a number of questions on notice that we will be sending to you. Could you please assist us with those?

**Mr FARRAR:** I will certainly do that. There is just one thing I would like to put on the record while I am here. The growth of the community housing sector, the housing association sector, in my view, clearly is pretty critical to making this all happen. But there is at least one very major barrier to being able to do the job I described, and that is the lack of a balance sheet, whether it is doing PPPs like the Bonnyrigg one or the private sector partner says, "How can we work with an organisation if you haven't got a balance sheet to carry risk", or whether it is raising finance and you do not have a balance sheet. We manage a portfolio of around 19,000 properties; some of those are head-leased from the private sector, but a significant proportion is currently owned by government. A major and very, very crucial part of the jigsaw in creating a new sector and new investment is to transfer those assets onto the balance sheet of the housing associations.

**(The witness withdrew)**

**(Luncheon adjournment)**

**ELERI MORGAN-THOMAS**, National Manager, Housing Services, Mission Australia, level 7, 580 George Street Sydney, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** Do you want to make an opening statement?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** I am national manager of housing services. I offer apologies on behalf of Leonie Green who is a late withdrawal because of operational matters that happened. Thank you for the opportunity to appear and for inquiring into this important issue. It is obviously very important to Mission Australia so we are pleased that the Legislative Council is taking an interest. I thought I would tell you a little bit about Mission Australia. We are a large national charity. We do a lot of work in the areas of both homelessness and increasingly in housing. The work that we do in homelessness in New South Wales is outlined in our submission and some examples of a number of the services that we provide in the homelessness sphere.

A lot of our clients are people who have become or are at risk of becoming homeless because of a whole lot of things that are happening in their lives, not just about a lack of affordable housing although that is a pretty important part of it. We decided a few years ago that what we did not want to do was just focus on the crisis centre end where you just have an intake of people who are homeless on that night, sometime after lunch, and then discharge them at 10 o'clock in the morning having given them nothing more than a safe haven overnight. We decided we truly wanted to work in a more transformative way with our clients helping them to address the number of issues that are in their lives.

So we have moved to a sort of longer term strategy in a lot of our services which often meant that the number of people that we would have put in overnight has reduced dramatically because we keep people for three months and try to actually make a substantive change. It has affected the way we deliver things. We also recognised that we needed to take more of a preventative and early intervention approach with a lot of our clients which is why we do things like the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative [HASI] and some of those other things which support people to address the non-housing-related issues. We have consciously done that over a number of years.

One of the things we have increasingly been concerned about is we are able to work preventatively with people to sort out some of the other issues which may be about mental health or drug and alcohol but what we were not impacting on was their ability to obtain affordable housing as well so that you have got the whole package. Sometime last year Mission Australia's board decided that it wanted to make an impact on the provision of affordable housing and to that end that it would establish Mission Australia Housing as an entity that would be a deliverer of housing. That was partly in response to the opening up of some funding opportunities with the National Rental Affordability Scheme [NRAS] and some State funding initiatives but also because it was an important thing for Mission Australia to do.

In the past year we have set up Mission Australia Housing in most States and Territories either in nascent or actual form. We have set them up as separate companies partly to meet compliance and regulatory requirements because the running of a housing business in New South Wales and in Victoria at least is regulated by statute. Internally there are also good reasons to do that. It is a very different business and it is very different business model to the rest of our business. We may be dealing with the same clients but in fact the way you operate a housing business where you have long-term asset management and your ability to manage your asset and cash over multiple years—10 or 20 years—actually affects the quality of your service provision so you need to do that very differently from when you are in a recurrently funded environment like Mission Australia is. We are happy to be regulated. I expect you do not get many people come in and say that but we actually think it manages some of our risks as well. It is also about the credibility of the housing association sector.

I will make a couple of key points that we did not necessarily make in our submission. One of them relates to the stimulus package funding. Mission Australia and most housing associations have a different service offering to Housing NSW, rather than running a large housing delivery system most housing associations have developed their own niche and do things in a different way. You will see in tenant satisfaction surveys that tenants in community housing tend to be happier or less negative about their housing provider than most of the State housing authorities, including Housing NSW. In the case of Mission Australia we have decided to have a strong focus on place management because we know that works well in our community services. If we are able to look at housing in the location that it is in we are able to bring in some of our other services, whether it be social enterprise to grow some local jobs or locate some of our services together, we

know from experience that in locations where we have a strong physical presence, like Millar where we have eight or nine services, that we actually have a much greater impact on that whole suburb, area and place. We will strongly take a place management approach in our housing business.

One of the missed opportunities I think is the approach of Housing NSW to the tendering of the stimulus package where it has chosen to go down a route of tendering that only to people who own properties and things themselves. They will directly purchase those themselves. They have locked out the not-for-profit housing sector. I imagine the Federation of Housing Associations mentioned it earlier today but it is something that will significantly impact on the ability of the sector. Did they mention it this morning? They should have. I will do it on their behalf.

If housing associations were able to tender for that and able to use some of the stimulus money through a different mechanism than the procurement method that Housing NSW go and you significantly build the capacity of the sector, significantly build the ability of those organisations to actually make a difference, and will do it in a way that will probably bring a greater diversity of product than will occur through the current stimulus package. I do not want to make any more comments. I note that you have a number of questions you may be interested in exploring.

**CHAIR:** What is your understanding of the term "social housing"?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Probably I think we would say it is an outdate term but how it is commonly used is normally housing that is delivered is where tenants pay a percentage of their income as rent, usually low to very low income earners. We distinguish that from affordable housing—really it is all affordable housing—which tends to be more as rents calculated as a percentage of market rent and more focussed at low to moderate income earners. I think it is probably a false distinction. It is about defining the housing type by the funding model.

**CHAIR:** How do you describe your model? What are the key advantages of your model over other forms of social housing?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** I think all housing providers—and Mission Australia is no different—try to combine both. The affordable housing options have only opened up fairly recently, and social housing options where something is capital funded. Ideally what you want is to have a mix of social and affordable housing, to use those terms, and to be able to have a flexible service offering to clients. It is really about the clients in the end, not necessarily about you fund it. You need to be able to make it affordable for the people who are in it.

**CHAIR:** I do not understand what you describe as the distinction between the two.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** It is about how they are funded. Social housing is generally capital funded. Because of the incomes of the people who are in social housing it will not support debt basically. The amount of rent that a tenant can pay in social housing because of their income, and because it is related to their income, means that you can just about cover the management costs and the long-term asset management costs but you cannot actually cover the costs of capital.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** You referred to your enterprise at Millar and that you had more than one programs. What other programs do you have?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** We actually do not have housing at Millar. When Mission Australia was formed—I do not know what the City Mission was that was out there, whether it was Sydney City Mission, it might have been Liverpool or whatever—it acquired a building there. Because we acquired the building we run a child care centre out of there that works with kids with a whole lot of difficulties.

We have a child and family centre there and some youth services just around the corner. We also have employment services there at the moment. I am uncertain how they have gone in the Jobs Network re-tender. We have had a number of services in Miller that have allowed us, if we wanted to put in another person or a program, to have a base from which to do it rather than go cold into a community and have to re-establish the networks. We know that if we have a building there we always have the capacity to squeeze in one more person and they can benefit from the networks everybody else has and do that work, and people think collectively about how to manage that community and what the issues are for the community.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** The reason I asked is that this morning one of the witnesses spoke about wraparound services—people being located in a residence or a home with a roof over their head, and then you wrap the services around them. Is your experience with Mission Australia that it would be better to have one provider provide all the wraparound services or would you prefer multiple providers?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Our preference is to work with multiple providers because you cannot be all things to all people and the more you try, the more you fail on quality and a whole lot of other things. We know that we have to think about those wraparound services and we would prefer to do them in partnership. In the context of place and thinking about wraparound services you have to think about your networks. We did a fair bit of work a couple of years ago on mapping a whole lot of things such as where we wanted to be and what services we needed to do. In terms of wraparound services specifically for our clients, in our Mission Australia centre in Surry Hills, which is a former homeless shelter that was a proclaimed place and had 60 to 80 people there overnight every night, we significantly changed the service model to longer term accommodation. That has a whole lot of wraparound services. We provide a place where that can happen and others provide the services. We do not employ the dentist who works in our dental surgery but we make available a dental surgery.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** What is the governance model for Mission Australia Housing?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** If we were a commercial company it would be a subsidiary. We have a subsidiary company and the board of Mission Australia's housing is Mission Australia's chief executive officer, Mission Australia's chief financial officer and our head of community services.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Is Mission Australia a company by guarantee and incorporation?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** I want to ask a couple of questions about the Kids Under Cover program referred to on page 8 that you are running in Queensland and Victoria. I was quite fascinated by that. Can you explain how that works? It does not operate in New South Wales, does it?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** No. I will have to take that on notice because I do not know either. We have over 300 services and I thought I was on top of them, but I read that and realised I am not.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** It talks about putting a facility in the backyard of a house. Greg Donnelly was talking about this earlier today. It would be good if you could take that on notice.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** How many people does Mission Australia have in housing in New South Wales?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Only 16 because we have 16 properties in New South Wales that we are running as housing. We have a whole lot of transitional accommodation. I cannot tell you the number, but it would be about 100, plus we have an aged care facility for formerly homeless older people. So the answer is I do not know but there are 16 in our housing business because we have only got one project in New South Wales at the moment.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Your organisation is obviously a faith-based organisation. What percentage of providers of social housing is faith based?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Very few I suspect, because most housing associations are standalone organisations. It is very rare and it has been quite challenging for a lot of the regulators to regulate a subsidiary of a larger organisation. I know the Salvation Army certainly provides housing in other States—I do not think it does in New South Wales—under a separate umbrella. They have not constituted that as a separate company as far as I am aware. There are some challenges in being regulated and therefore getting funding.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** What are those challenges?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** In order to be regulated in New South Wales and Victoria you have to have housing as your primary purpose. Mission Australia's constitution has a primary purpose which is a lot

broader than that so we were not able to register Mission Australia as a housing provider. In fact, that would have been a bad idea anyway because you want something in a housing business, primarily because of the asset side of things, that is a lot clearer than that and a lot more focused.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Can we talk about the foyer model, which I understand is at Miller in western Sydney?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** It was not one of our services and in fact that particular foyer has closed.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Do you run other foyer services?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** We do not run any foyer services. We are about to open one that is foyer-like in Victoria.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** That is where you have accommodation associated with a school or TAFE college?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Not necessarily associated with the TAFE. Mission Australia is a registered training organisation so it is possible for us to provide some of that training. It provides training, support and accommodation. There are some really big foyers in the United Kingdom. You need a critical mass of young people to make it work and a fairly dynamic place with lots of rooms and things like that. What we will do in the Victorian one, and we would like to replicate this model, is to bring in things like social enterprises, which are supported training and employment programs that have a commercial focus, so they tender for jobs. We have an urban one in Victoria called a Renewal Employment Enterprise Program [REEP], which tenders for small landscaping jobs and things like that. They are doing some work on the housing property we have just bought down there. It has some rectification work to be done and they are doing the cleaning, some of the light maintenance and the landscaping in the gardens. We are contracting them to do that. It means the young people get a job and training in how to do that, so it is supported employment. You put people who have been locked out of the workforce into those sorts of training programs.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Is it a successful model?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** It is. They do not make a profit so it is not successful from that point of view but the profit is in social outcomes, absolutely.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** So why did the Miller live and learn campus close down?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** I am uncertain; I think there were some challenges with the funding for that.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** But the model itself was successful?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Absolutely. The model is successful, certainly overseas. I know the Federal Government is looking at a whole lot of foyer models for the Northern Territory. We have had things that were foyer-like in previous years. In regional New South Wales when I was a kid we always had people coming from farms to live in town during the week in supported accommodation. They did training and things like that. That sort of model is not that unusual. It is like a boarding house in some ways.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** What is different here is that it is specifically targeted at young people at risk of not getting employment and also at risk of social issues arising?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Would you recommend that as the model that ought to be pursued?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** I think it is a model that should be pursued, yes. I think it probably needs a little more investment in how it works in the Australian situation and how you can fund it. All the ones that I am aware of in New South Wales have struggled with the funding issue because there is no obvious way to fund it. You try to do it by cobbling together lots of little bits and pieces of funding. That is always unsustainable and you spend a lot of time trying to chase money rather than actually doing the business.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Question No. 10 asked how the housing provided through your various types of housing association members was distinct from other forms of social housing. Are there pros and cons to that model?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** At its most basic it is the same service. You are providing accommodation at a subsidised rent to somebody and there are a whole lot of rules about how you do that that are governed by the Residential Tenancies Act and best practice and so on. I think the difference between housing associations and Housing NSW as the main provider of social housing is the style of tenancy management. I think it is more direct and personal and that is reflected in tenant satisfaction. Housing associations are all smaller than Housing NSW so they can bring in innovations, which is very hard to do in a large service delivery system where you have to provide the same service to everybody. It makes it hard to innovate. There is a lot more innovation happening. Some of the things that I know have happened in housing associations that I have looked at with interest and thought I would like to do in Mission Australia are tenant scholarships, where scholarships are offered to the children of tenants to go to school through some form of tenant participation; and rent payment incentives that reward good payer behaviour instead of doing a straight impersonal service.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Has Mission Australia been involved in some of those?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Not yet because we are very new in managing housing but there are certainly things we would want to include in our service model.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Has it been difficult for Mission Australia to get the capital you need for housing from banks and loan institutions?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes. In the first round of the National Rental Affordability Scheme we won subsidies for 82 dwellings, one of which we had to 100 per cent debt finance. Trying to 100 per cent debt finance anything in this market took 10 years off my life! It was very stressful. Nobody wants to lend you that much money. It is very hard to get a loan-to-value ratio of more than 60 per cent.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** They would be viewing it as a high-risk investment, wouldn't they?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes, they do. They are only assessing it on capital. Although in a more normal environment you might assess it on its cash flows, all they are looking at at the moment is capital value and a lot of those sorts of properties are going downhill.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Is this part of the reason for the call for an economic stimulus package for your sector to be further considered?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Mission Australia Housing would like to have access to some of the stimulus money, not just to manage the properties. If we had access to the capital we know we would be able to secure some loans against those properties. If we want to participate in more of the National Rental Affordability Scheme, because I know we will not be able to debt finance 100 per cent—believe me, I do not want to be carrying that much debt in Mission Australia Housing—we would want to secure that against some of the capital assets. If we have access to capital we can do that. Whereas Housing NSW will get 100 properties and it will own them, with the Commonwealth subsidy we could get 200.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Have Mission Australia and/or any other housing association members made representations to the government bodies to that effect?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** We have asked whether we are able to put in a non-conforming tender. They close tomorrow and we are putting in a number of non-conforming tenders in New South Wales. I suppose the test will be whether they get chucked out!

Every one of those tenders we put in has been with some very well-known developers where we are putting in specific projects. Some of those projects are for multi-unit developments in transport hubs over the top of supermarkets and all those sorts of things. But that is a product that Housing New South Wales does not want to buy because they do not like strata titles. We are quite comfortable to manage strata title properties but, because it is a non-conforming tender, we are confident with our partners that once we get some capital funding, we will be able to get some National Rental Affordability Scheme [NRAS] funding into that and get some mix of social and affordable housing.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** This is a completely new direction for Mission Australia in New South Wales?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** It is a new direction for Mission Australia, but we have put a lot of time and effort into thinking about how it will work. One of the advantages is being able to do this in a substantial organisation. We have turnover this year of \$300 million. You have the back office systems and the finance departments and so on to help you make some of those calls about financing the project.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Are you able to provide us with copies of those non-conforming tenders?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** In some of them I have signed confidentiality agreements with some of our partners.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I anticipated that might be the case.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** I suspect they do not necessarily want everybody to know that they are seeking funding.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Sure. What I am interested in is getting some indication of the style of projects.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** If there are any that you can provide, I would most appreciate it.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** I will get back to you. I will check.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** No problem. I will change the focus because I think everyone else is going to ask you in terms of the Mission's housing issue. I think it is probably because of where I live when I am down in Sydney. I want to talk, if I can, about spectrum apartments.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Are you familiar with the work done there?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** There are just a couple of matters in regard to that. It provides crisis accommodation for men who are 18 years or older.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Where are men under 18 years referred?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** They would normally go to a youth service rather than that. There are some issues about putting under 18s with over 18s.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I am not being critical. I know there has to be an age limit. Is there suitable accommodation for young men?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** There is nowhere near enough accommodation for people who are homeless, and the latest statistics I saw that came from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare last week indicate that probably young women are more at risk than young men.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I was going to get onto the young women's situation next.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** In the Mission Australia centre, that is the service I talked about that we substantially changed.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I gathered that.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** We have noticed that the age of our clients was changing; that they were getting younger, and that there were a group of people in that 18 to 35 age group who had not been homeless for very long and were at risk of being institutionalised into homelessness. What we decided was to focus on them very early in their homelessness—before it became a career, for want of a better word.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Would you like to say something more on that because it interests me and what you are seeing on the street in that regard?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Most homelessness is hidden. The people you see on the street, particularly young people, are couch surfers. Do you know what I mean by that?

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Yes.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** This is particularly so for young women. You see very few young women living on the street. They are much more likely to be staying with friends in inappropriate relationships or not going back to their families and things like that. The solutions for really young people often actually do not rely on housing. They rely on early intervention working with families and supports around trying to reunite them with their family, if that is appropriate, and if that is not appropriate, it lies in finding some other safe solution which is permanent and allows them to finish school and maintain an engagement. There is an interesting report that came out. I think it must have been an Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute report on housing careers for young people. Young people, when they first become homeless and if you put them into a shelter, quickly learn how to be homeless.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** They become institutionalised, in a sense.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes. They find out how to get around the system, and we absolutely would want to prevent that. You do that not through an institutional setting, if you like.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** You are dealing with the plus 18s. They find accommodation in spectrum. How long do they stay there and where do they go?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Up to three months. We work with them intensively over that period. We have a contract with them that is about their responsibilities and our responsibilities in that time on issues they need to work on and that we will support them in. We work with them to find somewhere for them to go. I wish we could say that 100 per cent of the people who come out of that centre had resolved their homelessness issues and all the rest of their life issues. People are more complex than that. It does not work.

We know that that is a lot more successful than our previous approach. Some of them will get into housing through Housing New South Wales or into community housing, or will go and stay with friends in a share house, or will some of those sorts of things. I do not have any statistics on that, I am sorry.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** That is all right. Some funding for the apartments is provided by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program through the Department of Community Services [DOCS]. Is that right?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Part of the support services are provided through which area health service? Is it the South Eastern Sydney Area Health Service?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Is any support provided directly from New South Wales Health?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Not that I am aware of. It costs us a couple of million dollars a year to run that service. Of that, Mission Australia puts in an awful lot through fundraising and other means.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Are you able to identify how much government support is provided?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** I think it is about \$800,000, but I can take that on notice and get back to you.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Please do. One of the feelings that I get is that there is a lack of an integrated response from government in terms of the provision of services to homeless people.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** What is your experience, or your organisation's experience, in that regard?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** We put in a fairly substantial submission to the Federal Government's green paper on homelessness, some of which is reflected in our submission where we outlined what the response should be. For a number of years that whole Supported Accommodation Assistance Program [SAAP], which is a Commonwealth-State program, has been underfunded, as has been Housing. It has always been our contribution; it relied on fundraising from most services to be able to fill the gap. We know that more money needs to go into that. We are hopeful that the reforms that come through from the Federal Government's white paper will be reflected at a State level in the way that the SAAP and other homelessness programs are funded. I would expect or I would hope that there would be some fairly substantial reforms in that, not just in funding but actually in the way that we deliver services. We could support a lot more people in housing if there were the support dollars for that rather than being forced into a crisis accommodation model.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** All right. I think I know the answer to this. Are there many homeless people in your catchment area of central Sydney who are not getting support because of a lack of funding?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** There are a whole lot of reasons why people do not get support. Quite a lot of it is funding. If you look at the census of 105,000 or 107,000 people on census night who were identified as homeless by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there are a whole lot more people who are homeless than that, and certainly there are not that many support packages around. It is hard to give you a metric on that one; but, yes, there are a lot of people who do not get supported.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** What sort of people are not getting support it? What is the characteristic that causes someone not to be supported?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** In one of our youth services, which has six or eight beds in it, when young people leave that youth service and go out into housing, we can only afford to support two or three of those at a time after they leave. If we have people who leave and we can only support three, so that leaves five. It is just a numbers issue. It is like who gets turned away from getting accommodation in a SAAP service? It is when you turn up, the time you turn up, and where you turn up.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Are there specific groups of people who are not getting support?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** There are some people who reject support, but they are in the minority. There are people who probably are more appropriately supported by somebody else. If they have a severe mental health issue, the way we have segmented and the way that the funding system is segmented, that is a mental health issue to be supported. A lot of people and community services either do not have clinical skills or they do not have mental-health specific skills or drug and alcohol skills. It kind of depends on what somebody's presenting problem is. Often it just depends on where you turn up. If you turn up somewhere in the country, you are much less likely to get something. You are not just wanting accommodation, and you are much less likely to get support.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Thank you for coming along and speaking to your submission. It is a very useful submission for us to reflect on. I am just wondering about the cooperative housing model. Witnesses who came yesterday provided us with what was a very enthusiastic endorsement of their model—a model which appears in the Australian context to be quite a modestly utilised model. Would you like to comment on that cooperative style? Do you see it as something that in Australia is under-invested in and something we should do more with?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** It is probably not anything that Mission Australia has thought about, really.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** That is fine. I just thought you might have a view on that. With respect to your submission, Mission Australia has various arrangements that it has in place to assist people who have housing needs. How is it discerned, if I may ask it that way, where to best place the dollars to deal with what is a pretty significant issue out there? You are doing different things with different initiatives. How do you discern which one is the most pressing one you should be reflecting on and doing some work in?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** In terms of the areas in which we work, we went through a major strategic review just over two years ago. We were assisted in that by Bain and Company, which did a fair bit of pro bono work for us in helping us think about what our strategy is and where we can make the biggest impact. What we realised was the three areas that we wanted to work in were homelessness, youth and child and family, but also employment and training in a separate area of business. We decided that was our focus. But in the way in which Community Services is funded in Australia, both federally and at State level, the government makes a lot of the decisions about where services will go.

Government will put out to tender and we will determine whether it fits in and whether we can run it. Often that will be around whether we have an existing footprint in that area and whether we know that is in need, although normally government funders of those things have determined that there is a need there and we normally would not argue or have a disagreement about that. Then it comes down to a capacity of whether we want to manage it and whether we have the capacity to take it on at that time. You cannot just sit down and say, "I'm going to grow in Liverpool." It kind of does not work like that.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** You have made that clear for me. In terms of the different types of housing issues, you have the emergency type of housing and then work through to the more permanent housing arrangements that you are involved in establishing. There is need in the whole spectrum, but is there a particular need with respect to that spectrum at the moment, or somewhere along the spectrum at the moment, or is it really an across-the-board need?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** I think it is across the board, and I think all the data would support that. There is a problem with housing affordability in New South Wales, particularly in Sydney. It is a major challenge to be able to resolve that.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** What about outside of Sydney? Does your organisation have initiatives outside of Sydney it is involved with, with respect to housing?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** With respect to housing? More at the crisis end and support for people who are at risk of homelessness. We have that at a number of locations.

**CHAIR:** In terms of supply, geography and mobility, and the issues of neighbourhood support and community support, what role can local councils play in assisting providers, such as you, to possibly source the supply and manage it or assist in managing?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** One of the really valuable things councils do is provide—quite a lot of councils provide a reduction in rates so it reduces the operating costs, which is very welcome. Some councils I am aware of are more interested in the provision of housing and will do things that help, like social planning studies that help us make an argument when we are putting things up. Others have implemented planning controls and things like that. I think local government could probably do more in the area of planning for affordable housing and making more of their land available for joint ventures. I am aware of a number of aged care facilities around the State that lease land from councils on 30-year leases, peppercorn leases, and have used that. It is expensive to go in and build and if you have access to land, that is a big asset, particularly in Sydney. They could make some of their land available if they had that.

**CHAIR:** I was thinking of Brisbane City Council. I understand it has been doing things to assist in growing the supply without necessarily controlling the supply in venture partnerships in association with a number of organisations, with a government or non-government, a combination of both or more?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Yes. Brisbane Affordable Housing Company has been the recipient of some of those joint ventures or partnerships. We would certainly be happy to joint venture. Still, we would need a funding model on our side to be able to enter into a joint venture.

**CHAIR:** But the joint venture may not necessarily involve capital?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** It may not. But somebody has to have the capital somewhere to be able to build. You may have the land but somehow you have to get the money to build the stuff on the land.

**CHAIR:** With your indulgence, we have a number of questions on notice.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** That is all right. I think I have them all.

**CHAIR:** There may be a couple more.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS:** Okay.

**(The witness withdrew)**

**FELICITY REYNOLDS**, Chief Executive Officer, Mercy Foundation Ltd, P.O. Box 3221 Redfern, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** Welcome, and thank you for coming along today. What is the role of the Mercy Foundation and how was it funded? And you may wish to make some other opening comments?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** Yes. The Mercy Foundation was established by the North Sydney Sisters of Mercy in the late 1980s as a way of ensuring that they continue to focus work on people who are disadvantaged. So, they established the foundation with that end in mind. There was a review in 2006-07 and they decided to focus exclusively on the issue of homelessness and, I guess, more specifically where it affected women, but most definitely on homelessness. So, they invited me to be the chief executive officer this time last year. I came on board to refocus the organisation around homelessness, more specifically on the aim to assist to end chronic homelessness. The Mercy Foundation is funded directly by a number of sources of funding the sisters have. We also do fundraising, from time to time, general fundraising.

I also add in introduction that in 2007, when I was working at the City of Sydney, managing a homelessness unit there, I was awarded a Churchill Fellowship and undertook a study in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom looking at programs for people who are chronically homeless and who are vulnerable. So, I have a specific interest and examination of that area. That meant I went to the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom and looked directly at programs that were assisting with a group of chronically homeless people.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** That would mean you would need to report when you came back?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** I have. Would you like a copy?

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Yes please.

**Ms REYNOLDS:** I brought one for you.

**Document tabled.**

**CHAIR:** Is there anything further or have you finished?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** No, they are my opening remarks.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** I apologise for missing part of your introduction. I am not clear, is the Mercy Foundation a service provider in housing?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** No, it is not a direct service provider. It is a philanthropic organisation that runs a number of grants programs and is also an advocate and does education programs.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** You provide wrap-around services?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** No, we are not a direct service provider. We provide grants and I have introduced some new programs since I started as chief executive officer last year. We have a program called Grants to End Homelessness. I am aware that a grant from the Mercy Foundation will not end homelessness but you can see the aim is to encourage those types of activities and projects that have a clear aim of ending someone's homelessness, most specifically that group that has become chronically homeless and who are stuck there.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Your Common Ground building model, which is based on the New York idea—and when I say Common Ground, if I am a tenant in Common Ground I do not own the land but I own the bricks and mortar, is that correct?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** No, Common Ground is a model of permanent supportive housing. That is really all it is. It is about providing permanent, long-term housing for people who have been stuck in chronic homelessness, and the support services to sustain that. It was established in New York initially and they provide about 2,500 units of housing. They intend to provide about 4,000. It has a social mix. It particularly targets people who have been stuck in homelessness but it also targets key workers and people on low incomes. So,

there is that social mix in the building. It is a safe place for people. It has a concierge in so far as he ensures that people who live in the building are safe and supported. There is now a Common Ground building in Adelaide. One is currently being built in Melbourne and this week the Tasmanian Government announced it would be developing a Common Ground building. That is primarily because it offers permanent, supportive housing to those people who are currently missing out, those people have been stuck in homelessness for some long period.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Are there plans for a Common Ground building in Sydney?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** There most definitely are. The Mercy Foundation has been working closely with the City of Sydney and a number of other partner organisations, including Housing NSW, to try to develop a Common Ground building here in Sydney as an initial start, certainly as a contribution to an increased amount of permanent supportive housing for people who are experiencing chronic homelessness. We have been looking at sites. The City of Sydney did a site audit and we have suggested a number of sites to the Government. We are yet to hear back what might be happening about that, because I understand a number of federal initiatives can assist with funding at the moment like A Place to Call Home, and Some of the Initiatives coming out of the white paper. That is our intention at the moment, to develop that Common Ground Sydney building. I have also had interest from some other people in New South Wales who have been wanting to establish Common Ground elsewhere. It is really important that people understand Common Ground is simply one type of model of permanent, supportive housing. There are other types of models, but it is a really good one for those who need on-site support services and it gives that economy of scale and it also gives that social mix and so it does not encourage what some people might call a ghetto or something like that.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Are we talking about a four-storey walk up or a high-rise?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** We are definitely talking of high-rise. In New York—and those of you have visited New York will know it is on a much larger scale than many other cities in the world—they are quite large buildings. They were dilapidated hotels that were not being used by anyone. Roseanne Haggerty, who founded Common Ground, saw empty buildings and homeless people and put the two together. There are a number of tax incentives they have over there federally that encourage private investment to make that happen and do up those buildings. It is a little different here. We do not want a building of 600 units here in Sydney—it is just that the scale would not fit. But the model itself is a really useful one because key parts of the model will assist those people who have been stuck in homelessness. So, the safety aspect, the on-site support service aspect, the fact that the tenancy management is separated from the support management—just as you and I would not want our landlord checking whether we had taken our medication. That is exactly the same respect with Common Ground tenants and, and that tenancy management and support management is separated.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** You are talking not in 400 but 40 units?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** No. Certainly in Adelaide from memory I think it is around 50 or 60. The one in Melbourne is about 160, 170, and that is currently being built. We would be aiming here to have I think an ideal figure of around 150, but anywhere between 100 and 200.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** In one building?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** Yes. Bearing in mind half of that I guess are people who just require low cost housing and who do not necessarily have a history of homelessness.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** It is the current view that high-density, high-rise housing is the right way to go for support and accommodation, in order to give the economy of scale, so there are some bad examples of high-density, high-rise public housing. What is different about this?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** What is different are those things that occurred, and I think I know which models you are talking about—I just came in from there, I travelled in from Waterloo—what happened was the housing went up but the support services were not there. What we have to make sure happens is that you cannot just provide the housing. Housing is key to any homeless; it is absolutely the most crucial component but you must have the support services and that is what was missing. In fact, other things were missing. If we look at some of the suburbs out west, there was also infrastructure, transport, a whole lot of basic services that were missing.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** You are saying that the problem with the 1950s high-rise model is not the geometry but it was the absence of the support services; that there is nothing inherently wrong with putting low-cost housing stacked up into a high-rise model?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** I think it is a bit of both. I think the scale of some of them were just too big anyway, but certainly I think of buildings where you might have 150 to 200 people, certainly where it is a social mix as well, where you are not talking about a whole lot of people who have some disadvantage or disability altogether; you have got the social mix, you have got people who model going out to work, going out to university, going out to training. It is pretty evidence-based. There have been evaluations in New York around how Common Ground has gone. It has a 1 per cent eviction rate is what I was told, so I think that is pretty darn successful as far as being able to normalise housing.

The other important aspect of it is that it is high-quality housing. It looks like any other housing in the street and you or I would want to live there. That encourages very much social inclusion. One of the key things about a Common Ground building is that it encourages the whole community cohesiveness and there are areas in the building that encourage people to come together rather than perhaps what we might have seen in some of those old-fashioned models where they are just a bunch of boxes put together with not many common areas. But, by the same token, it is not the only model. There are some scatter-site stuff like Pathways to Housing that is equally as effective.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I am interested in exploring Common Ground a bit further. You talked in terms of on-site support services. Could you explain more what those on-site support services are and how they connect with individual clients?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** The model in New York has a concierge so people do not come into the building without people knowing that they are in the building. I guess you already know and, I am not sure how much evidence you have heard or submissions you have read, but you may have already heard that some people who are quite vulnerable and have been stuck in chronic homelessness sometimes have their public tenancies fail because they are so vulnerable and sometimes they get taken over by friends or people they may be involved with and they are quite vulnerable. For that particular group where you have someone checking who is coming in and out of the building, it can be useful and they can feel very safe.

The support services themselves would be around offering a sense of case management to people. That is part of the model, and those services would be whatever might normally be offered to someone with a mental illness. Certainly there would be someone who would be brokering whatever other support services might be required in order to sustain that tenancy, in fact, the same comment is made, "whatever it takes". For some people that may be quite significant and for others it might be very little. I spoke directly with a Street to Home team in Toronto in Canada a couple of years ago getting people straight from the street into their own permanent housing and that is called Housing First, who said to me that someone who looks terribly complex on the street can sometimes, not always, look a hell of a lot less complex when they are living in a unit, because it is so much easier to get your life together and get some stability once you have somewhere stable to live. It is nigh on impossible to try to do that while you are living on the streets.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I do not want to cut across you because you are doing just fine, but in terms of the case manager, who would you envisage in a Common Ground environment providing that? I say that in the context that I get an impression—and this is me—from some of the evidence we have received that there is a lack of coordination of various of the Government-sponsored health services and the like?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** Yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Who does that coordination?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** There would be case managers there on site during business hours who would broker that.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Employed by?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** Common Ground or employed by whatever. In New York what has happened, because they do believe very much in that separation of tenancy and support, they contracted out the support services to an organisation called the Centre for Urban and Community Studies. As they said to me when I was

speaking with them a couple years ago, they said, "Felicity, we employ the best qualified, most experienced people because we are dealing with the most vulnerable and most complex people." It makes a hell of a lot of sense but it is not necessarily what is currently happening. What we would be looking at would be caseworkers who would work with people living in the building to broker whatever services are needed or to directly provide them. Sometimes it is a matter of ensuring that people are linked up with the local community. It is as simple as that. Sometimes it is a matter of ensuring that the mental health services are seeing people incredibly regularly.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** In the South Australian, Victorian and Tasmanian experience, who owns the building?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** From memory, Common Ground Adelaide was established by the South Australian Government and it was established as a separate entity called Common Ground Adelaide. I have not checked beforehand but I am almost sure Common Ground Adelaide do. I will double-check that. In Melbourne it is a partnership between Home Ground, Yarra Community Housing and the Victorian State Government. Yarra Community Housing will look after the building and the tenancy, and Home Ground, which is a big provider of homelessness services in Melbourne, will provide the support services. The Victorian Government did have a scheme, I understand, that offered up 75 per cent of the capital costs of that social housing building for that to happen and Grocon are building the building at cost, which is precisely the same commitment they have made here in Sydney to build the building at cost. We need a site.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** In terms of the New South Wales or Sydney proposal, are you able to outline what sort of structure of ownership, management and control you or the organisation envisages?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** I still think that is somewhat flexible. We would be looking at a commitment from the State Government. Whether or not it retains ownership and there is a 99- or 49-year lease, that is pretty flexible. It is a matter of making sure the building happens. Grocon is happy to do it at cost; they have made that commitment. We have had a number of other pro bono commitments from other organisations and because I know that the Committee is looking at partnerships with business in the corporate sector, I think what it has shown me since I have been involved in trying to make it happen, is that there is a certain amount of willingness on behalf of the private sector to help try to solve this problem. I have been quite pleased to see the number of businesses that have stepped forward to try to assist in dealing with homelessness, specifically chronic homelessness, and trying to get Common Ground happening in New South Wales.

**CHAIR:** Have you come across a situation where, in that mix, you might have the local council wanting to become involved with land in some form a joint venture with the private sector?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** Certainly the Common Ground development that I have been involved with on behalf of the Mercy Foundation is very much in partnership with the City of Sydney. Their commitment has been significant. They have done a lot of work to help try to make it happen. I do not think Common Ground is a great model outside of urban areas. I think it is an urban one. I think we need to think of some other things for rural and regional areas and I think that is where local government could certainly perform a role. I have actually worked in local government quite a few times throughout my career and I do think it has a great role to perform as far as a strategy to ensure affordable and low-cost housing in the local area. It has obviously got a role in regards to the current type of low-cost rental accommodation, such as unlicensed boarding houses. I think their role in actually trying to ensure high-quality, low-cost boarding houses is something that could be explored further. The State Government could also perhaps have a look at some of the tenancy rights.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Has State Rail offered up any land?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** No.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** You can ignore the last question; it was not a serious one. The Government's questions are always serious. With respect to the model you referred to whereby there is a mix of people living in the building. Obviously to establish that in the first instance requires a decision about the range of people, backgrounds and what have you. To maintain that over time so you do not end up with a majority taking over, just through turnover, if you know the answer, can you explain how that is managed over time?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** My understanding is that it is managed insofar as if someone who has had a history of chronic homelessness comes into the building and then ultimately leaves the building further down the track, then that person is replaced with someone with that background as well, and vice versa. You do try to keep the

mix, within reason. Obviously the important thing is to try to get housing to that group that is currently missing out, so there is a level of flexibility but we have still to see in Australia how that will happen because we have got the Adelaide building; the Melbourne building is still a year or so away from opening, Tasmania has only just made the announcement and in Sydney we are still trying to find a site, so we will have to see how that happens in practice, but the intention is to ensure that people with the most need actually get that permanent housing.

One of the mistakes that sometimes some of us make is thinking that somehow there is this never-ending group of people who are chronically homeless. In theory there is not. There have been people who have been stuck 5, 10, 15, 20 years. If we can solve their homelessness and we can continue to put in place programs that are preventative, we should not make the assumption that somehow there is always going to be this bucket of chronically homeless people who need housing. In fact, the United States, through their local plans to end homelessness, have announced this year a 30 per cent reduction in chronic homelessness over the past number of years. I cannot tell you exactly how many years. As you may already know, the British Central Government did this in the early 2000s and they had a significant reduction because they provided the permanent housing and the support that ended people's homelessness and got out of the cycle of going between crisis services, sleeping on the streets and on their friend's couches.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I guess this is an age mix across a range of ages, gender, single, family?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** That would be the intention, yes. Certainly the Melbourne design of the building includes studio units, one-bedders and some family units. I know that the Common Ground building that I visited in New York were primarily studios. They were what you would call starter housing, because one of the reasons that we do have this phenomenon of homelessness is the starter housing that we lost. It was lost in New York; it has been lost in the major capitals cities for a range of reasons, so we need to have some more starter housing.

Even though it is out of a sense of equity that we want to make it medium-term or transitional, if you do not give people a sense of permanency, it is really hard to get stable. If you think, "I have to move on again in six months or whatever", there is some evidence to indicate it is more difficult to get stable, so by saying it is permanent, you can assist somebody to get their act together and there is a natural turnover over time or someone may stay there forever and maybe that is exactly what needs to happen because that individual may need that ongoing support for a very long time.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I take you to the final paragraph on page 3 of your submission. Are you able to elaborate on that paradigm shift? I was not sure whether you were alluding to government policy behind that paradigm shift, or it was that and other factors operating together.

**Ms REYNOLDS:** There has been a specific Federal-led policy to end chronic homelessness. What they have realised is that the Federal Government cannot do that—just as our Federal Government has realised that, that it needs local communities and the States to do that. The paradigm shift is about: instead of endlessly servicing a problem, realising that the solution to ending someone's homelessness is housing. Some people do not need support, they just need the housing, and some people do need ongoing support. If you provide the support with the housing, you end the homelessness. That is where the paradigm shift has occurred.

In fact, it is not made up either. If you ask chronically homeless people what they want, generally you will find that what they would like is a permanent place to live. That has been done over there, and that is what they found was needed. What they have been doing is encouraging local plans to end homelessness. Just as I would not know what to do in Dubbo, I suspect Dubbo has half a clue what needs to happen in Dubbo. They will know the services on the ground; they will know the types of people who are affected by homelessness there. That is where it needs to come from. Again, that is where local government can perform a key role in helping to bring together those plans. They have been highly effective in the United States. But what they have needed is not just the Government doing it and dropping it on the local community; it has been the local community, which includes the businesses as well.

Businesses are also involved in homelessness. Businesses do all sorts of things to address homelessness that do not necessarily help to end it. And by ending homelessness it becomes not a recurrent cost; it becomes a once-off cost and then you have solved the problem, especially if you have prevention strategies in place as well. Does that answer your question?

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** That is very helpful. Obviously there are people who are in social housing. Let us assume that, in the context of the model that is working at least in parts of New York to which you referred, people get in there, they become settled, they get their lives together, they find themselves employment, and perhaps some of them take education. They get themselves on track, so to speak—hopefully a track that will go forward. An argument could be advanced that there comes a point where they are asked to move on, because in a sense they have been able, to use a colloquial expression, to get their act together. It is done in this way. To the extent that they vacate, it provides prima facie an opportunity for someone to take that room or unit, or whatever the case may be. Is that something that is done in terms of these models, where people in some sense are not allowed to call this their own on an indefinite basis but are encouraged to transition out, ultimately, into something, when they get to the point where they would be able to do that?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** I completely understand where you are coming from. We do not have an endless supply of money and houses to drop on people. However, I think what has been shown is that it can sometimes undermine someone's capacity to get stable by indicating this is transitional. People, when they generally get there act together, will, on the whole—I realise that there are some people who may not—but on the whole they will. If it undermines people's capacity to get stable—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** That is the risk?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** Yes. It is a difficult one.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I think you have answered that question.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** With regard to your response to the Hon. Trevor Khan's question about case management and the case service delivery mix, do the privacy laws in this country have an impact upon how that is done?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** Yes. I think privacy laws were established, quite rightly, to ensure our privacy. But I think, unfortunately, that has sometimes meant that some very vulnerable people stay very vulnerable because it is very difficult for services to coordinate and wrap around them—not because anyone wants to invade anyone's privacy, but because we want to make sure that people get appropriate assistance, especially where there may be some concern about their ability to give consent. That is an issue that I know has been taken up by some people in inner Sydney, and a bit of a handbook is being done.

Generally the services are full of quite well-meaning people who are working in the social services sector because they want to assist homeless people. They are kind of averse to breaking the law. They just know there is this privacy legislation but they do not necessarily know the ins and outs of it; they are not lawyers. So they err on the side of caution. I think that can sometimes mean that you do not get as good cooperation and coordination around someone, simply because they are trying to do the right thing.

I know for myself, when I have been working directly with people, I use as a rule of thumb: Would I stand up in court and say, "I decided to tell someone to do it because I felt it was in the person's best interests." But it is a difficult one. I think it is something that goes towards providing good support for people who are vulnerable, complex and chronically homeless.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** In your submission, I think in the background to the Mercy Foundation, you talk about a special interest in single women with children who experience homelessness. If I were to ask you what would be the protocol of a typical woman who would access homelessness services from the Mercy Foundation, what would that typical woman be today?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** As I said before, the Mercy Foundation does not provide any direct services. But my understanding is that clearly a number of women who experience homelessness in Australia are women who have experienced domestic violence and have been in domestic violence situations. With single women it may be exactly the same mixture that brings men to homelessness: mental illness, drug and alcohol issues, traumatic brain injury, or physical or other health disabilities. One of the issues when it comes to women—and I am not talking about women with accompanying children; many of them have children but they are not accompanying them because they have already been taken by the time the woman lands on the street, and they are often a lot less visible than the men. In order to stay safe, they are catching trains late at night, they are doing a range of things such as sleeping on friends' couches et cetera—

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** When you say catching trains late at night, you mean going around and around?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** Going all the way up to the Blue Mountains, or going all the way up the coast and coming back. That is the way some people stay safe. It is very vulnerable for blokes, but it is extra vulnerable for women. I think services for women alone—there is hardly anything. A report done by Catherine Robinson at UTS a couple of years ago indicated there is nothing on the other side of Parramatta for single women without accompanying children.

On the other hand, I would like see a greater emphasis on getting people straight from homelessness into permanent housing because it has been shown to work—and getting those support services to people in that housing. I realise that is not necessarily an easy task, but I think we have seen enough evidence from the United States and Canada that housing first does work. There is an assumption that we have often made here that somehow people need to get better first, and prove that they can manage. But, in fact, it undermines your capacity to get stable if you do not have anywhere stable to be and you do not have a sense of connection with your community. If you are going through a range of crises transitionally, and you are moving through different communities, you do not know what community you are going to end up in. You do not know which one you need to connect with. I guess that flies in the face of social inclusion. Does that answer your question?

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** It does. I am trying to get in my mind a visual of the profile of homelessness in women.

**Ms REYNOLDS:** I think we can all land in homelessness. There is no set rule. But I guess with those who land in chronic homelessness, there are some obvious key features and usually they are multiple disabilities. I would say to you I think the HASI program, which I am sure you have heard of, is fabulous. It has been evaluated as a fabulous permanent, supportive housing program for people with mental illness. However, if you have more than a mental illness—for example, on top of that you have a traumatic brain injury or a neurological deficit, or drug and alcohol issues—you are not necessarily getting into HASI. It is those people who are stuck on the streets. We need some programs in place fairly soon to get those people off the streets. And it does work. We had a forum last Thursday here in Sydney where we had Phillip Mangano, the Executive Director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Plus, we did a video link with Rosanne Haggerty and Sam Tsenberis from New York. Sam Tsenberis has published widely in academic journals on the success of housing first and the success of getting people straight into housing without any requirements. They do not even have to take medication, or stop drinking or whatever. All they need to do is agree to a visit from the assertive outreach service. They have shown significant results. In fact, if the Committee would like copies of a couple of Dr Tsenberis' articles, I am prepared to supply them. I have brought one with me.

**CHAIR:** Yes, that would be very helpful.

**Ms REYNOLDS:** Would you like the information from the forum, plus Dr Tsenberis' articles?

**CHAIR:** That would be very helpful.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** On the last page of your submission, in the last paragraph, you talk about useful roles and positive community connectiveness and cohesion within buildings and local neighbourhoods. Can you talk about some of the elements that make up that desired outcome?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** I had written, in preparation for today—because I thought there was possibly going to be a question: What do you see as the repercussions of key workers' inability to live in or close to the communities in which they serve? Clearly, one of the problems is that you cannot be that connected to your community if you are travelling for four hours every day to another community. I think that sense of fostering social inclusion can happen only if you are there in the community. I guess that once happened when not everyone worked, when sometimes one of the partners would remain at home, and there was a linking in with other members of the community. So we have to think differently; we have to think a little bit about that now. One of the ways they do that in common ground buildings is in the public spaces in them, through the opportunities to interact with each other. I think there are other ways.

I was quite taken with a program I saw in Canada. As you know, when you want to put in place some programs that assist people who are disadvantaged, sometimes people in the community may oppose that. I have

worked in local government, so I am familiar with that. I think they are often called NIMBYs. What they have developed in Canada is YIMBYs—yes in my back yard. Often it is people like ourselves who say, "I don't care." In fact, I would really quite like to have a diverse community. I would really like the opportunity for people who have a range of backgrounds to come and live in my community, but I am just not that interested in going to a meeting and shouting about it.

**Ms REYNOLDS:** The people that really do not care do not care enough to go to a meeting and it is often those that do care that do go to a meeting. They have developed consumer advocates and they have got the big "yes in my backyard"; so there are people who go to those meetings and say, "Yes, we do. We want a diverse community. We want people with disabilities to live in our community. We want our communities to reflect the community". It is not easy to do but I think that is where there can also be some local leadership around that kind of thing. Just a final point in regards to addressing homelessness: it really does need local champions to do that; it has to come locally—obviously, with Federal and State resources and pushing, but it has to come locally.

**CHAIR:** Local champions—that is a very important issue. You may be able to expand on that concept for us—not today but we may ask you on notice with the number of questions that we have got—because I think there needs to be some work done in that area; it is very underdeveloped and a key issue for going forward in many areas, this being one.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Just a very quick question that follows on. You were talking about public spaces within the building. Can you just give us a couple of examples of what the public spaces are used for?

**Ms REYNOLDS:** Maybe a café. I know some of the buildings down in New York have gardens on top of them, like a brick garden, that kind of relaxed space or active space—gyms, et cetera.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for being with us. It is quite obvious that your knowledge is quite extensive in this area and very impressive.

**(The witness withdrew)**

**SUE CRIPPS**, Chief Executive Officer, Homelessness NSW, P. O. Box 768, Strawberry Hills, sworn and examined:

**CHAIR:** Would you like to make some opening remarks before we go to questions?

**Ms CRIPPS:** I am here today representing adult homeless services. Thank you very much for the opportunity to come and speak before you. A key message that I would like to communicate on behalf of members is how important the whole issue around affordable housing is for people who are homeless or those who are at risk of homelessness. Several key things are happening at the moment. We have the Federal Government's White Paper called The Road Home, which is obviously looking at how we start to implement that within New South Wales, and a key component of any strategy that we can do in New South Wales has to have access to affordable housing to be able to resolve people's homelessness or prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. It is a very timely committee to come to and speak before.

Building on that, Homelessness NSW is one of several organisations that is working very closely with the New South Wales Government, and in particular Minister Borger, and the Department of Housing in terms of looking at how we build a homelessness strategy, again within the New South Wales framework, and obviously affordable housing has to be a key component of that.

**CHAIR:** What is the role of Homelessness NSW?

**Ms CRIPPS:** Homelessness NSW has as its mission a goal to end homelessness for all people in New South Wales, which is a very bold and brave aspiration really, and we do that in a variety of ways. We obviously are a member-based organisation, so we represent homeless services, many of whom are funded within government funding programs through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, the Department of Community Services. So we represent actual services. We also work and represent the views of homeless people and really generally look at what needs to happen, again within New South Wales, to frame a better response for people.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** There are a couple of interesting points in your submission that I just wanted to tease out a bit further. On page two you say, "When we recognise that homelessness is about more than houselessness". What do you mean by that statement?

**Ms CRIPPS:** What I mean by that statement is that you can get a homeless person a house and I can guarantee that in many instances within a couple of months that person will be homeless again. We need to understand that resolving homelessness is not about just giving somebody a house; it is actually about looking at the supports and services they need and about how people connect to community. One of the most important things around resolving homelessness or preventing people becoming homeless is that connection to community. If people are engaged and have people that they connect with and have activities they do that embeds them within that community, it is likely that the risk reduces of them becoming homeless or losing the house once they are housed. We know that internationally but we also know that from community development regeneration work that Housing NSW has done.

So it is really important that across New South Wales we understand that you do not resolve homelessness by giving somebody a house. You have to give them a house but then there is a whole suite of supports, products, activities that need to wrap around that person in that community to sustain and endure what happens.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** As part of that process, which we teased out a bit earlier today with one of the witnesses, to deliver that suite of programs that you are talking about, do the privacy laws in this country impact on how that can be done?

**Ms CRIPPS:** That is an interesting point. I think they do on a couple of levels. When we look at the Federal privacy legislation and the impact that that has on tenancy databases, and I am sure you would have heard about this over the last two days, there are some obvious issues there that need to be addressed. Many people who come through the adult home services system are known and identified on these tenancy databases, and it could be for things like, for example, women and children escaping domestic violence that the women have been no part of but the tenancy was in their name and so whatever was the issue was attributed to them; it

could be something as trivial as not mowing lawns. There are all sorts of things that people get tagged with that quite often people do not know that they are actually on a tenancy database.

So there are some real issues around that, around the privacy legislation at the Federal arena and how we start to look at managing that to actually perhaps free up some of the blocks that exist for people currently in terms of accessing. At that State level, in a previous life I was a psychiatric nurse by training and I shudder when I think of the times I used to say this, but using privacy legislation as a tool to not necessarily share patient case planning stories as part of a broader care response, if you like, I believe there is nothing within privacy legislation that stops you, with the client's consent, sharing history and knowledge. But there is a culture and a practice that is inherent in the way health services particularly—that is what I am talking about because that is what I know—are delivered that can cause some real stumbling blocks when you are trying to work with people with quite complex issues and pull together a package of support that requires really clear communication in the sharing of knowledge to help resolve somebody's homelessness or sustain them in their housing. So, yes, I think there are some significant issues around that. I do not know what the answers are but there are definitely some key problems.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** I was going to ask you what the answers are.

**Ms CRIPPS:** We have in New South Wales the accord, for example, the Housing Homeless Services Accord, and where that has been operating my sense is—and I am on some steering committees but I have not yet seen the actual evaluation report—that it has actually been working quite successfully. I think where you have a group of people who are working closely together with a common goal, and the accord provides them with a framework and some communication tools and some paperwork around client consent and confidentiality and involving the client or the consumer and getting their sign off on what you can and cannot talk about, I think it has been working quite well, from what I have been talking to people and hearing. So I think here in New South Wales we have some good products, good systems, that could be built on quite successfully.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Just an important thing we have picked up today, if you go to page 3 of your submission you talk about the Cumnock project. Can you explain a bit more than you have in your submission how the Cumnock project has the capacity to maybe overcome some homelessness issues?

**Ms CRIPPS:** When you are thinking homelessness in regard to the Cumnock project do not think about the people that you would see around here on the streets, think about people who are perhaps at risk of homelessness—they are perhaps working families, people who are at what I would perhaps call the softer end of homelessness or at risk of homelessness, and they are people who have trades: chippies, builders, those sorts of people. It is quite interesting, I found out about the Cumnock project over a dinner party conversation. Some of the best conversations and some of your best knowledge come just through word of mouth.

Basically how the Cumnock project came about was that one of the farmers' wives living in Cumnock, which is a small town in central west, near Orange, was very concerned that her children were about to not be able to go to the Cumnock school because they were going to be losing their teacher because the number of children was dropping, which obviously is a real issue in country New South Wales, and she wanted to do something about this. She was also very conscious that there were lots of farmhouses that, because of the rural downturn, were not being used at all, or workers cottages that were not being used on land. So she got a group of people together—a real estate agent and a local solicitor, so there was a proper legal process and there was a proper tenancy thought about the tenancy rules and what have you—and got a bit of a community working party going together and it has basically been incredibly successful in attracting into Cumnock—I think they have already filled four farm properties and are looking at a few more—people who were coming in with the capacity to renovate the properties, the actual houses, and to add to community.

They had to have a couple of rules: they had to have children at school age and they had to bring a skill. So these are definitely people more at the risk of homelessness end than the people who you would see living on the streets and what have you. But when we were talking to them the people who were applying—they were swamped with applications—four of them were living in caravan parks, so they are technically homeless in that sort of tertiary homelessness: they did not have secure accommodation over their head, and when we asked her what she knew about them, basically they have become homeless because of rental unaffordability. Somebody had got an investment property, they could no longer afford to rent it, they had to sell it, the person got evicted and they could not find any other affordable housing.

I see that as an opportunity to explore further how that could perhaps be replicated elsewhere. I remember it must be 12, 18 months ago I was doing a bit of media work and I had a phone call from down around the Murrumbidgee area.

It was a guy from the Farmers Federation, I cannot remember his name, I am really sorry. He phoned me because he was coming to me with exactly this issue. He said, "You are talking about homelessness. In our region there are these vacant farm houses and they have all got water rights"—not that I understand much about water rights. He said, "There is just something waiting to happen".

From my perspective I think this is something quite exciting for people who are at risk of homelessness or newly homeless who have a real load of skill and capacity, so they are not going to need a lot of support. I think rural communities could actually really build on this model in Cumnock. When we were doing a little bit of literature research we found they are also running a similar approach in one of the country communities in Tasmania. I think it is something that is waiting to take off really, with a little bit of support from government through the Homelessness Action Plan that we are building at the moment. It would be a small amount of seeding grant, I would think, to get communities up and running with such an approach.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** You spoke about the Cumnock project. What role do caravan parks and tenants play in the low rental market in New South Wales?

**Ms CRIPPS:** This is a fraught issue really, a bit of a vexed issue. Caravan parks have for many years played a vital role in providing more affordable accommodation for people either short-term and some people long-term. I will start again. There are two communities that we need to think about. There are people who choose to retire to caravan parks and they have their own fixed environment and that is their house, and lovely, good on them, then there are people who through being homeless end up being placed in caravan parks or seeking caravan parks as a short-term or temporary measure whilst their issues are sorted through and alternate accommodation is sourced. There are several issues. This can never be long-term permanent housing for this group of people. They are caravans, they are not mobile homes first off. Secondly, many of those caravan parks are particularly not actually in just urban areas, I know on the central coast as well, and down in Nowra—

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** That is an urban area.

**Ms CRIPPS:** Yes, it is an urban area. Many homeless people particularly women and children, but also men, will choose to sleep in their car rather than sleep in the caravan park because they feel so vulnerable in caravan parks. I hear stories. About four months ago we were consulting around the State on the white paper and what this might mean. This was down towards Nowra and people talked about how they had their clients tell them that the drug dealer used to come around and door knock every night to see what people wanted in terms of take away. So caravan parks are not safe places so we need to be very clear. It is not holiday caravan parks that we are talking about, these are caravan parks that are quite dangerous for many people and are absolutely not a long-term solution.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** On page five of your submission the Getsemy community is referred to. What is it?

**Ms CRIPPS:** The Getsemy community is a boarding house style community. It is a really great place. One of the things I think is waiting to be developed in New South Wales—and Getsemy is one of them really and is a really good project. Felicity Reynolds who was here earlier is on its board of management. It is a boarding house style accommodation so basically it is a congregate care model of accommodation so lots of beds all in the one building with a support service that is there. But, of course, people have their tenancy rights. You would be aware that in New South Wales we do not have tenancy legislation for boarders and lodgers so somebody in a boarding house as we speak today could actually be evicted and given five minutes notice and be put out on the street.

Obviously I would never advocate development of a boarding house model of accommodation without proper tenancy protection. We definitely believe at Homelessness NSW that there is a community that would welcome boarding house style accommodation—it tends to be single older men or single older women, who want their own space, do not want a large house but want to have some shared living spaces. To be honest, what is needed is a support service that actually manages that property; is there working with the residents of that property which is what Getsemy is about. But you would want people to have proper tenancy protection so that they could not be just evicted with five minutes notice. There is nothing to stop people in those services being

put on a proper tenancy agreement, which is what Getsemyity does. You do not have to have somebody in that boarding house style of congregate care and not put them on a proper agreement but people choose not to.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I do not want to dismiss the legal issues that you have raised. Will you describe the physical nature of the accommodation? What is included in the individual unit, if I can describe it that way, and what is shared or common property?

**Ms CRIPPS:** Getsemyity is like bed sits. It is a largish room, which is their bed-sitting area, with a little kitchenette and their own little en suite bathroom, shower. Then there are some shared facilities of sitting room. So some shared sitting rooms and I do believe at Getsemyity they have a larger kitchen where they can, should they choose, cook a communal meal. I think it is a good model.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** How was it funded?

**Ms CRIPPS:** No, I am sorry I do not. Actually I do, I think it is through either the Mercy Foundation or one of the religious institutions and I believe it receives no government funding.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** It is the Mary MacKillop Foundation that owns it—the founder of St Josephs nuns.

**Ms CRIPPS:** Yes, it is Catholic.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Earlier you referred to the State Government preparing a Homelessness Strategy. I do not seek to sound critical but why does it take until 2009 to develop a Homelessness Strategy?

**Ms CRIPPS:** My point exactly. We at Homelessness NSW, with a group of peak colleagues, have been lobbying for many years—in fact, I have actually met several members of this committee as we have been lobbying—to actually have a Homelessness Strategy that is a really broad strategy that involves government and non-government working together. The Government has the Partnership Against Homelessness which is government agencies working together on a place management sort of project approach. Our position has been for a long time that a strategy is required. So we are very heartened that we are at this point now where we will be signing off on a strategy that has a strong capacity to engage with the broader community because government by itself cannot deliver what needs to be delivered to actually address the issue of homelessness across New South Wales. It needs to be a very broad coalition.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I suggest from my perspective what has come out of the past two days of hearing is that even within government there seems to be a difficulty in coordinating the provision of services?

**Ms CRIPPS:** I think I would have to agree with that. One of the real challenges for all of us, government and non-government, is how we move from what, if I have my business head on, I call that silo mentality of how we deliver services. So talking to Health but struggling to talk across—it goes to your comment around privacy and all those communication processes. It is one of the biggest challenges that we have in how we actually work across processes and systems rather than thinking about what actually we can do and what we are responsible for. Having that broader view is a challenge.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** In terms of the Homelessness Strategy do you have any suggestions as to how you overcome those intra-governmental blocks as well as the outside communication lines?

**Ms CRIPPS:** Our position and that of the State Government and Federal Government quite clearly on this is that we believe there needs to be a very strong relationship between government and non-government in terms of the governance mechanisms for the strategy so that there is space for free flowing discussion and debate and review of where we are going and what we are doing. One of the things that I am doing that is going to occur within the New South Wales plan is to pick up on what the Federal Government identified in terms of regional planning. One of the things that over my years I have become very conscious of is that we can be incredibly urban centric when we actually develop these State plans.

I am a reformed character. These last couple of years travelling around New South Wales talking to services and the broader communities around the issue of homelessness, very clearly what you can develop and deliver in Sydney, even in the Greater Metropolitan Sydney, you cannot deliver in Cooma or Tamworth: you

just cannot because not only are access to resources so different but the concept of travel and distance is just totally different to anything that you are going to have to deal with when you are in the city.

I am very hopeful that one of the ways that we might start to tackle some of that siloing, if you like, is to actually have a strong regional planning process that is government and non-government working together with a mechanism for that information to flow into the central planning process because I think that is going to be quite critical.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I hear what you say with regards to talking what seems to be between departments and organisations. I go back to the question of the Hon. Michael Veitch. If a caseworker cannot find out that a client is not taking their medications are we actually achieving much if we have got two heads of departments talking to each other when the person completely falls off the wagon and disappears out onto the streets again? I suppose I am asking about the micro as opposed to the macro level.

**Ms CRIPPS:** Except I am hopeful that if you have at that high level people talking together when the system falls apart on the ground there will be a mechanism to do the policy change that needs to happen to stop that from happening again. I think if there is a strong planning process that is happening in your patch, in your region, there is going to be more accountability, government and non-government, to actually deliver what is in the plan because you have built it, so your engagement and connection with it is going to be stronger as a community. So it is not something that you can just shaft home to "This happened in head office at Housing". It is something that you have more ownership of. When you look at a lot of the great change work that happens around the world, change comes from the bottom up. It is supported top down but to actually create change you need people on the ground with a passion to actually drive that change in their local area and so they need to be supported to do that.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** In your submission you talk about boarding houses and a concept of boarding houses perhaps with those regulatory safeguards that do not exist at the moment. Have you put that to the Government?

**Ms CRIPPS:** Yes.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Over a period of time?

**Ms CRIPPS:** We have talked about it on occasion. It is something that you stop talking about for a while. It is one of those things that actually you seek your moment really. I think with the interest at the moment in homelessness planning and affordable housing there is another moment so we are starting to talk up again more strongly around some of the models that we think need to be in place.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** There is always a danger that people will say that if we start to legislate heavily and put in all those safeguards there will be a whole lot of closures. That might be stock that you might want to close and redevelop because it is not ideal anyway. We judge what you say about boarding houses by a lot of crappy stock that exists where people are not getting services. What you are talking about is something completely different.

**Ms CRIPPS:** Absolutely. It is quality. I think it is one of those things that we are just going to have to grapple with. Of course you are going to think about refashioning and making changes. My point would be that at the moment boarding houses operate as private-for-profit houses. I am not talking about private-for-profit. I am talking about purpose-built or purpose-renovated resources with a not-for-profit provider providing the support. You are probably looking at rental income that is obviously within the realms of public housing and affordable housing income with perhaps a little extra for support services, but you are not looking at making a profit because this is a not-for-profit initiative. I think that is perhaps the point of grapple.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** I was very excited by what you said because we have not really done justice to that style of living and asked people what they want, particularly single men and women.

**Ms CRIPPS:** Again, from years of working in the sector and looking at what is working for older people like me, over 45—

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Is it over 45 now? I thought it was over 55. It is getting younger!

**Ms CRIPPS:** You do not want to be part of a shared house or part of a group living situation. You want your own place but you do not necessarily want or need a huge house.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Are you satisfied that in the rollout of the stimulus package, the \$6.4 billion for public housing, enough consideration has been given to the non-government sector's delivery of that, not just in delivering support services at the end but in working with the non-government sector and letting it develop some of those properties?

**Ms CRIPPS:** Because we are not property managers like the Federation of Housing Associations and community housing providers I cannot give you a strong answer to that. Time is of the essence with all of this and the pace has been phenomenal. I have been at Government tables with colleagues from the community housing sector being briefed and consulted. I cannot provide fair comment on development versus management-type issues. I believe from talking to colleagues that they have some issues.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Can you provide some strong messages for this Committee in going forth with our recommendations? Now is not the time to be shy!

**Ms CRIPPS:** In my lifetime this is the one opportunity we have to do something meaningful about homelessness, and I am not just talking about people who are homeless but about homelessness prevention. We have to be strong and bold. I really want us to grapple with it and get some good regional mechanisms so that we have meaningful engagement with communities and support those communities that are resourceful and strong as a result of working with these people for many years to build what they need. As well we need to spend this stimulus package wisely and build resources that will make a real difference. I would like to see some very different models rolled out, not just the two-bed flats, and use this opportunity to be quite creative.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Using some of the successful models from overseas and adapting them to our circumstances?

**Ms CRIPPS:** Absolutely, but we really need to think about it. The key to all the advocacy around homelessness at the moment is the common ground supported housing model. It is a great model but my concern is that it is an urban model. It works because in New York it is surrounded by people who have perhaps a higher level of tolerance for chaos and who also have access to a whole suite of services at the drop of a hat, which are not available when you get out of metropolitan Sydney. We need to look critically at international models, but then we need to step back and ask what it means for New South Wales or Australia. You cannot just pick something up and put it down here.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** And local government involvement?

**Ms CRIPPS:** That is vital. Homelessness NSW is starting to work—obviously Sydney City Council has a strong history of working with homelessness—with Blacktown City Council and we are about to do some work with Parramatta council on homelessness thinking and strategy, which is great. As part of consulting on the green paper and the white paper we have had meetings and talked to some of the workers at Armidale City Council and at Young. We are keen to look at how local councils are engaged more fully in homelessness prevention, planning and response because they have a key role to play. They know the communities.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** And some of them seemed very keen to be involved.

**Ms CRIPPS:** That is right.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Thanks for your submission and your highly enthusiastic evidence. I want to talk about Cumnock for a moment. One fear I have that has arisen both from my experience and from talking to people is that when you put people who generally do not have a job into a rural area they can become isolated from services and jobs. I do not know Cumnock personally but if it is like a million other small rural villages around New South Wales it will not have access to a nearby high school or to reasonable shopping and jobs. Are you concerned with projects like Cumnock where you are taking people out of the city and putting them into those rural areas that you are going to create another set of social problems?

**Ms CRIPPS:** You would if you did not think about that. The Cumnock project is really interesting because the people who have come back are perhaps those who were born in country areas, moved to the city and have now decided they want to go back. They may be people who have had experience of working or living

in the regional environment for periods of time. I would die living in the country. I could not do it because I am a very city girl. I love being in the country but I just could not live there.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** A nice place to visit but you would not want to live there!

**Ms CRIPPS:** That is right, but I am clear, I know that. I think it is really important that people are clear about understanding that. One of the things that the Cumnock project did, from my conversations with the woman who set it up—I am sorry I cannot remember her name—was that it raised just that question: how are we going to make that transition? I forgot to say that one of the key components was that Anglicare had an identified worker there—pastoral support is the wrong word, but that sort of support mechanism—to help people make those transitions if they came up with any questions or concerns. Rural communities that have a school and have access to shops—yes, you would have to look and pick where you were going to go, but it is a model that could work. It seems to be working.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Have the people who have transmigrated to Cumnock ended up with access to employment?

**Ms CRIPPS:** My understanding is the people have skills that they brought with them, such as electricians and plumbers. They have started by renovating the properties they have moved into but they are building and connecting through the community and getting work. There are a couple of key things: you have to have a skill that is useful in the country and there have to be children so that the school can be kept open.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Could I talk about boarding houses for a minute? I preface my question by saying that I live in Waverley where we had a progressive council that focused very strongly on protecting boarding houses but failed dismally at doing so. I can think of only one boarding house that was saved from development in the 10 years that I was actively involved with Waverley council. What hope is there for privately owned boarding houses? Do you think there is no hope at all? Do we need to rethink the whole business of boarding houses and think of them as being either public or community sector and give up on trying to protect private boarding houses? Should we have another shot at securing the future for privately owned boarding houses?

**Ms CRIPPS:** I have to say that from my years of working with very vulnerable people my experience with private-for-profit boarding houses is not positive. I see very vulnerable people becoming very disadvantaged and being treated quite poorly. I think Government has a key role through the not-for-profit sector in providing quality services through boarding houses because I struggle with the lack of quality and rights for people in private-for-profit boarding houses. It is from my professional experience. That is not to say there are not some that are very good.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** I think you are saying it is a battle that is not worth waging.

**Ms CRIPPS:** I do not think it is.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Okay. That is good to hear. The last question I want to ask you relates to the difference between crisis accommodation and crisis services for homeless people, and the longer-term solutions. We have heard a lot of very engaging evidence over the last two days about helping people to make the transition from a homeless lifestyle to a housed and homed lifestyle. We have not heard as much about crisis accommodation or about people suddenly becoming homeless. Is there a conflict between providing those two services? Is there a continuum? How does your organisation see the connection between those services?

**Ms CRIPPS:** I think it is more of a continuum. Even in a new world where we have really got access to affordable housing and all the support services that are needed so people get diverted very quickly into housing with whatever supports they need, we are always going to need a crisis service that will be able to be responsive and available so that people are not on the streets at all. I think we have to be realistic about that. Obviously you and I would want people's time in crisis to be minimal and we would want them to have access to a whole suite of services to help sustain housing and make it long-term and permanent, but the reality is we are always going to need a crisis service.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** So how is New South Wales doing in the business of getting people who are in crisis accommodation transitioned to a longer-term solution? Are we doing well in that area or are there things we should be doing?

**Ms CRIPPS:** Are we doing well? We are doing not too badly. The reality is that the way the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program has been built and structured it has had a strong emphasis on crisis and transitional housing. That is where your resources and support services are. It is really hard for services with no additional resources to expand into longer-term support. Many people who end up getting housed are going to need support for a long time, if not forever, at varying levels to help them sustain their tenancy and connect with the community. We are doing not badly, but we could do much better, and I think that is one of the exciting things around this homelessness planning process: We can build a framework that we can start to move towards.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** What do we need to do? Where are the gaps in transition from crisis accommodation to ongoing solutions?

**Ms CRIPPS:** Obviously to date it has been access to affordable housing, permanent affordable housing.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** It is just the number of units of permanent affordable housing?

**Ms CRIPPS:** Yes, that is right. But it has also been around how you put support services on the ground. It is important that people understand that very few of the homeless services currently have the capacity to provide that longer-term ongoing casework support. Many people who have longer-term, real issues around how they resolve their homelessness and the support services that they are going to need will need support for longer than three months or six months—it could be a couple of years or it could be a bit longer—to really help them connect and engage. I think that is one of our stumbling blocks at the moment. We just do not have the resources targeted there.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for attending.

**Ms CRIPPS:** It is a pleasure.

**CHAIR:** We have run out of time. We have a number of questions on notice that we wish to send to you, if that is okay.

**Ms CRIPPS:** Absolutely.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for making yourself available today.

**Ms CRIPPS:** Thank you for the opportunity.

**(The witness withdrew)**

**LOUISE VOIGT**, Chief Executive Officer, Barnardos, 60/69 Bay Street, Ultimo, 2007, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** Would you like to make some opening remarks to the Committee before we commence questions?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes, I would. Barnardos Australia, for those of you who do not know, is a charity that is particularly concerned with children and young people. Unlike many other charities, we are not involved, for example, with single homeless people who are older. Our particular concern about homelessness relates to its effect on children. In many of the discussions about homelessness, whilst much is said about the tragedy of families, little is acknowledged about the close association of the committal of care of children into State care with homelessness.

Homelessness is the forerunner for many children of losing their entire family. I think it is both a condition of the families that they have poor resources and an inability to maintain secure housing, through poverty, through mental ill-health and sometimes through drug and alcohol, but the homelessness itself compounds the problem. For those children, the experience that they usually have is of constant moves—as the parent tries to find somewhere to stay and which often ends up with the children being removed—and that is the forerunner to a life in care.

That is really where Barnardos starts from in the whole issue of homelessness and housing. It is a critical matter for families and for the capacity to rear children effectively. Barnardos has both crisis housing, because we have motel-style units generally in some of our children's family centres where we can support families and where we attempt to transition those families in permanent housing units, and we also have some medium or longer-stay housing. Of course, as I stated in our submission, we are involved with community housing and often with long-term support programs of community housing.

The families who become known to us, as I heard the previous person say, are not minor problems. They are very often severe and entrenched difficulties which will require sustained support. It is that nexus between support and housing that is important. In the State of New South Wales, it is simply finding housing. It is getting more and more expensive and more and more difficult for people to find housing, especially if you have children. If you have little children and you go to an estate agent, it is darn hard to find anywhere to stay. People get more and more desperate.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Thank you for attending. I will ask you some questions in regard to your submission. On page one of your submission in the paragraph beneath point two and about halfway down the page, you nominate the figures of 8,000 families and young people accessing Barnardo's services in that financial year and it indicates that 716 of those had family housing problems. I am just wondering if that can be converted to a percentage. Is that percentage something that has remained about the same, or has it been increasing or decreasing over time?

**Mrs VOIGT:** What is not included in those percentages are the children that we have in care because we run quite considerable programs of foster care. Those are not included because those children, in essence, when they are in foster care are not homeless. Their predominant problem is not homelessness. Otherwise, for one of the more core presenting problems of family, yes that would be usual when they first approach us because we work directly with families trying to prevent children from coming into care and from general family problems as well as foster care. We have a quite significant foster care program.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** With respect to family centres themselves, in the first paragraph you detail that there is one you have operating in New South Wales.

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Can you give us an overview of what the typical family centre is like as a building and structure sort of picture?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes. It tends to be located in a low-income neighbourhood. It provides things like child care, family day care, and maybe a disability program—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** In the same building, is it?

**Mrs VOIGT:** It is in one building—including our family support programs, always a crisis accommodation service, child sexual assault programs, domestic violence programs, and a crisis foster care program. But there might be additional needs because of the particular surroundings of that particular children's family centre because we tend to respond to configurations of non-government service providers around that. We fit in among that configuration because, as you would be aware, non-government service providers are a sort of a network out there in the community.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** We heard evidence from witnesses today affirming this position. In terms of the model itself when it was set up, the provision of services on-site to provide direct assistance—in other words, being immediately available—is important to the model. Is that right?

**Mrs VOIGT:** It is absolutely critical. There are very few agencies that have developed children's family services to the level that we have. We have been at it for 25 years with a one-stop shop. If you have problems with kids in your community or a young person, you will tend to come in to see us. For instance, we know quite well the mental health services and we may have legal assistance that comes once a week, or something like this. There is a whole range of things that happen. One of the biggest uses, I think, is the fact that we always run an intake service so that whoever presents at a children's family centre can get immediate assessment. We also might be providing things like material aid, a scheme for electricity subsidy and things like this that would be provided there. It often provides a soft entry point for people who have bigger problems.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** With respect to the centres themselves, presumably you have a centre manager, a person who is responsible?

**Mrs VOIGT:** We have a senior person, yes, who is responsible. One of our senior managers is responsible.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** They are employees of Barnardos?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes, indeed. They are all employees of Barnardos.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Is that right?

**Mrs VOIGT:** All the programs that are in the children's family centre, and on occasion other service providers, will also utilise Barnardo's premises.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** They are invited in, obviously.

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes. But by far the majority of services are delivered from the children's family centre and outreach from a children's family centre. For example, Auburn has 10 or 12 community houses which are funded through the housing department and where we have some families living. There are some outreach services as well as services inside, and of course we are working out there in the community with programs like foster care and other things.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** My final question is a rather specific one. In terms of running a family centre where you are providing for the needs of specifically women and children, is the security issue quite important?

**Mrs VOIGT:** On occasion it is. However, we try not only to work with women and children but also with numbers of males in the family. We might be working with adolescent boys. We sometimes get problems with security that come from outside. For example, drug dealers are quite well attracted where we are running crisis housing. It might be a problem for a while. Then we will engage the cooperation of local police. We might even have security guards for a time or something like that. But in the main and generally this is episodic rather than a continuous thing. We might have a really difficult domestic violence problem. Of course, in general we do not tell people that this is crisis domestic violence housing, but on the other hand it is found out.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Thank you for your submission. I want to ask a few questions around your mention in your submission of people who are not eligible for community housing. Could you talk

about some of the people who are not eligible for community housing and who really do need some sort of community housing?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes. Most of the community housing that we are engaged with is where we provide a support system, and of course there is a limit to that. How many clients can you support? For example, in a service we run in Redfern-Waterloo, we have begun to get a bit of a reputation that we can provide housing. It is amazing how quickly this goes round in the community. People are quite desperate. It may be that they are people whom we do not know well, but we are aware that, for example, they have several children and are perhaps sleeping in overcrowded accommodation where they have no housing security. But we cannot take them onto our caseload. They would not be eligible for the sort of accommodation through community housing that we could support. It is just timing, it is caseload, it is numbers. Housing is needed at every single level.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** What about people who come from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds? Is the issue specific to that population?

**Mrs VOIGT:** I think there are issues about access to all services for people. For example, refugees—one of our major children's family centres is in Auburn and, as you would see, we get to know quite a number of refugees, some of whom have full Australian rights and some of whom do not, and many of whom have very serious difficulties. I can think of a family of five, we ended up putting them in a motel, because they were Sudanese and nobody would give them accommodation. We just could not get it and we ended up putting them in a motel.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** You talk about the mix of services you operate in the family centres and other ways. Do the current privacy laws in this country create problems?

**Mrs VOIGT:** No, because you ask your clients if you can talk to other people on their behalf. It is really very simple. It is about relationships. I am sorry to answer in rather a rude way but I get quite upset about the level of people talking about privacy as if it is something you do to people rather than with people. In our experience, and we work with some extraordinarily difficult people whose children have been permanently removed from them by the courts, in the main if you treat them with good relationships and ask for cooperation and act in a respectful manner, you get it. Of course, there are occasions, and the children's Act covers those, but in terms of the general issues about privacy—and there is a lot of discussion now about referral centres—most times just ask your client.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Can I take you to page 2, paragraph labelled No. 1, where you talk about the situation where families who may lose their children in child protection matters and then you go on to describe how they would then lose their house if they no longer had children, and then the next unfolding part of the disaster is that they cannot get their children restored because they do not have appropriate accommodation.

**Mrs VOIGT:** That is not an unfamiliar story.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** You would say it is a Catch-22 situation? Would you say that is a regular occurrence?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Not regular, but it does occur, and it is part and parcel of this whole problem of grossly insufficient housing in every single area. For example, there is no single-bedroom accommodation easily available, so if you move from supported accommodation you could go to the open market. That is not there. Housing is a problem right the way through. For many of our clients, their capacity to resolve their problems and get tenancies—usually they have been appalling payers, and so on, so people do not want to give them tenancies. So, they have ongoing problems even if they did not have children, and it is compounded by them having children. Certainly, it is not unfamiliar. We have heard many times of this occurring. Generally, if it is known to us we will attempt to resolve it.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** How do you resolve it?

**Mrs VOIGT:** We resolve it by looking to our own crisis accommodation, for example, because we have united families into that crisis accommodation, because that is the preferred situation for the Department of Community Services, of course, because there is regular monitoring.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** So, you reunite them into crisis accommodation and then transition them from crisis accommodation into ongoing accommodation?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** It is the crises accommodation that gives you the opportunity of breaking the vicious cycle?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Are you aware of other organisations that resolve the matter in a similar fashion?

**Mrs VOIGT:** I am aware that some organisations that have crisis housing have this occur. The difference is we are not primarily an adult organisation; we are primarily a children's organisation, so our focus will be towards that. It is not a secondary issue for us, it is a primary issue.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** At the bottom of page 3 of your submission you talk about the foyer model, and your definition of the foyer model is approximately 80 families in high-rise accommodation supported by services located there. You believe the problem with the foyer model is that it tends to concentrate families experiencing similar problems together?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes, absolutely.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** So, in some senses you are quite critical of the foyer model?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Certainly I am aware that writers do write that this works. I have been 30 years in this game, and back in Britain before I left we had exactly these situations. Certainly from then and from experience I have had here in New South Wales, including, for example, down in Canberra, where they housed adolescents with serious problems together—that came from the homelessness, they put them all together—the same thing occurred. You do not find improvements in social behaviour; you find deterioration and increasing problems.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** The counter argument is that by putting people with similar problems in the same place you can provide high-quality services because you have a concentration of that particular need—

**Mrs VOIGT:** I know the argument. I just think you have to put increasing amounts of service in, because you have depressed the social behaviours of the client population. Social behaviours of the client population are very interesting because if you look at some of the housing in the outer west, where they have taken all the single mums and put them all in the same street, you will find far less social capacity than you will were it is a much more mixed group. People are not individuals; they activate one another. For example, if children in the street are taken regularly to school, other mothers see it and they tend to take the children to school.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** So, you have both positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Your argument therefore would be that the foyer model in its purest form represents a false economy of scale?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** The reinforcement of negative behaviours overwhelms the benefits?

**Mrs VOIGT:** You have to put more service in.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** So you do not actually gain anything?

**Mrs VOIGT:** That is right.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Can I take you to page 4 of your submission. You talk about the formal tendering process in respect of the Cranebrook Estate and also on the fringe of Wollongong, where, despite a successful service provision, the formal tendering process resulted in the de-funding of a decade-long program.

**Mrs VOIGT:** That is correct.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** This is a significant issue because obviously we are moving increasingly to competitive tendering for the provision of services.

**Mrs VOIGT:** Absolutely.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** What seems to emerge from page 4 of your submission is that it looks like the formal tendering process was a least-cost outcome or a greatest number of units of provision outcome, whereas there were other issues, and you talk about the consumer participation and evidence of results needing to be contained in the process.

**Mrs VOIGT:** Absolutely.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Can you expand on that? It is a very important issue so if you can expand on that for the Committee that would be useful?

**Mrs VOIGT:** One of the difficulties—and I think they found it also in the Department of Community Services—when utilising the Government's formal tendering process is that it is very restrictive in how it is designed and how it is graded, rather than a more outcome-focused and departmental experienced look at what is occurring. For example, that program was funded for 10 years and not only did all the Ministers visit it during that time, it was used by the Department of Housing to bring overseas visitors to commend. A video was made of it, a DVD was made of it, as being excellent of its type. However, when it was graded—I must say also that we were not up to snuff that this was a formal tender, we thought it was more like a grant process of outcomes, and there are differences in those two things—in the formal tender process you are much more likely to get success by people who are good at writing tender documentation. That does not mean they are necessarily going to be as effective in running good service delivery. This is something the Department of Community Services talks about and it has amended some of its processes to allow for it. We are talking about human relationships here. We are talking about, in that case, long-term relationships with a community that had been established and, for example, vandalism had declined in that area.

I am not beefing particularly about that; it was a good learning experience for us to keep our eyes on the ball a bit more, but I think it is a good thing to note, that when you are putting tenders out it is not the same as it is for washing the windows or building a bridge. They are equally important things and no doubt have their own issues attached to them, but when it is about relationships you really do need to consult the people it is going to be done to.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Was it that the terms on which the tender was assessed were too narrow—

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Or was it that the tender process—where I am heading with this is can you fix the tender process? Was it that the terms were too narrow, was it that the people assessing the tender did not really have the on the ground experience or research that you simply cannot tender out these things? There needs to be a more sophisticated instrument than a simple market force tender?

**Mrs VOIGT:** I think you need, to some degree, to tender out. Agencies the like of mine have become very self-satisfied that what they are doing is the best thing, and it is not always true. Plus, are we giving value for money, another important issue for government. But I think you have to attend, for example, the narrow focus of the tender and the assessment process. I think you have to bring in, as we have said in here, consultation with the community and consultation with the officers of the department who are on the ground and have seen it. I know there will be bias, but there is bias in all sorts of things, you just allow for that. I just think it needs some attention, that is all.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Some strong feelings for this Committee in terms of formulating our recommendations to the Government, do you have some strong messages, given that the need is so high, the housing stock is so low and the sector has been neglected so long? Do you have any strong messages for us?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes. You recently had the Wood inquiry. The Wood inquiry drew attention to the fact that the problem of child protection is not just something that is part of the Department of Community Services but is a whole-of-community response. Equally, it is very important in housing. The message I have is, whatever happens, that the Government look at the housing needs of families with their children in the light of that. So, therefore, for example, collaborative processes occur between Housing and the Department of Community Services, which is not true at the moment, necessarily. These processes need to be really strengthened. For example, there are more support systems to areas where known high-risk families are living, not just from the Department but as a general service to that community from Housing. That sort of work of the Department of Housing has diminished over time. I remember when it was much more than it is now.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** Were you working in that, or is that your experience?

**Mrs VOIGT:** I was working in the children's area always.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I am interested in your last comment, what I take to be a change in the ethos of the Department of Housing of New South Wales. What have you seen change over time?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Clearly, I have been around a long time. We do not have much public housing anymore, for example. That is a huge change—I would say to the detriment of the people of New South Wales. Also, I think there have been some good things, the ways in which they view some of the old mistakes that were made, but also the less human face of the Department of Housing on the estates, I would say. There was a much more human face in the past. Welfare officers were seen much more as being welfare officers not just community development, capacity building. You want people who can talk to people.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** I am particularly interested in Wollongong where I grew up, where you talk about a development support program on the fringe of Wollongong. Where was that?

**Mrs VOIGT:** It is near Warrawong. We have had this program running there for some time. We have had community development work going on there. I will write to you about it.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Was it Oak Flats?

**Mrs VOIGT:** No, it is Bundilia.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** What did the tenancy support program involve that was operating there?

**Mrs VOIGT:** The tenancy support program that was there has, over time, involved a range of different things, depending on the particular needs of the estate. There have been parenting groups, for example, run on that estate because of the difficulties that many of the children have faced. There have been specialised after-school facilities developed for the estate because many of the children did not have the sorts of support through education, food, et cetera, at the end of the day that they needed. There has been a range of things. The year before last they were doing things in relation to looking at their past and looking at where they came from. It would depend. Community development tends to be different, whichever our staff is running it, frankly.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Again in regards to Wollongong, you used to operate what I took to be a foster home in Coorabell?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Does that still operate?

**Mrs VOIGT:** No, indeed it does not.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Do you still own the property there?

**Mrs VOIGT:** No. We run a children's family centre down in Warrawong. It was a partnership between ourselves and Wollongong council. They sold us the land at a reasonable price for us to put up a children's family centre. The children's family centre at Warrawong has a focus particularly on under-fives and some of the focus is on Aboriginal children—you would not know in that area the needs of that area. We have had quite a wide range of programming. We did have, over the last three years, a community children's grant from the Commonwealth Government to extend out beyond the usual area which we would usually service, which is closer in to Warrawong-Port Kembla, out towards Shellharbour into the new estates out there with development for things like parenting programs to break down the isolation of some of the people who are rearing small children out there.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** Can I go back to what Dr Kaye asked you earlier with regards to the foyer program and your reservations with regards that style of program. If that is not a program that we should find attractive as a model, what is the alternative?

**Mrs VOIGT:** The alternative is having dispersed housing. There are a number of programs like this around the world in which there are not conglomerates of housing, which everybody in the neighbourhood knows "That's where they live", but scattered housing through a neighbourhood because you can also deliver a lot of different services in that style. You have a few units of accommodation in each street so that you do not have this collection of people who are seen as different from others around them. This feeling of being different affects children also; it affects everything that happens. In our view we have managed much better because we do run units like that. As I said up in Auburn we have 18 or 20 and every now and again somebody comes to me and suggests a small block of units might be a good idea. I tend to say, "Let's stick with what we know" and it is much better than the individualised houses.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** If we can talk about the Auburn experience, in terms of the individual dwelling, how many people are in those dwellings?

**Mrs VOIGT:** In the dwellings for families, often it is quite a sizeable family size. It might be that there are four or five children; some have one or two, but because of our concerns for some of the families where there are larger numbers of children, we tend to use the accommodation we have up there for the slightly larger family groupings, but they are not, as I said, one after another in a street.

**CHAIR:** But you would not see any problem, from a cost-effective point of view, in having one or two units in a block of units?

**Mrs VOIGT:** No I would not, but I would be careful about it because I do not think it is cost effective; I return to that. If you just have to walk around the corner, it does not make a great deal of difference if you are a mental health worker or somebody else.

**CHAIR:** I am not saying you are wrong, but I would imagine that being able to obtain three or four units in a block of units would be cheaper than buying for individual houses?

**Mrs VOIGT:** We sometimes have individual units also. Up in Auburn we tend to have houses, just because of our arrangement with the Department of Housing, but for example down in Canberra—of course we are in New South Wales—but I have many more units down there, we do have the experience of having scattered units in many different blocks and a small group of units in one block and exactly as with a very large block the Government funded down there, we have found the same problem; it is a magnet for dope sellers, it is constantly in trouble, it is frequently visited by the police.

**CHAIR:** I think it is important we get some more detail on what you have just said, after today?

**Mrs VOIGT:** I will be happy to do some background research for you.

**CHAIR:** Yes, that is important because it is different to what we have previously heard.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** One of the proposals put to us has been Common Ground as a proposition of providing intermediate to long-term housing for people who have been chronically homeless with a variety of problems. In terms of the United States experience it was up to—

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** I think it was 600 in one unit; it was massive.

**The Hon. MARIE FICARRA:** I thought it was 300.

**The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** It does not matter; we are talking in the hundreds.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** But it was mixed.

**Mrs VOIGT:** I would be happy to do some background research for you on that one. I have a worker who could start looking. The United Kingdom would be the place where you would look at some of this experience over time and whether it has worked or not. You want to know whether it has worked or not, not what people say they are doing. Spin is terrific.

**CHAIR:** Evidence-based?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes. I would be happy to provide that. I will get my person to look at it.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** You said there is not as much public housing in New South Wales as there used to be and that is to the detriment of the people of New South Wales—I am paraphrasing you. If it were true that there is less public housing but that the loss of public housing units was made up for by a gain in community housing, would you still make that remark?

**Mrs VOIGT:** No, I would not.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** So it is not public per se, it is the affordability?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Absolutely, the affordability and the security, because those two elements are the critical elements for families; affordability and security. It is no good having somewhere that you have only got for a year. You need a home. Housing is not just about a place to sleep; it is about creating a home because when families create a home, then they see a future for their children; they have options and opportunities, which they would not have otherwise. Things change for them.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** You do not believe that necessarily public provision or community sector provision, one or the other, is superior?

**Mrs VOIGT:** No, I do not. I have not seen any difference. I have seen some very bad times on public housing and some not terribly effective community housing. It would depend on who is running it, really.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** You talked about the human face of public housing and the loss of a human face. I think you were specifically referring to some of the larger estates?

**Mrs VOIGT:** That is true.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** And you are specifically referring to the fact that there are not the same number of social workers?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Welfare workers.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** The same number of welfare workers that there used to be. You then made a slightly disparaging remark about community development workers.

**Mrs VOIGT:** I should not say that because we employ them ourselves.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** I wanted you to have the opportunity to perhaps modify that remark and explain in more detail what you meant by the loss of human face, particularly with respect to welfare workers?

**Mrs VOIGT:** I will explain it by saying that it is about relationship. Community development is about a view of the whole community perhaps taking up issues of the community, which are joint issues and resolving them. Certainly that is very important but for the client population I work with, who are extremely disadvantaged individuals, many of whom come from very traumatised backgrounds, who encounter severe difficulties in parenting, what they need at times is somebody to talk to on a one-to-one basis.

I have been a community worker myself in Waverley and I have been, in the past, working in communities as an individual worker. There are differences in that and I think one of the problems for the busy community worker is that they do not have a sufficiency of time to be able to engage with individuals about an individual's problems because that is not their role. That is really what my commentary is about. It is important, of course, for community workers to look at whole issues that affect communities, transport and other things.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Is it in part about counselling services?

**Mrs VOIGT:** It is about a lack of availability of an easy, accessible point for discussion. You can call it counselling because it ranges from a simple discussion into more intensive counselling but at the point at which welfare workers got engaged, it was usually to talk through perhaps events where a parent has been called to school where a child has been excluded and how to handle that. That is not necessarily counselling in the highly professionalise sense, but it is very important for a family who has experienced difficulties to have an opportunity to talk about it.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Can you explain to me the different requirements of, say, a homeless youth as compared with the broader homeless population?

**Mrs VOIGT:** I have talked primarily about working with families, but of course we have worked with homeless youth and we have a number of programs, some of which are funded through the Department of Community Services and some of which are SAPP-funded programs, that is under the Commonwealth's homelessness scheme. One of the real problems with adolescents as they become homeless is that in most cases their problems did not start in adolescence; they are the accumulation of serious difficulties that they have experienced in the home that have led them either to be excluded from that home or to exclude themselves from the home. Often this is related to domestic violence, aggression, sexual abuse in the home—for girls in particular but also for some boys—by partners, or the succession of people who might go through what was their family home. There are other problems, of course. For some of the young people they have not received the specialised help, for example, with education or counselling that they needed when they were much younger. There is a higher than usual level of disability amongst them, and a higher level of mental health problems.

We come in touch with some of these young people when they are adolescent and they are homeless, often referred by the Department of Community Services. They are deeply distrustful of adults, their experiences have been very poor—of nobody seeing them through and continuing with them. One of the things we see as very important is accommodation, but also a secure relationship with a worker who will continue with them and will not easily give up.

**The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH:** Over an extended period of time?

**Mrs VOIGT:** Yes, indeed. We run a range of services, from what you would see as 24-hour care, where we might have a young person in accommodation and we might be, for example, just doing sleep-overs with that young person, to young people with whom we would, by the time they are somewhat older, have very limited contact. They might just be coming to us to do their washing or whatever. It could be a range of things.

One of the problems is the stability of the adult contacts at that time. Young people do need some levels of secure housing, but they tend to be a bit more experimental than most adults and often will need to be rehoused in other accommodation. But as long as we stick with them, our experience is that they usually come out at the other end.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for your attendance today; your evidence has been very helpful. We have a number of questions that we have not got to that we will need to send you on notice. Also, I think there is some information you were going to help us with.

**Mrs VOIGT:** I am happy to do so.

**(The witness withdrew)**

**(The Committee adjourned at 4.33 p.m.)**