

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2004–05 budget estimates

Melbourne – 21 May 2004

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Witnesses

Ms S. Garbutt, Minister for Community Services;

Ms P. Faulkner, secretary;

Mr L. Wallace, executive director, financial and corporate services;

Mr A. Rogers, executive director, disability services; and

Ms G. Callister, executive director, community care, Department of Human Services.

The CHAIR — Good morning. I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings on the 2004–05 budget estimates for the community services portfolio. I welcome the Honourable Sherryl Garbutt, Minister for Community Services, Ms Patricia Faulkner, Secretary of the Department of Human Services, Mr Lance Wallace, executive director, financial and corporate services, Mr Arthur Rogers, executive director, disability services, Ms Gill Callister, executive director, community care, other departmental officers, members of the public and the media, and all present. All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript early next week.

Minister, I now call on you to give a brief presentation on the more complex financial and performance information relating to the community services portfolio.

Ms GARBUTT — Thank you, Chair. I will break my presentation into two parts: firstly, community care; and secondly, disability services. For each of those I will look at some background issues and then some new output and asset initiatives as well. I understand the committee has a copy of the slides; is that correct?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Overheads shown.

Ms GARBUTT — Across the two budgets our priorities reflect a two-pronged approach to the support of families and children. We continue to roll out the integrated strategy on child protection with a range of new services to reform that system, in particular through new diversion and prevention services which will be piloted in 12 selected rural and regional areas and in indigenous communities. We have also injected new funds to boost foster care payments. The focus is on the most vulnerable children, and it is also balanced by a recognition of the need to strengthen early-year services through the implementation of the first stage of the Best Start initiative and the enhancement of preschool services in line with recommendations of the Kirby report.

Our initial research has been telling us that the family support innovations projects, which have been funded as part of the integrated child protection strategy, are working. You can see that from the graphs there. They were funded in last year's budget and they have commenced operating across the state — in Ballarat, Central Goldfields and East Gippsland — and they include indigenous projects. The success of the projects has been quite dramatic, with an average of a 7.5 per cent drop in child abuse notifications across the project areas. Those graphs show that we are recording lower levels of notifications, but also lower levels of formal investigations and protective investigations to the Children's Court. I think you will agree they are fairly convincing graphs. We are now doing much better than the rest of Australia, and in fact we are defying the trend across Australia. You can see there the figures since 1999 onwards for the rest of Australia, with Victoria's figures taken out, compared with Victoria. Notifications of children at risk have risen nationally by more than 120 per cent — in fact it shows 128.5 per cent there — over the last five years, and in Victoria it is just 2.3 per cent. I note that the numbers of substantiations of abuse have also shown similar defiance of the national trend.

We are aiming at reducing renotifications of families — that is, where the first notification shows that families are struggling and are perhaps not at the stage of child abuse but still in a lot of strife. The reductions here in notifications indicate that these families are now getting the help they need so that they are not renotified time and time again. It is about longer term support. Those figures come from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. We are also continuing to invest in the early years. We are matching our effort on child protection with more investment in the early years. We have commenced 11 Best Start projects operating in 14 per cent of the state's local government areas. Best Start projects are about joined-up government — all levels of government — and organisations to help vulnerable families. We have now achieved the highest kindergarten participation rate in Australia, and we have a record participation rate.

The number of indigenous children who attend preschool has also increased by 7 per cent. It is not at nearly the rate it should be, but it is heading in the right direction. The number of eligible children accessing the second year of kinder has also increased, and that is good because research demonstrates that access to a second year of kinder for eligible children enhances school readiness, avoids remedial assistance programs and contributes to better numeracy and literacy outcomes for those children.

I will outline some other achievements in 2003–04. All child protection and non-government-organisation staff providing services to children and young people in care have trained in the Looking After Children Victoria framework and are developing development plans for their clients. This program means that all important events of a child's life will be recorded and go with the child. So children will have a record of all the important things — and some not so important things, too — that will go with them.

Our new \$20 million Take Two service is up and running. It is about treating children who have been subjected to abuse so that they get the therapeutic support and intervention that they need. In relation to juvenile justice, the new demountable facility at Malmsbury is complete, and we have now closed and demolished the old class A facility. We have a range of new rehabilitation and diversion programs, and they have commenced in the juvenile justice area. They are aimed at breaking the cycle of reoffending for young people. The budget priorities for 2004–05 are to build on the success of the child protection reforms; boost resources for more of the innovation projects, and focus further on improving early childhood services: kindergartens and child care, maternal and child health, and so on.

We want to upgrade essential infrastructure for residential services for children in care, and provide more children's centres and kindergartens. We also want to tackle the overrepresentation of indigenous children in the child protection system. The community care budget is implementing these priorities with an increase of \$82.8 million, or 13.5 per cent. As the chart shows, this represents an increase of 55 per cent since the 1999–2000 budget. The graphs reflect our record in supporting families and children, and in strengthening communities. To continue to divert vulnerable families away from child protection and prevent child abuse, \$6.7 million in funds, which is \$34.8 million over four years, has been provided to commence more family support innovation projects. Twelve projects are currently operating successfully; another 15 will be funded during this year. We are going to establish an adolescent mediation and diversion service in every DHS region, based on a model in the eastern suburbs which has been very successful. All of those eight projects will be funded by June 2005; and we are going to expand the services available to children who perpetrate sexual abuse. We will help another 80 children with that service.

We are improving support for foster carers, and this budget provides \$5 million, which is \$20.7 million over four years, to increase the reimbursements to foster carers. This takes it from an average of \$150 per child in care to an average of \$800 per child. That is a big increase, and, of course, it builds on our increase in payments last year which was funded by a \$16 million increase over four years.

To further strengthen our focus on early childhood services we are providing funds to continue the clustering of kindergarten services. So far 500 kindergartens have been funded to join up into clusters through group employment, and these additional funds will allow around another 200 to join. We are providing seeding grants to establish kindergartens in growth areas — that is an additional \$3.5 million. Four kindergartens have been allocated grants this year, and the additional funds will allow another 14 centres to receive grants.

We have put in \$500 000 to assist schools and local councils to establish outside school hours care. We are further boosting funds for maternal and child health with an additional \$2.5 million, and we are providing seeding grants to establish integrated children's centres, or hubs, and that will be expanded with a further \$3.5 million. We will be able to announce further children's centres as well.

Another priority is to address the overrepresentation of indigenous children in the child protection system. We have allocated \$1.8 million to establish Aboriginal family decision-making projects, based on a model that has been developed at Rumbalara, near Shepparton. It has been very successful, and we are funding six of those projects. We are seeking to address family violence within indigenous communities by implementing the issues raised in the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force. Funds will also be allocated from additional child protection-funded amounts in last year's budget to commence more family support innovation projects. Four more will be indigenous ones; that will be a total of eight. This is to implement the last component of the Aboriginal protocol, where Aboriginal families and communities have to be involved in decisions where Aboriginal children are removed from families; it is really to ensure that they are central to the decisions made.

With the way forward we have a bigger reform agenda. It is underpinned by a clear vision for the future. We are already seeing early signs of success. We are trying to rebalance the system to focus on early years with services that help families before they reach crisis point. We want to focus on indigenous children, young people and families, and to improve the quality of care for children in the state. We have got a clear set of priorities that are

going to take us forward. They include ensuring good outcomes for children; developing a more contemporary service system supported by appropriate legislation, focusing on early childhood, and improving the quality of services.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. The first topic I would like to cover is the child protection reform that you outlined in those overheads, particularly the Caring for Children package which was described in the DHS budget fact sheet, and that was \$69.2 million over four years for initiatives directed at protecting and caring for vulnerable children. Could you advise the committee on just what impact this funding will have on the child protection and family support system, particularly on the child protection notification rates?

Ms GARBUTT — I am sure the committee is very well aware that there has been a lot of attention given to the child protection and placement system over recent years. I have always been pretty candid in my comments about the strengths and weaknesses, where we need to go, and where we need to make reforms, and there are certainly some challenges to address. If I could put things into perspective a little, the first is the state of the system in 1999. It has been rendered fairly dysfunctional by chronic underfunding, not just the tertiary service, the child protection service, but the universal services, the kindergarten, maternal and child health services. There was a real disconnect between the child and family support agencies of the non-government organisations and the child protection system. We had then spiralling notification rates; workers were facing huge workloads; there was inadequate support and training for them; and the sector had had years of cuts and been forced into competitive situations which did not allow them to work together. As well, families were showing much more complex problems. The incidence of parents presenting to child protection with a psychiatric disability, and with family violence and substance abuse issues all increased significantly in the late 1990s.

The other perspective is to have a look at what is happening in other states. This is a national problem, those sorts of experiences of families. The child protection systems in Queensland, in New South Wales, South Australia, and the ACT have all but collapsed in recent years, but, as I have said before, we are defying the rate of growth in the other states by recording a small decline in notifications. I still think we have to treat that with some caution because it is early days for a lot of our reforms, but the evidence is pretty stark when you compare it to other states. We think the reforms are beginning to work, and it does show that we are going in the right direction with them. Our direction is to build a culture of prevention in everything that we do. It is about treating the causes of child abuse and neglect before families get into serious trouble, and providing the help that suits them and meets their needs.

We have four major aims around our agenda: support development for all children — that is our universal services; identify vulnerable children and their families before they encounter difficulties and provide support; divert children and families at risk into appropriate community-based support first and offer flexible alternatives; and then when children must be removed from their families to provide high quality care with an emphasis on stability and treatment. Unfortunately each year several thousand young Victorians still need assistance through child protection. Over the last three years we have undertaken a major reform process. We have put in an additional \$160 million over the last three budgets, beginning with the integrated strategy for child protection and placement services, which focuses particularly on child protection, but also looks at the foster care system as well. The total over the last five years — that is, from 1999 — has been 55.7 per cent. But money alone is not the only way to strengthen the child protection system. We are really saying it is up to the whole community. We all have a responsibility, and all organisations have a responsibility, in caring for children. We want to have a clear policy framework which builds a partnership between the non-government agencies and government. We want to recognise families that are facing difficulties early and get them help through local community support networks before they get to that crisis point.

There are some key improvements. We have put in 60 additional child protection workers. We have put in additional resources to the non-government agencies so they can support families in the form of family support innovation projects. We have enhanced payments to foster care workers. We have put in specialist services, such as the Take Two program, and appointed an advocate for children in care. We are certainly starting to see the results of that. I showed you those in the graph. I do not think that we should overestimate how important all of that has been. With this added investment this year and more innovations projects that are working we can have a significant impact on child protection rates.

Mr FORWOOD — I also turn to the issue of child protection and placement. Many of us saw the disturbing story on *A Current Affair* on Monday night. I wonder at the outset if you would you like to make some comments on that before I ask some questions?

Ms GARBUTT — Ask the question and I will incorporate my comments.

Mr FORWOOD — The story seemed to indicate that there was serious dysfunctionality in the operation of child protection. I wonder if you could advise the committee how many deaths are currently being investigated by the department?

Ms GARBUTT — Let us put that in context. Youth suicide and drug taking are serious issues for all of the Victorian community, not just for children and adolescents in care but right across all communities and all families. We see that every day. It happens in some of the best families, and it happens with adolescents in care. If we look just at drug overdoses and suicide, I can give you the figures. There were two last year unfortunately, and every death is tragic. One was a suicide and one was an overdose. The year before there was one overdose, and before that one suicide, so there have been four over the past three years.

Mr FORWOOD — Deaths of children in the protective services?

Ms GARBUTT — From those two causes, yes. I did table a report last year from the child deaths review committee. There were other deaths that quite clearly were due to other things, such as accidents or illnesses, basically, or sudden infant death syndrome. But you did ask about — —

Mr FORWOOD — My question is: of the children who are in the custody of the state how many deaths have been investigated in the last three years?

Ms GARBUTT — Every death is investigated; every single one of them. Every one is investigated first by the department, to look at its own case practice, and secondly, a fully independent judicial inquiry, which is the Coroners Court, takes place for every single death and is reported publicly, so every one of them is investigated.

Mr FORWOOD — And ‘every one’ is how many.

Ms GARBUTT — I have just given you the figures for overdoses and suicides; four over the last three years.

Mr FORWOOD — But what I am after is not those categories, Minister. I am after the total number of children in custody who have died in the last three years.

Ms GARBUTT — They are not in custody; they are in care.

Mr FORWOOD — Okay, in care; in the control — where the state has the duty of responsibility, that is the number I am after.

Ms GARBUTT — You are after adolescents? The program was about adolescents, Bill, so — —

Mr FORWOOD — I do not want to make this difficult. The question is pretty clear.

Ms GARBUTT — Yes.

Mr FORWOOD — Children in the care of the state.

Ms GARBUTT — Yes.

Mr FORWOOD — What I want to know is how many have died.

Ms GARBUTT — You referred to *A Current Affair*, which was about adolescents, and I was trying to answer that question. But if you are now asking ‘all’, I did table the annual report of the inquiries into child deaths. The report of 2003 reported on deaths in 2002. It reported 32 deaths.

Mr FORWOOD — Thirty-two?

Ms GARBUTT — Thirty-two. That was 2002. The year before that it was 12, and the year before that it was 25, so there is no pattern in numbers. They move around. The 32 were mainly due to sudden infant death syndrome and illnesses. Last year's figure — and I will table it shortly; probably next week — is 12. It has gone 25, 12, 32, 12. There is no pattern, Bill. They are all unfortunate, and they are all investigated.

Mr DONNELLAN — Minister, I noticed you have released a new report on the child protection system entitled *Report of the Panel to Oversee the Consultation on Protecting Children — The Child Protection Outcomes Project*. Can you advise the committee of the directions of the report, and do any of the budget initiatives listed support the directions of this report?

Ms GARBUTT — Some of you may have seen in the paper today that I did release a report by Mr Peter Kirby that flags some of the directions for future reform. He and two others undertook a consultation on the discussion paper that the department put out, which was called *Protecting Children*. That was released late last year. He has now reported back on the results of the consultation as well as made some suggestions for reform. His report and the *Protecting Children* report will inform the review of the Children and Young Persons Act. It will lead to reform of that act. That is something I committed to last June when I made a ministerial statement. The major directions in his report are to create one integrated service system for children and families which is based on shared responsibility and mutual accountability, the sort of accountability and responsibility I was talking about before, to focus the system in promoting children's safety and wellbeing in the broader context of children's developmental needs and to improve the quality of our system. All of those are quite clearly consistent with the directions of the reform. We are undertaking more of those reforms in the form of the innovations projects and so on.

What he provides now is some further directions, but also an evidence base and data about the way we need to move forward. What I am proposing next is that we will undertake some development work with the sector and establish leadership groups to take what are basically broad policy directions and turn them into real changes on the ground, and that will lead to a government position paper in the next few months. The position paper and the reform will clearly cover both practice and legislative reform. We will be looking at legislative reform some time next year. We hope that will reflect the change in the policy directions and improve the legislative base. So there are some real opportunities now for a further focus on prevention, minimising out-of-home placements, and promoting stable futures and certainty for children.

Mr CLARK — I refer you to the 2000–01 budget paper 3, which you probably do not have with you, but it shows that in 1998–99 the number of notifications to child protection services was 34 775. That compares with the expected number of notifications of those 37 400 for 2003–04. I also refer you to the quality measure in — —

Ms GARBUTT — Sorry, for what year are you quoting?

Mr CLARK — The first figure I quoted of 34 775 is based on the 2000–01 budget paper 3 as the number of actual notifications to child protection services for 1998–99. The second figure I quoted you is from budget paper 3 for 2004–05, which shows an expected number of notifications to child protection services for 2003–04 of 37 400. I also wanted to refer you to the quality measure at page 98 of this year's budget paper 3, which relates to the percentage of children and young people who were the subject of an investigation which led to a decision not to substantiate that were subsequently the subject of a substantiation within three months of case closure. You will see the expected outcome for that for this year, and the target for next year is 5 per cent. On my reading, what that means is that 1 child or young person in 20 who is the subject of an investigation leading to the decision not to substantiate subsequently has a case substantiated within three months. It would appear to refer to approximately 1800 children and young people across the state being in that situation.

It seems to me that that indicates that the statutory services continue to be under considerable pressure. Given that, I refer you to the apparent reduction in the amount of funding going to statutory child protection, as set out on page 98, from the target of \$111 million this year to \$102.4 million in 2004–05. You indicated there has been some change of program structure. Can you explain to the committee what the change of program structure has been, what is actually happening to the true funding level for child protection, and in particular what is being done to reduce that number of 1 child in 20 who is investigated, not substantiated, and again subject to a further investigation?

Ms GARBUTT — Thank you for those three questions in one, Robert, and there were various claims and distortions along the way, which are clearly able to be refuted. The first part of your comments was around the notification rate. In this year's budget papers you will see the pattern over the past few years of a light reduction in notifications. You can see that in 2002–03 the actual number of notifications was 37 494; that has gone down, and the target for the forthcoming year is 36 900. That is only a small reduction, but compared to the rest of the country, where it has gone up by 128 per cent, that is a standout performance.

The second thing you talked about was the substantiation after one case of investigation which did not lead to substantiation. In most cases the evidence that the department has now shows that usually what this indicates is that there was not child abuse or neglect on the first occasion but that the family had quite serious problems. But the investigation was made and child abuse was not substantiated and probably was not there. But after another few months and weeks of stresses, strains and problems, the problems had escalated and there was child abuse. That is why we have acted to put in place the family support innovation projects: to pick up these families that are having problems and give them long-term support.

The child protection system was set up as an emergency investigation of an immediate situation. If there is not an immediate problem of safety of children then the case is closed. That is what it was set up to do. But that is now no longer good enough. What we have to do is make sure that those families who have a problem have ongoing longer term and multifaceted support because they will have a range of problems. That is why we have the family support innovation projects, and that is why you see the number of notifications actually gradually reducing: because those families are not being notified again and again and again because they know they are going to get the help. As to the last question — and I am surprised you asked this, Robert, because I would have thought you knew enough about budgets and how you allocate costs and that they can shift between — —

Mr CLARK — I am asking you to explain the figures, which appear to show a fall, and you have offered no account in your budget papers.

Ms GARBUTT — There is an account, but we can give you a full one. I will ask Ms Callister to do that.

Ms CALLISTER — It is a detailed answer, so I will read it out. The decrease reflects the recasting of the program management and support costs. The 2003–04 published budget reflects the superseded distribution of these costs. It was not possible to clarify the distribution of administrative overhead prior to 2003–04 budget. However, as the output restructure was bedded down over that year the head office and regional budgets were recast accordingly. So it is budget neutral from an output group perspective as follows: there is a reduction in the statutory child protection services allocation of \$13.9 million and then an increase in the child protection and specialist services allocation of \$7.5 million, and then an increase in the placement and support services allocation of \$6.4 million. So the increase of \$5.3 million in the 2004–05 target relative to the 2003–04 expected outcome reflects in the main the impact of indexation adjustments of \$3.9 million.

Mr CLARK — So you are saying there is a real increase of \$5.3 million and that reflects indexation?

Ms CALLISTER — Yes.

Mr MERLINO — Minister, you have previously described foster carers as the heart and soul of the child protection system. Can you advise the committee of what sort of impact you expect the \$16 million allocated for foster carers in last year's budget and the \$20.7 million in this year's budget will have?

Ms GARBUTT — Yes, indeed. Foster carers certainly are crucial to our out-of-home-care placement system. We are very determined to support them in their role. There are two aspects to these funding boosts. One is that the weekly payments they receive has been boosted. That was the \$16 million in last year's budget. This year we have boosted their reimbursements.

Foster carers have to pay for a whole range of unexpected items when children come into their care. It can be visits to dentists, doctors and specialists — even a new pair of shoes can set you back a long way these days. It might be swimming lessons the children are having, or it can be a whole range of things that foster carers can be out of pocket for. We are lifting what they are reimbursed. It has been around an average of \$150 per child per year, which does not go far, to an average of \$800 per year per child so that those essentials are paid for and so that foster carers are encouraged to stay in the system.

The reimbursement was a key element of the report *Public Parenting — A Review of Home-based Care Services in Victoria*, which we released in last July. It really was in response to an issue we had identified. Since 1998–99 the number of foster carers had declined by 7 per cent so we needed to keep foster carers who were in the system and to get more foster carers into the system. Over that time the number of young people in care has increased by 10 per cent. So we are losing where we should be gaining foster carers. We viewed that reimbursement and payment level as absolutely critical to keeping foster carers in the system. As well we believe foster carers need recognition and support. I have increased the funding to the Foster Care Association of Victoria to \$162 000 per annum, giving it capacity to have an office and staff. It is a peak body for foster carers and provides support and advice on foster care, so I think that was a very important move to support foster carers. Another initiative to improve the quality of care provided to children has been the advocate for children in care, Mr Toby O'Connor; he commenced at the end of March and his position will be to drive improvements and ensure that the highest standards apply to our out-of-home care system.

I am certainly aware that there have been criticisms that the advocate was not a children's commissioner, and it is not something that I can support. There has been quite a debate about the pros and cons of commissioners, but I think if you look at the other states the case has not been made out. In New South Wales they have a children's commissioner and their rates and notifications have skyrocketed. In Queensland they have a children's commissioner and it has not prevented abuse in care, nor their system from nearly collapsing. So they do not prove it. We want the advocate to lead to direct improvements and particularly focusing on the most vulnerable children and that is what he will do. I have to say that it is particularly galling that it has been pushed by people for a whole range of reasons and it is a bit hard to cop it from the Liberal Party when children remain in detention camps.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about recommendations arising from the 2001 case practice review of child death inquiry for teenager Janelle Parker. The recommendation from the CPR was that protocol arrangements and draft protocol arrangements between — —

Ms GARBUTT — Sorry, what is CPR?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Case practice review into the child death inquiry. The recommendation was:

... that protocol arrangements and draft protocol arrangements between placement and support agencies and ambulance services be reviewed to ensure that duty of care requirements are met in relation to young people in placement and support services. Additional procedures are seen to be necessary.

This was a 2001 recommendation, so I am wondering if you can tell the committee whether it has been implemented, and if so, how is it being done?

Ms CALLISTER — There have been discussions with ambulance services and arrangements about how young people in out-of-home care are responded to by ambulance services; it has been the subject of ongoing debate with new arrangements being discussed.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Is that likely to be finalised, given that this was, as I understand it, a recommendation from 2001?

Ms CALLISTER — We might have to take that on notice in terms of when the finalisation would be able to be — —

I need to clarify that with other parts of the department.

The CHAIR — Minister, I draw your attention to the family support innovation projects. You have previously referred to those projects and I see that the government is committed to funding more projects in this year's budget. Can you describe in some detail the progress of such innovation projects to date, and have you got any ideas on how you intend to allocate the new funding?

Ms GARBUTT — Certainly and these do go back to the Integrated Strategy for Child Protection and Placement Services which commenced in 2002 and the innovation projects were a vital part of that plan. The did represent significant new funding, but also a greater strengthening of the early intervention and prevention infrastructure. They now represent a \$40 million plus investment over four years, and that represents a doubling of the level of funding available to Victorian family support under this government. In 2002 the figure was \$3.7 million for eight innovation projects, and they were in areas of the state where child protection demand is high.

They have been established in Ballarat, Central Goldfields, East Gippsland, Frankston, Geelong and Shepparton, with four indigenous — two then — projects, East Gippsland and Greater Shepparton. In last year's budget we built on that with \$1.3 million extra for four more projects, two in Darebin, one indigenous, one mainstream and two in Latrobe. In this year's budget we have got \$5.3 million to establish 15 more projects. Those together with the existing ones will operate in around 30 local government areas and they will account for approximately 50 per cent of all notifications that we get each year. They have two objectives: they divert a significant proportion of families who are currently notified to child protection to community-based support services, and they minimise renotifications and the progression of families into the child protection system. We have an interim evaluation report; we have independent evaluators at La Trobe University and I would just like to quote from them:

While caution needs to be exercised in interpreting results from the initial stages of the projects, the analysis indicates reductions in child protection activity. In the three years (Q1 to Q12) prior to Innovation, first round project areas contributed an average of 16.1 per cent of total state notifications. In the three quarters after the commencement of the Innovation initiatives the average had dropped to 14.8 per cent.

And they went on to say:

These changes in Child Protection system activity levels are in the desired direction and are indicative of positive programs effects associated with Innovation.

So that is good news. But they also said of the notifications that there have been reductions in other measures of child protections activity, such as investigations and applications to the Children's Court, so if they continue we will be very pleased indeed. They are already showing us, defying the national trend.

What innovations projects do is try to bring together local service organisations as well as child protection as well as other levels of government, so all the key players in a particular area come together. That would include police, schools as well as hospitals in some cases, as well as child protection. A child protection worker is allocated to the innovations project and is able to give advice; there are networks formed and these become very strong networks which have the local expertise and understanding about issues and families and they are able to provide long-term support for families, and I will just quote from a vision statement for Shepparton which says:

We share a sense of hope and a working commitment in supporting families and ensuring the wellbeing of children. We need to work together, be available to each other, strengthen our connectedness and assume a whole of system approach to provide early intervention and a future direction for families we work with.

That really is a very strong statement of all working together, commitment to each other, but more importantly a commitment to families and children and I think getting the networks and all of those organisations and government together in one region is one of the great strengths of the innovations projects. They are working quite well.

Mr FORWOOD — I turn again to the issue specifically of teenagers in the care of the state. What protocols are in place when you become aware the department becomes aware and the carer becomes aware that children in the care of the state are regularly using drugs, or acting as prostitutes. What protocols do you have in those circumstances?

Ms GARBUTT — Let me first say that most of the adolescents who come into state care come in because the Children's Court has determined for their own safety that they need to be removed from their families — that it is dangerous for them to stay with their families. Many of them have suffered many years of abuse and neglect so when they come into state care they often have very disturbing, very challenging behaviours. They are very difficult to deal with. That is the background of these sorts of children in our care. We have recognised that they need treatment and there had been a gap in the services we provided. That is why we established the Take Two Intensive Therapeutic Intervention Service which is now up and running and will see these sorts of children. It is to provide them with the support, treatment and help they need. That has just come on board in January of this year.

This year's budget also extends another program — the Adolescent Mediation Service — to try to work with these children intensively and their families before their relationships break down. We have put in place and are putting in place reforms to try to address that problem. With regard to specific protocols, I will get the department to take you through those.

Ms FAULKNER — Can I just say something? With respect to specific protocols we actually have not brought those today. We came prepared with a whole lot of stuff about budget estimates, so I would prefer — we

have protocols in relation to most issues — to provide those to the committee afterwards because we really just do not have them. Gill can outline in general, but if you are looking for specific — —

Mr FORWOOD — A general outline would be great and the specific protocols would be terrific. Thank you.

Ms CALLISTER — The first thing I would say in response to the question is the department does have the capacity to put young people who are at severe risk to themselves into a facility that we call our secure welfare facility. It is a secure facility so they are not able to leave. They are only able to be there for relatively short periods of time because that is what is determined by our legislation. Many of them will be there for at least three weeks, and there is very intensive work with them while they are in the facility. Many of the young people that you may be referring to would have had a number of periods in secure welfare. While they are there they will have lot of intensive work done with them with staff, with drug treatment services, with mental health services, which will be continued when they return to the placement that is deemed the most appropriate. Sometimes that is reviewed and there is a different sort of placement put together that might reflect more the intensive needs that they seem to be demonstrating. I would say that secure welfare is a key component. In addition to that there are protocols with mental health services, with drug treatment services and with a number of other specialist services. The Take Two service has commenced, which the minister referred to. There has been, I would say, a deal of attention paid to these fairly complex and difficult young people.

Mr FORWOOD — The secure welfare system is a crisis intervention response? If somebody needs to go there, is there capacity for them to go there? Or is there a waiting list?

Ms CALLISTER — No, there is not a waiting list. When they need to go there they are admitted for anywhere up to a total of six weeks because that is determined in the legislation.

Mr FORWOOD — Who makes the judgment who should or should not go there?

Ms CALLISTER — The child protection manager in the relevant region or the community care manager in the relevant region.

Mr FORWOOD — Can I have one last question? I have a particular case in front of me where a particular child said, 'I want to go there', and did not and a week later unfortunately the child was dead. Somehow or other the system collapsed.

The CHAIR — The explanation given is that there are protocols that will be forwarded to us. In terms of specifics, out of courtesy, I think we need to make sure that people have the opportunity not to discuss publicly the lives of individual people when they do not have the background information here with them.

Mr FORWOOD — I am happy to make the information available.

The CHAIR — All right, okay.

Mr DONNELLAN — Minister, there are a range of studies that have been published in recent times that conclude that Aboriginal children are overrepresented in the child protection system. Can you tell us more about the Koori-specific budget initiatives in the budget, and what steps the government is taking to better protect and support Aboriginal families and their children?

Ms GARBUTT — Yes, you are right, there are too many Aboriginal children in the child protection system. I think it is something we should all be ashamed of, and it is certainly something this government is prioritising. We believe it is something we need to work on. We have taken a number of initiatives already and there are more under way as you saw in this year's budget to try to reduce that overrepresentation. Last year we expanded the delivery of the Aboriginal Child and Specialist Advice and Support Service to all regions. This service works with child protection so whenever an Aboriginal child is reported or notified to child protection that it will need care, this service is brought in to make sure there is an Aboriginal perspective on the whole process — that Aboriginal families, broader families and communities are involved in these decisions. We have supported that now to extend to the entire state. That is governed by a protocol which was developed between the DHS child protection service and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. That aimed at improving and understanding the care needs of Aboriginal children.

This year we are allocating an extra \$300 000 to extend the scope of that to all Aboriginal children and young people on a child protection court order. First we expanded the coverage — there is statewide coverage now — and then the scope of it. What we want to see there is improved risk and safety assessments, better case planning and decision making and increased involvement of the Aboriginal family. Along with more culturally informed and engaged responses, we expect the protocol to contribute to a reduction in the rate of Aboriginal children being involved with child protection.

We also have funding for expansion of Aboriginal family decision making. This is one I mentioned that came from Rumbalara, near Shepparton. Wherever there is an Aboriginal family involved with child protection, the broader family are brought together — uncles and aunts from across the state — together with respected elders from that community and child protection, and a course of action is determined and agreed upon and followed. It has been very successful. The renotification rates — the number of times that children are then referred to child protection again — has dropped amazingly. We are now taking that pilot across the state. There is funding there for that — \$4 million over four years — to expand that project right across the state. In addition we are putting in \$1 million to address indigenous family violence. There has been a task force of indigenous people which developed a report and made recommendations. We have picked up some of the key recommendations there and we are trying to address that. We know that family violence is a child protection issue. They go together. As well we recognise that a lot of Aboriginal children are not with Aboriginal families at the moment. We are developing a resource guide for people who are fostering Aboriginal children so they have a better understanding of the cultural needs of these children and cultural differences. We recognise they need extra information and support to undertake their work.

You are quite right. There are too many Aboriginal children in care, it is something we are acutely conscious of, and something I have prioritised and we are funding — we have picked up what is successful and we are extending it across the state. I am very hopeful it will produce some good results.

Mr CLARK — Minister, I want to refer you to a research study undertaken for the Criminology Research Council entitled *Facilitators and Inhibitors of Mandatory Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse* of December 2003. This was a survey that was distributed in October and November 2002 and had results compiled from 452 survey responses. This survey reported in particular that only 29 per cent of the surveys sampled agreed the child protection system is effective. Prior negative outcomes with child protection services or knowledge of colleagues' experience of a negative outcome influenced many professionals when deciding whether or not to make a notification. Sixty-four per cent reported that they were concerned that child protection services would offer an inadequate response to child abuse and only 51 per cent of those who made a notification had received follow-up information from child protection services. I wanted to ask: are you or members of your department aware of this survey? What is your or their view of its findings? Do you agree that, on the face of it, these findings report a pretty poor standard of performance by child protection services? And what is being done to address the concerns highlighted by this report?

Mr MERLINO — This is not question time; this is budget estimates.

The CHAIR — In terms of that question — I am just asking for clarification — the opening of that; is that in relation to Australia or Victoria?

Mr CLARK — This is a survey in relation to Victoria.

The CHAIR — Prepared by the Department of Human Resources?

Mr CLARK — No, prepared by the Criminology Research Council.

The CHAIR — Right. In order for that question to be accepted, you would have to tie it in to the budget output measures.

Mr CLARK — It relates to the effectiveness of the output group relating to child protection services, and protection and placement generally. This committee needs to look not only at what is being expended from taxpayers money but, equally importantly, what is being achieved. This question goes to what is being achieved to protect our children.

Mr MERLINO — I would have thought as a courtesy it should have been presented to the minister to look at before she has to respond to it.

The CHAIR — We have tied it into the budget papers. I am not sure if the minister is even familiar with this particular document.

Ms GARBUTT — I will get the department to comment. It is a very recent publication, I understand.

The CHAIR — We will take it on notice or you can answer — whichever the minister wishes.

Ms FAULKNER — I can say we are aware of it. It was very recently published. It is a report on what people think about the system, and we are currently analysing it, so I am not quite sure how helpful we can be at this time. The only thing I would say is if there is an issue to be addressed, we will address it, but there is often an issue of unmet expectations because people expect that the child protection system will do different things than what it is legislated to do. So that is a possible — —

Mr FORWOOD — You think it is working, do you? The child protection system?

The CHAIR — The question was to the minister.

Mr FORWOOD — I was just following it up with the department secretary.

The CHAIR — And it was taken on notice.

Mr MERLINO — Minister, my question is about support for kindergartens. The committee could not help but notice the industrial action during the week by our kindergarten teachers. Can you describe what impact the funding allocated in this year's budget for kindergartens will have on kinder services in Victoria?

Ms GARBUTT — This government has a very strong record on rebuilding our kindergarten services in Victoria. Last year — and I am sure you are well aware of this — we achieved record participation rates for four-year-olds attending kindergartens. We have achieved that with a significant investment since 1999. That includes a nearly 55 per cent boost to the kindergarten budget since 1999–2000 — a 54.8 per cent increase, to be exact. That has included an increase in the kindergarten subsidy of an extra \$65 per child for every child attending kindergarten. For low-income families, where they have a higher fee subsidy, we have increased that from \$100 to \$250. I think that was under the Chair's ministry at the time when we did that, so it has certainly paid off and we have managed to lift that participation rate. We have also funded a pay increase of at least 20 per cent for kindergarten teachers in the last EBA round. That is to retain and attract kindergarten teachers.

The 2003–04 budget provided \$8 million to build new kindergartens in growth corridors. We have announced some of those new sites, and others will come through in this budget. We allocated \$5 million to improve the information technology available to kindergartens. Yesterday I was at Bundoora kindergarten and helped launch its new computer and Internet connection and so on. The teacher and the committee were very anxious to know about training, which they will need, and that is included in the package as well. So they will have everything they need to connect to each other, to their peak body, to DHS and so on. So that will be quite a big boost. This particular kinder had no IT equipment at all previously — some do, of course.

We have also provided, in the last few years, an extra \$28 million to upgrade kindergartens. Importantly for the participation rate we have allocated \$12.5 million to support children with a disability or special learning needs, so that they are able to attend their local kindergarten with their neighbours. We think it is very important that they are given this special help. They were largely the group that was missing out and helping to keep participation rates down, but this funding has meant they are able to attend and join with their local neighbours — the other children. The strike action you mentioned was, of course, yesterday. Our view is that that was premature. It is an industrial tactic to put the pressure on during the current negotiations. I think the union will be better served by sitting around the table and negotiating with the parents' representative body, the employer body, Kindergarten Parents Victoria. In fact that sort of strike action will disrupt those negotiations.

We do value the work of kindergarten teachers. We have funded a 20 per cent pay rise in the previous three years, and we have offered, and already funded, kindergartens — the kindergarten committees have extra funding of \$10 million, which will pay for a 9 per cent pay increase over the next three years. That is in line with other sectors — the nurses, teachers and public servants — and we believe that that is a fair and equitable offer, but the exact salary increase, of course, will come from negotiations. That is where they need to be sitting down. We believe the AEU's claims are not realistic and not affordable, but it needs to negotiate that out.

One other project we have had under way is the group employment or kindergarten clusters. This goes directly to employment issues, because under this arrangement — the cluster arrangement, where you get a dozen or more kindergartens together — there is a common group employer, which takes the burden off the individual committees of management to run all those employment issues such as WorkCover, industrial relations, long service and so on. All of that is then done by the group employer, which typically is the local council, but it can be a federated model. Many kinders have got together and formed a federated model. It provides for professional management of the employment issues. We have funded in this budget more opportunities, around 200 more — 100 in each of the next two years — to bring the total number of kinders operating under that sort of model to around 700. We have had a very good response so far, and 33 per cent of all the community-based kinders are now funded and managed in that kindergarten cluster. They get extra funding to do it that way. It helps with their viability, reduces the management burden and makes them much more professional. This particular model seems to be very enthusiastically embraced by rural kinders, and 29 out of 59 current kinder clusters are in rural Victoria, so they have seen the sense in it and the advantages to them and have really taken that on board. That is an issue that we are continuing to work on and continuing to fund.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about the departmental handling of child abuse allegations. You would be familiar with the article ‘Suffer the children’ which ran in the *Bulletin* magazine on 20 April and made some comments about a high-profile child disappearance case. The magazine states:

The most disturbing revelation is that only weeks before —
the child —

vanished, the Victorian Department of Human Services received a serious child abuse notification about the toddler but no investigation began until after his disappearance. By then it was too late.

It goes on:

A child protection worker familiar with the case told the *Bulletin* the decision to investigate the latest abuse claims came after he disappeared. ‘It was a disaster,’ the worker said. ‘For some reason the notification was not followed up even though there was a history of abuse allegations on the files.’

Given that that article appeared a month ago, have you investigated those claims; are you satisfied with the department’s handling of this case; and why did the department not investigate the serious child abuse notification at the time it was made?

Ms GARBUTT — You would be aware that the Children and Young Persons Act specifically says that the minister and the department, and nobody else, are allowed to comment on an individual case that is under investigation. I do not intend to disobey the law. I am surprised you are prepared to, but I will not. I would say, however, that that is a case under investigation by both the department and by the police, and I am certainly not going to interfere in police investigations. That would be totally irresponsible.

The CHAIR — The minister took a question on notice that has since been followed up, and Ms Callister is going to provide the result of that inquiry.

Ms CALLISTER — I took the question on notice regarding the protocol on ambulance services. I have had somebody check, and in April 2002, which was before the minister took up this portfolio, a clinical information notice was distributed to all ambulance services across Victoria specifically stating a requirement regarding young people under the care of the department, and ambulance staff as a result are now required to provide assertive support for adolescent overdosive patients.

The CHAIR — Minister, would you please move to the disability services section of your portfolio and take us through the overheads. We have got just under 10 minutes for the overhead presentation and then we will move to questions.

Overheads shown.

Ms GARBUTT — The disability service system is facing continuing increases in needs. The long-term sustainability of the disability service system requires greater investment in home and community-based living, and this will reduce the emphasis on out-of-home care. We also need to give greater support to families and carers.

Meeting the increased need for disability services is a challenge for all governments across the country. The graph shows an increasing number of people in Australia with a severe and profound disability. The trend is one that extends right across the country. The number of people with a severe and profound disability more than doubled between 1981 and 2003, due in particular to the ageing population. The ageing population issue has another result as well: not only does it increase the prevalence of disability, but it also reduces the availability of informal support, as carers are also ageing. Another factor impacting on demand is the growing complexity of care. The experience of service providers suggests that individuals are seeking assistance in relation to more complex needs, more complex behaviours and more complex requirements for support.

We are increasing our service levels to respond to this underlying demand pressure. The chart shows the growth in service outputs since 1999 and shows that the provision of individual support packages has more than doubled since 1999–2000. We believe that responding to the growing pressures from need requires new approaches. There is clearly a need to provide flexible individualised support and to invest in early intervention wherever possible. Rather than continuing to provide institutional and quasi-institutional services, government is focusing on new services such as Home First, which can not only better respond to demand but which can assist in promoting a better quality of life for individuals with a disability. You can see from this graph that over time the service mix is changing, with an increasing emphasis on people receiving individual assistance within their homes, and that includes the Home First and Community Outreach programs, facility options and flexible support packages rather than the traditional training centres or community residential units.

My priorities in last year's budget were to continue implementing the state disability plan, which is guiding all that we do; expanding the Home First and Making a Difference programs; improving carer support; raising community awareness through an initiative for older carers; expanding the rural access program, which has been very successful, to provide metropolitan access in Melbourne; strengthening our capacity to plan for the future through better planning and coordination of services at key transitional points in people's lives, when we know there are going to be stresses and strains — there are for everybody; assisting people to make the transition from supported accommodation to more flexible home options as appropriate to their needs; and of course continuing to redevelop the Kew Residential Services.

We know that demand for services is increasing due to ageing as well as other factors, and we have considered what we can do to assist to deal with that in the future. Our priorities in this budget are to provide more support to disabled people earlier in their lives and to their families so that problems like challenging behaviours do not become insurmountable later in life. It is very similar to the child protection issue I was talking about — shifting it all to the prevention and early intervention. All of that goes hand in hand with the target and individualised responses that were outlined in the state disability plan.

In this budget we also want to strengthen the support we provide to carers in the form of expanded respite services and aids and equipment funding. There is a big boost for them. We also want to increase the range of accommodation and support options which the service system has available to meet more individual needs by providing not just the standard two options, with an expectation that everyone should fit themselves into those two, but a whole range that are tailored and flexible.

This graph shows that the government is continuing to invest strongly in disability services. You can see the increase there — a 59 per cent increase since 1999–2000, with a 7.8 per cent increase this year. The new funding will continue to support more individualised approaches to assisting people with disabilities and their carers to live at home or in community-based settings with less intensive support systems. There is \$7.8 million to support carers by providing 650 additional respite breaks; by giving greater access to aids and equipment — we estimate around 5360 individuals will be assisted; and by expanding the Signpost program for children to assist carers to prevent and manage complex behaviours. There is \$3 million to expand support, choice and community inclusion for another 360 people, and to develop the Disability Housing Trust, which is a joint initiative between myself and the Minister for Housing which we hope will create at least 100 new housing opportunities. We are providing \$10 million over three years to redevelop and upgrade supported residential accommodation, commencing with \$2.5 million this year; so that is upgrading the existing CRUs.

The Kew redevelopment is also progressing well. The picture shows a typical bedroom at the existing Kew institution. You can see that there are three beds; it is very crowded; there is no privacy; and no room for personal effects. I think that shows exactly why we needed to redevelop it. People leaving there will have individual bedrooms and 24-hour personal support. So there is an additional \$42 million for that project over four years. That

is on top of \$6.2 million in 2002–03 and \$2 million last year. That will allow the project to meet our election commitment, which was to redevelop it and have it finished by the next election in 2006, and we are on time for that. By June 2005, at the end of this next budget period, 190 residents will have relocated, but the whole project will be concluded by November 2006. That is a brief snapshot of the disability services budget.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Minister. I would like to start by looking at the question of addressing need — the ageing of the population you referred to — and I am keen for you to advise the committee as to what impact the budget initiatives will have on addressing increasing demand for services for people with a disability in the community and their carers. Could you help us by explaining exactly where the money is being spent and what services will be provided as a result of that new allocation of funding?

Ms GARBUTT — It is good to set the context and what the needs are and to get an idea of the size of that. It is a major challenge confronting government, because the projected growth in needs for disability services is very strong. As I said, it is a national problem — every state is facing this — and I suggest internationally as well in comparable countries. The ageing of the population is putting pressure on the system, and it does that in three ways. First of all, people with disabilities are living longer, much longer than they did a generation ago; secondly, the carers themselves are, of course, ageing as well and are less able to continue to provide the care that they may have been providing for their sons or daughters. So we have people with a disability entering the service system at one end and not leaving at the other end, so the system has to respond to that.

The CHAIR — That is good thing.

Ms GARBUTT — It is good — I am just outlining the challenge. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has done some work on this, and it predicts that by 2006, 1.3 million Australians will have a severe disability. That is up from 450 000 in 1981, so it is a huge challenge for all governments, particularly the commonwealth, but I am afraid the commonwealth has not appreciated the dimensions of the task. Our CSTDA did not adequately fund growth, so that is another issue that we have to address and are addressing.

We are very conscious of the magnitude of the task, and very determined to rebuild the disability services after the years of neglect. We did inherit escalating levels of unmet need, but as well the previous government did not have a long-term plan. We clearly do now, with our state disability plan. We know that we are delivering a record number of new services as part of a funding boost of nearly 60 per cent since 1999, and this budget builds on that strong foundation. It is a big boost of an extra \$47.1 million over the next four years, and we are providing people with support based on what they want and what they need. To take a step back, 920 extra people received assistance of various forms, according to their need and choice, compared to last year's budget.

Building on last year's budget we are investing another \$3 million in individual support packages that will provide an extra 360 people with a disability with support to live independently how they choose in the community. We do not believe people living in facility-based accommodation is the best measure of how the system works. Our philosophy is to take services to people, into their own homes and into their own communities. We believe the services should be tailored to what the person needs, wants and desires, and they should be flexible. It is not the one-size-fits-all approach that has characterised previous services, where there were, fundamentally, two or three models on the table and people had to fit themselves into one.

Mr FORWOOD — I am sure we will get to talk about that.

Ms GARBUTT — We will, Bill. We are providing support to carers with a new investment of \$7.8 million. That is 650 extra respite breaks for individuals and for their carers. There is \$5 million extra in the aids and equipment funding, and as I said we calculate that that is around an extra 5360 people assisted through that program. The Signpost program will help an extra 950 carers. So this is quite a big boost, and it is a 7.8 per cent increase on last year.

I was going to talk a little bit about the flexible funding. We are calling it a support and choice package. It is perhaps a little hard to get an understanding of it because it is not quite so obvious. I was speaking to a woman who unfortunately had two boys with disabilities. She had approached the department wanting to put them into shared supported accommodation — although they were 12 or 13 or 14, early teenage years — and that was very disappointing. But when the department talked to her further it found her real concern was that they were getting bigger, heavier and stronger, and she did not have time to meet their needs as well as the needs of her two other children. What the department figured out with this individual package was a way of better supporting her in her

own home — new washing machine, extra help with household chores, that sort of thing — so that she felt more confident and able to support her two boys as well as her two other children. They have stayed at home, and there might be a time down the track when they cannot, but for the moment she is delighted. She is able to keep them with her, and we support her. That is an example of the flexibility of this style of funding and how it has to meet individual needs; you could not write a program description that says that. It is about support and it is about choice.

Mr FORWOOD — Minister, we all know the magnitude of the challenge that we face in disability services. I refer you to the PAEC report on estimates for 2003–04, page 188, which refers to a service needs register for shared supported accommodation. Recommendation 17 of this committee is that:

The Department of Human Services ensure that the strategies being developed to meet increasing demands for disability services do not affect the wellbeing of persons with a disability in urgent need of appropriate care.

If you look at page 95 of budget paper 3 you can see that clients in shared supported accommodation increased by 30 this year and that the funding is scheduled to increase from an expected outcome of \$363 million to \$380 million, which is around \$17 million. You and I know that the amount of time someone waits to get an SSA place has increased from 116 weeks to 146 weeks in nearly three years. You and I know that the number of urgent need cases has risen from 1068 in 2002 to 1161 now. Would you not say that we are going backwards?

Ms GARBUTT — I repeat that we are trying to shift to more options and flexibility. What I just described to you about a mother getting extra help in the home is not listed as an accommodation option, but clearly it is about accommodation. Two boys do not need or want to go to shared supported accommodation because their mother is now able to support them at home. Because something has an accommodation label on it does not actually mean that that is all that there is available. Our shift in focus has been to broaden those options and to broaden the choice and support available to people. I am trying to say to you, ‘Look at other funding options; look at other programs; look at the Support and Choice funding, and see it as accommodation as well’.

Mr FORWOOD — I would happily do that, but in particular I am looking at the budget papers. With shared supported accommodation are you saying there will be 30 extra clients in this category of the output group for an increase in \$17 million? Could you explain to the committee, given the size of the waiting list, how come \$17 million in additional expenditure and shared supported accommodation leads only to an increase in 30 places?

Ms GARBUTT — I am trying to say that accommodation means many more things than community residential unit and shared supported accommodation. In fact I point to the Home First package, which is part of Support and Choice, because I do not believe that all these individual names of programs mean anything more than that they are all about supporting people for their accommodation and recreation.

Mr FORWOOD — I accept that.

Ms GARBUTT — I will come to your answer, Bill; Wait a minute. With Home First, for example, we are taking 100 people who want to leave shared supported accommodation. So there are going to be 100 people coming out of CRUs over the next two years; this current one and the next one. That is not in your figures because it is in the Home First accommodation figures. I met one of these young men just recently with the member for Narre Warren North. He is a young man who had been living in a CRU for six or seven years. He has come out and is now living, with support, independently in his own flat. He is loving it. He thinks it is the best thing that has ever happened to him. We are going to do that for 100 people, and that will not show up in the figures you are quoting there because it is in the Home First or the Support and Choice packages. That is where we are moving to. Just looking at that urgent waiting list will not help you understand what is going on across the board.

Mr FORWOOD — Seriously, I accept all of that.

Ms FAULKNER — I think the point you are trying to get to is that part of the output cost goes to the residents of Kew.

Mr FORWOOD — Yes, I know.

Ms FAULKNER — So that is why it seems to be so expensive to move those 30, or whatever you are talking about. So that is what it is going to — —

Mr FORWOOD — I cannot let the minister's answer go. I accept everything that she says, except that if you look at the particular output group we are talking about we are only talking about services provided to groups of clients in community-based settings. That is the only thing we are talking about.

Ms GARBUTT — I will ask Arthur to elaborate on that.

Mr ROGERS — You are referring to the change in funding to shared supported accommodation. As you pointed out, the increase is there. The increases relate to a couple of things. One of course is the general price adjustment, so there is indexation in there. I think that is \$8.2 million. Then there is the money for the Kew residents, as the secretary referred to, which is the 30 people moving from Kew, which is at the high end of the cost scale. The other thing that the minister has mentioned is that the 100 people who will get the chance to move out of CRUs is not reflected in that cost.

Mr FORWOOD — I understand all of that as well, but the point I make is that the output measure I am looking for is for the number of people on the urgent waiting list — by whatever means; I do not care how we do it — to start coming down the other way rather than continue to go up, and the amount of time to find people, which has also as I said, gone from 116 weeks to 146 weeks, start to come back the other way. I do not care how we do it, I just think we need to do it. I am sure you do too.

Ms GARBUTT — Certainly. Yes.

Mr DONNELLAN — In light of this year's state budget and regarding the issue of addressing future growth and demand for disability services, how does Victoria perform compared with other states in the delivery of services and expenditure.

Ms GARBUTT — We are leading the nation, to put it in a nutshell. In fact we have had endorsement from none other than Senator Vanstone when she was the relevant minister, when we signed the commonwealth state disability agreement. She compared Victoria to New South Wales and said:

... you have a much smaller state providing more assistance to people with disabilities.

I am quite pleased to be able to put that on the record. If we look at the figures on a per capita basis, Victoria leads all states. We have per capita funding of \$4230 a year. The national average is \$2961, but that includes Victoria. If you take us out the national average goes down to \$2550. When you look at the funding in the commonwealth state and territories disability agreement, we provide 86 per cent of funding for that agreement. That is also the highest in Australia. The average is 80 per cent, so the other states are well below that.

We do take our responsibilities to people with disabilities very seriously, and we are very proud indeed to be leading the way once again. We did certainly slip back in the 1990s, but we are well ahead now. The expenditure is consistent with the new policy direction of focusing on increasing broad community-based services and support. We are not just leading the way in funding, but also in the sorts of services we are building. For example, the Productivity Commission's report 2002–03 indicated that we have the highest proportion of eligible consumers in the age range 15 to 64 receiving a day activity, so 5.4 per cent are receiving a day activity in the community. The national average was 2.7 per cent. There are many different figures to demonstrate we are leading the nation, and you can see the shift in funding — I showed it on one of the graphs — away from residential care to community services and home support. We will now spend 49.4 per cent of our total budget just tabled on non-residential services. It was 57.3 per cent in 1999–2000, so there has been quite a shift in the focus of the budget. Obviously we will still be providing residential care, but we are managing to shift it in line with our philosophy and our state disability plan.

The CHAIR — What was that figure? Was it 49 to 50?

Ms GARBUTT — It was 49.4 per cent in the 2004–05 budget, from 57.3 per cent in 1999–2000, so it has been quite a shift. We are now taking the support to the person and building the support around the person instead of expecting the person to fit into some bricks-and-mortar answer. It also views people with a disability as citizens. They have got rights and they are members of the community. They are not just clients; they are citizens with rights that we want to respect and enhance.

We do need to exercise a little bit of caution with those productivity figures. They are not strictly — and they say this too — they are based on snapshot activity data rather than ongoing, and sometimes our services are not always

standardised against interstate services. But we are not making a lot of progress on developing some benchmarks and performance measures so that we can make these comparisons rather than just have a snapshot. We are clearly leading the way, whichever figures you look at. It is about community-based housing and about flexible supports. We have led the way for a long time in things like deinstitutionalisation. Right space legislation is another thing that we have led on. We are certainly reclaiming that role, but nevertheless there is a lot more to be done. I do not diminish that at all. I will tell you about the complexity of the situation and the numbers involved.

Mr DONNELLAN — You mentioned benchmarks. Will they be national benchmarks done at a ministerial council level?

Ms GARBUTT — Yes, they will.

Mr ROGERS — They will be developed by the national disability administrators group at a request from the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency and the ministers council, and there will be a report back to the ministers for adoption, I presume, or for consideration at least.

Mr DONNELLAN — Would that be over six months, or what period?

Mr ROGERS — I believe it is at the end of this year, but I am not exactly sure of the date.

Mr CLARK — I refer to the early childhood intervention services outputs at page 103 of budget paper 3.

The CHAIR — Early childhood is community care; it is not disability.

Mr CLARK — My question relates to children with disabilities. I assume it does not relate to child protection.

The CHAIR — Community care covers it, but it is not disability services.

Ms GARBUTT — It is, strictly speaking, in the community care section, but I am happy to take the question. We will just have to rearrange our chairs here, that is all.

Mr CLARK — Minister, you may or may not be aware of a circular issued by the Irabina Parents Action Group, which claims that for the children with autism attending Irabina, their hours of service have been cut from 12 per week to between 1 hour and 2½ hours per week. The group has supplied in that circular backup figures that show that from 1998 to 2000 the majority of their children received 12 hours of care per week. It also makes the case that: 'autistic preschool children need a minimum of 10 hours per week of specialist early intervention treatment'. My question is twofold. First of all, similar to the question I asked you earlier about the other output group, can you explain what the real change to funding for early childhood intervention services is once you adjust for the cost reallocation factors; but, more importantly, in relation to children with autism needing early intervention services, how do you respond to the complaint about the cut in the number of hours of service? Do you agree with the Irabina parents group that 10 hours is a minimum that autistic preschool children need, and if so what is being done to raise the level of early intervention services provided to those children?

Ms GARBUTT — I am happy to take you through those answers and what is happening because it is a very interesting process and priority. When you review the research about early intervention and what works best what we are told by the experts such as Professor Frank Oberklaid and the Early Childhood Intervention Association of Australia — which represents the sector, the managers, the professionals and a whole range of people — is that what works best and the best way to help children with disabilities and developmental delay is to assist them in their own environments — that is, in their own homes, out in the community, in kindergartens, in child care, in family day care and in early childhood intervention services, but in what they call their natural environments. The department undertook a process with the sector, including the representatives of the researchers, managers, centres and parents and developed a vision for the service. They clearly accepted that research and said the direction they wanted to go in was the direction that the research said would work best — that is, in assisting children wherever they happen to be, wherever they live, play and so on. That has become the focus. That exercise showed that early intervention services in a segregated centre were not the best way to go. We have taken that advice, the advice of the sector and its own vision, and tried to shift towards a vision.

We have also changed the funding services model so that it is more flexible. It is now modular. Centres can choose modules of service, whether it is group therapy, individual therapy, assisting parents or assisting kindergartens. The

centre will choose which modules best suit that child, and the funding goes with that module; the funding is the same for a module in whichever the centre the child is enrolled. That is trying to tailor the services as well. I am familiar with the paper from Irabina that you talked about, Mr Clark, but I would say that measuring the hours of service in the centre is no longer the best way to measure a good early intervention service. The research and the vision all say that the best way to measure that is support for the child in their own natural settings, in their own home, or kinder or wherever. That is what we have now implemented and that is the funding that goes with that.

I wanted Irabina to make that change over three years. It chose to make it in one year. That has been quite a big change, but that is how it has chosen to do that. We have given it extra support to make the change; there was some extra funding for it to do that. But as well for autism — and Irabina largely covers autistic children — I have just announced a \$400,000 consultancy to Monash University to provide support for the whole range of early childhood intervention services, and there are some 63 or 64 of them, so that the Monash University is able to support each early childhood intervention service to help autistic children. But also the consultancy from Monash will help support the ordinary kindergartens and primary schools or family day centres, wherever autistic children are, and that absolutely complements and strengthens the vision, which is to provide support wherever the children are in their own environments rather than relying entirely on a segregated setting. I also point to the extra respite that is available in this year's budget, which clearly will benefit families of children with autism, as well as the money for the provision of aides and equipment.

Mr CLARK — Given your move away from an institutionalised setting, can you still indicate to the committee how many hours of intervention, in whatever context, you are aiming to be able to provide?

The CHAIR — That has already been covered.

Mr CLARK — On a point of order, Chair, the minister has not indicated that at all. If the minister does not want to answer, that is her business, but — —

The CHAIR — The minister talked about individualised funding.

Mr CLARK — And my question was: what was the target level of hours per week that the minister was aiming to provide under the model that she told the committee about?

The CHAIR — The minister may wish to repeat what she has already said, if she wishes.

Ms GARBUTT — That is the old-fashioned way of measuring and quite clearly that is not the best service.

Mr CLARK — That is a fudge to avoid answering the question and to deprive kids of support.

Ms GARBUTT — I am afraid you have not listened, Robert.

Mr MERLINO — Minister, you referred earlier to the output funding of \$42 million over four years being approved in 2003–04 for the Kew Residential Services redevelopment. Can you provide the committee with an update on how the redevelopment of KRS is progressing?

Ms GARBUTT — It is progressing very well. We have made substantial progress. Just to take you back, it was announced as a project by the Premier in May 2001. Kew is the last of the old-style big institutions in metropolitan Melbourne. In fact its redevelopment will be the biggest disability institution closure in Australia's history, with 480 residents at the time of the announcement. It is a very significant redevelopment.

All of those people that move off site will be supported in the community. They will have 24-hour support. About 100 people will remain at Kew as part of the new residential development. Already around 100 people have moved into the community. There have been continuing calls from community visitors, disability advocacy groups and so on to continue with the process, in fact, to speed it up. They certainly view it as a Dickensian institution that needs to close. Of course, it was a key election commitment of the government and it is a central part of the disability plan. These closures can be a difficult process, certainly for the clients but also for staff and governments as well, but I am very committed to undertaking it; it is the right thing to do. Residents will live in purpose-built housing in the community, and it will be a vast improvement on the sort of conditions that you saw there.

We have had a preliminary report of the review of the redevelopment by Gary Radler, who is an independent psychologist, and he found that the outcomes for the clients were very positive. He found, for example, that the residents are much more involved in their daily life, in shopping and preparing food and cleaning and those sort of things; they are able to make many more choices; they interact with the community, the neighbours, and they actually see a lot more of their friends and family who are a lot happier to visit a nice home, rather than an institution. He also found that the families and the support staff were overwhelmingly satisfied as well, so that is a very good result. His final report is under way now, and that will be available shortly. It will also emphasise a need for residents to be actively involved in household activities. They simply could not do that at Kew; they did not get to choose any food, do any shopping or do any cooking; that was all done for them. So they become a real household here and are able to make the sorts of choices that we all have to make.

The process included a thorough assessment of every resident and where they would like to go, where their contacts were with their families and friends, who their friends were and where they had day programs. That was how the decisions were made about where they would move to. To date, around 140 residents will have moved at the end of this financial year. We have had \$21.6 million expended as capital as of end of April; 25 new community houses will be completed by June of this year, and of course they will all be moving out by completion date of November 2006 as per our election promise.

Mr DONNELLAN — Very good.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I would like to ask you about the proposed disability housing trust and seek some detail on that. The description on page 276 of budget paper 3 refers to the trust providing 100 new housing opportunities, so firstly, I would like you to expound on what you mean by ‘opportunities’, whether it is people, units, accommodation et cetera. It also says:

The trust will involve partnerships between ... non-government housing providers, local government and the private sector.

So can you explain to the committee please, given you have got the target 100 opportunities, how much do you expect that the non-government and the private sector will contribute to that trust? What is the purpose of the state funding, because it is shown as a output rather than an asset initiative over three years — is that management fees et cetera — and how will the return be generated for the particular private sector investors and will the government underwrite that return?

Ms GARBUTT — I am glad that you emphasised the word ‘opportunities’, because it is not building another rigid bricks-and-mortar style one-size-fits-all choice for people. We do intend to look at many options, and it will be a partnership with other bodies as you have said. Indeed it is a collaborative effort by the Minister for Housing, Candy Broad, and me. The \$3 million in this budget will commence the establishment of it, and the remainder is in the out years. Arthur, are you able to give some more detail?

Mr ROGERS — Some of the detail that you request is not available at this stage in terms of the work we have done. The process that we have embarked upon is that we are working closely with housing, and particularly in relation to its work with housing associations, and we expect that the housing trust will be closely linked or associated with those different housing groups to provide the sources of funding that are identified in the budget. Also other sources of funding from charitable and other areas as well as private funds to generate sufficient funds for the housing opportunities. We have done some early feasibility work; we are about to embark upon a lot more detailed feasibility and the funding from the trust is over the three years. We do not expect that we will have the trust up and going in the next couple of months; it is towards the end of this next financial year, so I am unable to give you some of the detail you ask for because we actually do not have it at this stage.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Have you quantified yet how much funding is required to get the trust up to provide the 100 units? Have you got a ballpark figure —

Mr ROGERS — I do not have that figure, no, sorry. We have done some early work on that; we are actually working with housing and they are doing some work on housing association, so I just do not have any figures here that I could give you that answer. But there are some ballpark figures been developed — I do not have them here.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Just to clarify: the \$10 million funding over three years is for feasibility management et cetera, rather than a capital contribution to that trust?

Mr ROGERS — Some of the funds of the \$10 million will be contribution to the trust and may well be used for capital in this year's budget. The money has been shown against the innovations because we are not aware of the actual amount of apportionment of the funds over the next three years. That will be clarified in next year's budget figures, but we are not aware of those figures at the moment.

The CHAIR — Minister, I want to go to the topic of community inclusion, and I note that our state disability plan talks about ensuring that people with disabilities are included in the community. Could you please advise us what initiatives will arise as a result of extra funding in this year's budget to promote community inclusion?

Ms GARBUTT — We are very aware that community inclusion is not just about locating people with disabilities in the community, it is about changing the community's attitudes as well. The community needs to be much more aware of and more responsive to people with a disability; I think that there is an obligation on us as well to make that change. Last year unfortunately we saw some hostilities in some people moving out of Kew into the Langwarrin and Cranbourne neighbourhoods. That was very distressing and very disturbing. Probably what was most disturbing, in fact, was that people seemed to be egged on and supported by some of the local Liberal members. I think that that is very unfortunate. So it is quite clear that we have got a long way to go at least in some areas.

The state disability plan outlines quite a comprehensive range of measures to build that community inclusion of people with disabilities. Central to that is a range of community building initiatives that help to build a coordinated approach to inclusion of people with disabilities. The key community building initiatives are, I suppose, the Metro Access and Rural Access projects, the companion card, advocacy, new legislation and a community awareness strategy, so I will go back over some of those. Our community building approach does come from a commitment to creating communities that recognise the citizenship rights of people with disability. They are entitled to be there; they are citizens; they have a right to participate and access community activities as anybody else does. As well, we want to promote opportunities for their participation in community life.

Rural Access and Metro Access are locally based in local government areas. There are 25 full-time rural access workers now based in local government areas typically or in community health centres, either in the councils or in the community health centres right across rural Victoria. We have taken the success of that — they have done some great projects; they are all different according to the local community — now to the Metro Access program, and that will be started in four demonstration sites in metropolitan Melbourne this year. We have got the funding in this year's budget — \$1.2 million — to roll out a further 14 local government areas in 2004–05.

They really complement other initiatives like the Support and Choice program and the Futures for Young Adults program to develop opportunities for people with disabilities. We also repositioned deaf access to ensure that it met the needs of rural and regional communities, obviously to help the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. We are working in partnership with local government. We are, for example, funding an officer with the Municipal Association of Victoria to work with them and support local councils. We are also working on the Access for All Abilities program with Sport and Recreation. They are partnerships that assist more broadly in the development of inclusion. I just want to mention the Companion Card for a little bit because it is a great program. It is a first in Australia.

The CHAIR — How is that covered in the budget — the Companion Card?

Ms GARBUTT — It is funded through the Community Support Fund. To give you some figures — card holders are entitled to take a companion to an event or venue. Those corporate events and facility managers and so on are able to demonstrate that they are meeting their commitments. As of 20 April, 4400 Victorians hold a Companion Card, so it is well accepted. Perhaps even more exciting is that 220 venues and activities have signed up. They range from the Australian Football League, including the finals; through Village, Hoyts, Regency and Nova cinemas; Moonee Valley Racing Club and Victoria Racing Club; Melbourne Fringe Festival; Festival Hall; Royal Botanic Gardens; Australian Open; to a range of local government but not all — there is room there for people to urge their local councils to get on board —

The CHAIR — Minister, if there is more information, we would be really interested but we would appreciate it if you tabled it. There is quite a lot of good information there. Thank you.

Mr FORWOOD — I return to shared supported accommodation. In answer to a question on notice 1658 I asked in Parliament — you can do the maths yourself — it shows that the cost of departmental-managed accommodation for 2002–03 was \$209 million for 2240 beds; for non-government-managed accommodation it was \$133 million for 2085 beds. You do the maths. Each bed costs \$93 700 in the government system and \$63 700-odd in the non-government system — a difference of \$30 000. I wondered why.

Ms GARBUTT — My understanding — and I will get Arthur to give you some more details — is that the government system includes the most profoundly and severely disabled. Those at Kew, for example, are at the highest needs end of disability.

Mr FORWOOD — That would be **congregate** care. Sorry, you mean the ones you have moved out from Kew.

Ms GARBUTT — Certainly those who have moved are at the higher needs end. I believe more broadly so are our other shared supported accommodation. Arthur might have more detail on that.

Mr ROGERS — I have not got the figures you refer to, but broadly there would be three reasons. One is, as the minister referred to, there is anecdotally at least — and we do not have a fixed measure of dependency of clients in government services — but we do know that many of the more, I suppose, outlier costs of clients are in government services. People with very high complex needs would be in government services. They would be some of the Kew residents and a lot of ex-institutional residents in government services as well. The second point would be that the costs in terms of industrial awards are higher in government services than non-government services, so the actual input cost is different — different awards, pay rates and conditions. The third one — and I guess I am speculating — is there may be some difference in the treatment of costs between government and non-government services. The government services would show the full attribution of costs. I do not know whether non-government services do or not to be honest, Mr Forwood.

Mr FORWOOD — They are your figures.

Mr ROGERS — They would be the figures they give us, and they would be accurate figures, but there may be some difference in accounting treatments. Primarily I would say it is around the dependency levels and the different input costs.

Mr DONNELLAN — Minister, you mentioned earlier on that there was funding available for the provision of aids and equipment for people with disabilities. My question is: what impact is this likely to have on the waiting lists?

Ms GARBUTT — The need for aids and equipment is continuing to grow. That is for a few reasons: the ageing of the population, as we have mentioned before; more people with disabilities are remaining at home and so need those aids and equipment at home; equipment is getting more expensive and sophisticated so the cost is going up; and occupational health and safety requirements are moving us from manual handling to use of technology so there is an increased cost there. As of December last year there were approximately 7000 people on the waiting list for aids and equipment. That will have come down significantly since then because there has been an announcement of an extra \$2.25 million that was allocated in April. That will taken down the number on the waiting list quite considerably.

In the May budget we have added \$5 million to the aids and equipment program. I have mentioned before we think that will take around 5360 people from the list. We think it will pretty substantially reduce those currently on the list. Of course people will continue to come on the list even after we have spent that money, but it will make big inroads into that list. I am absolutely committed to that because that is how you support people in their own homes, their carers and their families; whether they are children or adults that helps them to stay in their own homes. In addition we have a number of other strategies about managing the demand including more efficient business practices, better software and a new model for allocation in particular of breast prostheses to allow easier access for women who have had a mastectomy, and we are constantly examining how we can be more efficient. I think it is good news indeed that we will be able to reduce the waiting list enormously with that \$5 million.

Mr CLARK — My question relates to budget paper 3, page 94. The questions relate to working out exactly what is being provided both under the primary support episodes of respite and individual support — the number of clients receiving individual support. In relation to episodes of respite, can you tell the committee how

many households will be assisted as a result of that respite so that we can have a basis comparable with earlier measures? In relation to clients receiving individual support, can you give some more information to the committee as to what the nature of the individual support is particularly given that the average output cost per client seems to have fallen slightly between 2003–04 and 2004–05?

Ms GARBUTT — We did change the output measure — you are correct there. It is now episodes of respite rather than the numbers. I can say that there has been an increase of 19 per cent in respite support since 1999, so that has been a big boost. I do not think I have figures in front of me — —

Mr CLARK — Are you happy to take it on notice and come back with the number of households of respite? That would be helpful.

Mr ROGERS — I do not have the numbers, but I recall this was an issue last year because we changed the measure. We collect through the quarterly data collection system both households and episodes, and we can supply that. I do not have that here. We obviously wrote a report on one of them.

Mr CLARK — Secondly, minister, in relation to what exactly individual support packages consist of given in particular the apparent drop in cost per client between this year and next.

Ms GARBUTT — Well, I did describe one to you that would come under that output.

The CHAIR — At the bottom of page 94.

Mr CLARK — It may be something you want to come back to us with fuller information on about the range of services provided under that.

Ms GARBUTT — I think I have a definition. There we are — individual support. Are you talking about the number of clients receiving flexible — —

Mr CLARK — You told us the number of clients. I am more interested in a description and quantification of the range of services provided under that heading.

Ms GARBUTT — An individual flexible support package can include essential goods and equipment, such as I described before, to the mother — direct support, respite, case management and other support as required. It is obviously by definition very flexible and covers a range of things. It really is trying to tailor that support, as I have mentioned before.

Mr MERLINO — Minister, my question is about innovation. Can you advise the committee what funding was made available in this year's budget to develop new and innovative services for people with a disability in the community?

Ms GARBUTT — Given that we are shifting to more flexible opportunities and a community-based and individual focus we do need to be more innovative. It is about getting more options available — more programs — and being more responsive. Last year we put out for innovation grants or projects and allocated \$600 000 to them to actively encourage and support people with disabilities in the community and to involve a broader range of organisations than would normally be involved with people with disabilities. They were grants of up to \$80 000, and we did get that broad range. A few examples I can give you include a mentoring project for parents with disability — matching them up with other parents; and strategies to promote accessible tourism policies and practices, which has often been an issue. We had several regional projects promoting partnerships with other community organisations. A really different one was training people with disabilities as accredited workplace trainers. We have a total of 19 projects currently under way, and we will be evaluating them as well.

I have also allocated \$700 000 in this budget — 2004-05 — for more innovation grants. They were advertised in March and will be up to \$100 000. This is a separate range of grants focusing on innovative accommodation options, trying to broaden that out. There are a lot of options out there already, but we want to encourage as many as we can and see how they all work. That is to enable people to live in a full range of accommodation options — whether you are talking about an individual flat, supported accommodation or what have you — the imagination is the limit. It is about supporting people with disabilities to live in the community. We are currently evaluating those projects and I will be able to announce them soon.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I would like to ask about the multipurpose taxi program. Given — —

Ms GARBUTT — It is not my — —

The CHAIR — It is not the minister's responsibility.

Mr FORWOOD — Minister, I would like to touch on respite as well. You would be aware, I know, of the Gippsland Carers Association's desire for a respite facility in Gippsland. It has been seeking for quite some time now — and I think it has argued its case well — for the funding of a 12-bed facility. It received a letter from Tim Pallas, the Premier's chief of staff, in which he says:

We appreciate all proposals from stakeholders for assisting with this issue. Your association's proposal for a large congregate style facility, however, is not seen as fitting well with government policy on deinstitutionalisation.

Do you think a 12-bed respite facility on a holiday-type rollover basis is best described as a 'large congregate style facility'?

Ms GARBUTT — That is up to Mr Pallas, isn't it? What we are trying to do with respite is broaden the options. Respite options include things like the carer coming into the house and caring for the person with disability in their own home — and that allows the parent, husband or wife or whatever to go out or simply do other things around the home. That is one style. Obviously there are camps and holidays as a form of respite as well. Last week I visited a Wodonga respite house, and they were taking half a dozen people with disabilities from Wodonga to Melbourne to the footy — they were going to see Melbourne play, as the cousin of one of them was making his — —

The CHAIR — They chose a good team to watch, didn't they?

Ms GARBUTT — Well, I wasn't too impressed, but anyway. They were going to Melbourne on the bus, spending the whole day at the footy and coming back home, obviously. It was going to be about a 16-hour day. They were all looking forward to that. That clearly is a great outing for people with a disability, but it is also a respite for their carers.

Mr FORWOOD — Sure.

Ms GARBUTT — I am just trying to indicate that there are many ways of delivering respite. Some will be with facilities, others will be through other ways. What we are trying to achieve across the regions is some sort of balance across those options.

Mr FORWOOD — Would an eight-bed facility be described as congregate care?

Ms GARBUTT — I am not going to get into splitting hairs with you. I do appreciate your questions, Bill. You asked me 37 questions on notice on disability last year. I contrast that with the shadow minister, who has asked me no questions on notice about disabilities — —

Mr MERLINO — Maybe that is because one is incompetent and the other is not.

Mr FORWOOD — I want to pick up on that and say thank you to the minister for her answers, because I do believe the information that has come back has enabled a better understanding of how the system works.

Ms GARBUTT — Certainly.

Mr FORWOOD — I think we all agree that what we are after is the best system we can get.

Ms GARBUTT — That is right.

Mr MERLINO — Maybe we should have a shadow minister that is trying to achieve that goal.

Mr FORWOOD — I am not going to stop asking you questions either.

Mr MERLINO — What about the shadow ministry — someone in there who wants to try to achieve that goal?

The CHAIR — Minister, my question relates to advocacy services. If I could draw your attention to BP 3, page 96, the department is targeted to spend \$7.2 million on information and advocacy services. Could you please expand on that budget initiative?

Ms GARBUTT — I think advocacy is really important, because these are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community. It is very easy to silence them or to overlook them. Advocacy in its various forms allows them to have a say about things that are important to them, allows them to participate in the community and allows them to point out injustice and discrimination as well. We are very committed to a strong and effective advocacy service.

I recently announced funding for eight new organisations to develop advocacy services. They are the full range. Some new organisations, one, for example, targeting women with disability — often a double whammy, people say — were funded. That was the first in Victoria. We will fund a new organisation targeting indigenous communities — and that is a vital service as well. And there will be new advocacy services in regions where there have been none — for example, the Grampians Disability Advocacy Association, which is in Ararat, has been funded to extend to Ballarat and Horsham, where there have been no services. You and I probably both remember the defunding of the one in Ballarat — the central highlands information program, I think. CHIP was its acronym, and it was defunded by the previous government. We have now restored advocacy to Ballarat. We have funded an agency in Shepparton which wants to link local disability agencies with the local indigenous community. That is a very interesting new proposal. Women's Health Victoria was the one that was funded as our first advocacy service for women. It will be called Victorian Women with Disabilities Network. They are a great organisation and have worked very hard to get this far. The migrant resource centre in the north-west regions have been funded and they, of course, will work with ethnic people with disabilities — another quite disadvantaged group. We have extended it to a range of areas: growth corridors in the south-east and outer east will be getting advocacy services.

The next move is to establish two new resource units that will support these advocacy services. One is the self-advocacy resource unit because I think self-advocacy is probably the best, most powerful and strongest advocacy that you can undertake, but it is not easy. This unit will provide resources for that. And the second is a state advocacy resource unit which will support all those other advocacy services, so we are really building that up, strengthening that up, broadening it both geographically but also to all segments of the community.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about the Community Services Investment Fund which within the allocation has allocated funding for indexation for its NGOs. Can you tell the committee how much funding will be discretely allocated to that new investment fund out of the \$40 million that has been provided for indexation and what activities that will be used for within that investment fund.

Ms GARBUTT — Yes, it has terms of reference which are to fund sector-specific improvements or innovations that can be applied across the sector; support initiatives that enhance a capacity and sustainability of the sector and support work force development particularly in relation to recruitment and retention. This covers both disability and community care areas, but there are quite a lot of similarities in terms of the needs for strengthening work force development and particularly issues about recruitment and retention. It is a partnership with the community and disability sectors so that they have representatives on it. I will not go through them all, but there is, for example, Dr Ray Cleary from Anglicare Victoria, Mr Ben Bodna, who is a community representative now involved in a disability service, Sue Jackson, executive director of the Council of Intellectual Disability Agencies, or CIDA, and a range of others as well. It has \$7 million of funding and that covers more than just my two portfolio areas; it includes some housing as well, so it is a broader community sector than just my responsibility.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Will that funding continue in the out years?

Ms GARBUTT — It is funded for a one-off \$7 million at the moment, but it is for the duration of the fund.

Mr DONNELLAN — You mentioned in the overhead presentation, the signpost program and I was just wondering if you could elaborate on that a little bit more.

Ms GARBUTT — Yes, I can and I will get Arthur to support it. It is a program that we are developing that we have funded on the prevention and early intervention side of our programs, trying to support parents in particular. Many children with disabilities have very difficult and challenging behaviours, very unusual ones, ones that not every parent would automatically understand and know how to deal with. So it really is about putting in

behavioural intervention support early so that parents have that sort of support. It is also about identifying transition stages. Obviously transition is when your children go from kinder to school, from primary to secondary school, and those sorts of transitions when everyone has to put in a bit more effort, it can cause a strain within the family. Identifying it up ahead and doing a little work to make it a bit easier.

Mr ROGERS — I could perhaps add some detail. The program has been trialled in Victoria. It is targeted for families with children with an intellectual disability between 3 and 14 years, and, as the minister said, it has really got two major components: one is to prevent the development of new complex behaviours in children; and secondly, to assist families to respond to managing the existing complex behaviours. As we have trialled it this is part of the rollout of the program to assist families across Victoria.

Mr CLARK — I refer to the fact sheet relating to assisting people with disabilities accompanying the state budget, issued by your department and the statement towards the end of that under the main heading of 'Additional second-year LFS commitments'. LFS, of course, stands Labor's financial statement. In relation to Kew Residential Services, it refers to additional funding having been provided and states that this funding delivers the government's LFS commitment to provide an extra \$3.1 million to the relocation of KRS services over the 2003-04 and 2004-05 budgets. I have had a look at the LFS which is both on the health department web site and, of course, on the ALP web site. I cannot find any express reference to Kew Residential Services in that. Can you point me to where that reference was made in the LFS?

Ms GARBUTT — I do not have those facts with me. I can give you a press release by the Premier announcing it in May 2001; I can show you the election platform where we committed to continue the redevelopment; I will have to get back and look through the LFS and provide that to you, but no doubt it is a commitment.

Mr CLARK — I will look forward to it.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Minister. I thank not only you but also the departmental officials who have accompanied you today and put in an incredible amount of work, so to one and all, thank you.

Mr FORWOOD — Next year, Minister, we are going to extend by an extra half an hour so that we can ask more questions.

The CHAIR — There will be circulated to the minister a copy of the Hansard transcript and any follow-up questions.

Witnesses withdrew.