

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

2021–22 Budget Estimates

Melbourne—Wednesday, 30 June 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr James Newbury

Mr Danny O’Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

WITNESSES

Ms Natalie Hutchins, MP, Minister for Youth Justice,

Ms Rebecca Falkingham, Secretary,

Ms Jodi Henderson, Youth Justice Commissioner, and

Ms Brigid Sunderland, Deputy Secretary, Youth Justice, Department of Justice and Community Safety.

The CHAIR: I declare back open these hearings of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee with Minister Hutchins, this time for consideration of your youth justice portfolio. We again invite you to make a 5-minute presentation, and this will be followed by questions from the committee.

Visual presentation.

Ms HUTCHINS: Thanks, Chair. In getting straight into the youth justice portfolio, we are really focusing our attentions on driving down the number of young people in the system. This has in part led to the 18 per cent decrease in the average number of Aboriginal children, 10 to 17, in youth justice in the 2019–20 year, but also Victoria has had the lowest rate of young people in that age group per 10 000 population in youth justice overall, with the lowest rate of young people under community and custodial supervision combined.

The evidence is strong that most young people grow out of offending behaviour with limited formal intervention from the justice system. I also note that the roles parents and families play to help their children to stop offending behaviour is a very important one. For young people who do come into contact with the justice system, we are focused on early intervention, diversion and meaningful support. In addition to the roles of families, other main responses in the 2019–20 financial year to young people are outlined on the slide. This includes many key diversion services such as the youth support service and the court youth diversion service.

In 2019–20 there was a 3 per cent decrease in the average daily number of young people under community supervision compared to the 2018–19 year, and based on the year-to-date figures for 2020–21 this is projected to decrease by a further 8 per cent. In terms of custody, in 2019–20 there was also a 3 per cent decrease in the average daily number of young people in custody compared to the 2018–19 year. Based on the year-to-date figures for 2020–21 this is expected to decrease around the 12 per cent mark.

In terms of Aboriginal young people aged 10 to 17 under youth justice supervision, we decreased the average number of Aboriginal children, as I said, in youth justice and we are on track to exceed our targets set with the Aboriginal youth justice caucus, aided by \$11.8 million funding through the 2020–21 state budget. We have committed to reducing the average daily number of Aboriginal young people, 10 to 17, under youth justice supervision to 89 by 2022–23. There were 81 Aboriginal young people aged 10 to 17 in youth justice supervision on the average day for 2019–20. We know that there is a lot more work to do, and our expected outcome in the 2020–21 financial year for our new BP3 measure is 18 Aboriginal children, 10 to 17 years old, to be in custody. In recognition of this result, I am further reducing the target range for next year, reflecting more ambition in addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children.

For the small proportion of young people who end up in justice custody, we are focused on providing a safe and stable environment. We have seen signs of stabilisation across the youth justice system in 2019–20, and the investments in 2020–21 and 2022 will help us stay the course. There has been an approximately 40 per cent decrease in category 1 incidents when comparing 2018–19 to 2019–20.

The number of frontline youth justice staff is remaining stable due to the increased recruitment efforts and fewer staff resignations. The number of frontline YJW1 and YJW2 staff increased by 77.5 FTE from 1 July 2019 through to 31 May 2021. This is consistent with the expected FTE figures provided to the committee in the questionnaire that you all have before you. Our youth justice workforce plan was launched earlier this year with a range of initiatives to attract, retain and build the capacity of our youth justice workforce. A range of initiatives were included in that, and really the focus is on how we can help staff address the very, very complex needs of some of the children and young people in custody and working with them to truly rehabilitate them.

That requires support from key professionals, including occupational therapists and psychologists, and investing in professional learnings of our staff.

On slide 4, the budget provides for \$165.1 million funding over four years to improve youth justice services.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Deputy Chair.

Mr RIORDAN: Thanks, Chair. Hi, Minister. I just want to move first to some of the issues at Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre. Minister, budget paper 3, page 89, highlights the youth justice COVID-19 response. Can you tell the committee please how many laptops, iPads and Nintendos have you purchased from that budget line item in response to COVID-19?

Ms HUTCHINS: I might refer the specific detail—I do not have that in my head—to the Commissioner, but I will say there was an investment in these areas during the COVID pandemic in order to keep kids engaged and their mental wellbeing supported and for the delivery of education services as well. But I will pass to the Commissioner of the details.

Mr RIORDAN: Thanks, Commissioner.

Ms HENDERSON: The exact details—I would have to get back to you, Mr Riordan.

Mr RIORDAN: Could you provide that on notice for us?

Ms HENDERSON: I can, but what I can also say is that Parkville College, which is the specialist school that delivers education to our children 52 weeks of the year, six days a week, was a major provider of the laptops to children. They had to be uploaded with educational material when we were unable to have face-to-face delivery, but we did supplement that. Every child gets a laptop around learning when they are in education, and we had to supplement some of that if there was not enough. So I will come back to you with the numbers, but the provision of the laptops is primarily around their education and learning needs.

Mr RIORDAN: And what about the iPads and Nintendos? Are they part of the educational—

Ms HENDERSON: So the iPads are part of the remote access around counselling, Webex court and professional and personal visits. The iPads enable that to occur, so that is separate to the laptops. And then the Nintendos are really just for recreational activity, to keep the children engaged.

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. So has the department treated that education the same as they have in mainstream, where students have taken the laptops when they go home?

Ms HENDERSON: Sometimes they do, Mr Riordan.

Mr RIORDAN: So some of these students or young people discharged have taken this equipment with them.

Ms HENDERSON: Sometimes if they are going on to further education and there is no provision at the TAFE or wherever, they are able to through education.

Mr RIORDAN: So therefore we can assume that there have been more of those items purchased again this year as well as last year?

Ms HENDERSON: Well, we can come back to you with what the numbers are, and I can ask Parkville College: have they provided laptops beyond the scope of a child being released from custody? But also in the community children were requiring to have their educational needs met when they were at home, and that was part of their education, for youth justice children.

Mr RIORDAN: So, Minister, back to you, I guess. In September it was reported that inmates accessed and downloaded pornography. How many times did this occur? And I ask that in line of the reports from corrections staff who said that the kids were smarter than the grown-ups. Another sort of interesting line was:

It is causing frustration among the staff—

having all this technology because, I quote—

how can you police it 24/7.

I would have thought perhaps that was something that the corrections staff would have been specialist at, but what rate of incidents do you have for that?

Ms HUTCHINS: This sort of behaviour is absolutely not tolerated, and it has been investigated. I will throw to the department Secretary to supplement, but certainly this is not the norm, and unfortunately I think the circumstances that led to these young people being able to access internet outside of the norm was due to a maintenance issue where a cable was left available for these kids to be able to then tap into. But there was a full investigation. There have been—

Mr RIORDAN: So the cable was left by corrections staff or—

Ms HUTCHINS: No, by maintenance. There was a full investigation into that, and I know that we have corrected to make sure that that does not happen again.

Mr RIORDAN: Was that an external maintenance provider or internal maintenance provider?

Ms HUTCHINS: It was external, and it was in relation to a TV that was in a recreational area.

Mr RIORDAN: So a TV—

Ms HUTCHINS: A smart TV.

Mr RIORDAN: A smart TV, and it could access the porn as well.

Ms HUTCHINS: Not access the porn but access the internet.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Riordan. Your time has expired. I will pass the call to Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister and departmental team. If I could take you to budget paper 3, page 89, and specifically the output initiative of youth justice community-based diversionary services and opening Cherry Creek, can you outline what investments the government is making in our youth justice services there, helping to support young people turn their lives around and in turn keeping our community safe?

Ms HUTCHINS: Thanks, yes. In the presentation that I gave earlier I did start to refer to the \$165.1 million of funding over four years for our youth justice services, and it is part of the \$1.8 billion investment in the system that we have made since we have come to government. This investment is critical to reforming the youth justice system in line with our 10-year *Youth Justice Strategic Plan*. It is already seeing the benefits of the investment today, as Victoria has the lowest rate of young people aged 10 to 17 per 10 000 population in the youth justice system. The average daily number of Aboriginal children, as I indicated before, between 10 to 17 in youth justice has reduced by 40 per cent when you look at the years 2016 to 2020. There have been 1179 diversions in our Children's Court Youth Diversion Service, with a 95 per cent success rate. Why I mention that is because we know that once young people take the step of offending and being incarcerated for that offence, if we have not done everything as a government to try and divert them from that experience, particularly in their youngest years, then their chances of being in contact with the system down the track are heightened.

So that diversion work is some fantastic work that is happening by the Department of Justice and Community Safety and also the services that we contract and work with as partners out in the community. It is really important that we stay the course with this, and this year's budget continues to deliver core youth justice programs. Work is well underway with the new custodial centre at Cherry Creek; community services such as the after-hours support for young people at risk; the delivery of evidence-based family therapy; and working in local communities to support the diversion of children, particularly working closely with VicPol; and dedicated cultural supports for children and their families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. These are all really important steps for diversion, and of course treatment programs in custody and in the community for children and young people to address the root causes of crime—for many of them that is about addressing

violence, experiences of violence, attitudes towards violence. They are the big challenges that our staff face every day.

Mr MAAS: Thank you. Would you be able to provide the committee with an example of an early intervention or a diversion program that the government is investing in which is producing positive results?

Ms HUTCHINS: There are two key programs that have recently been assessed by the department and have been trialled in detail. The first was delivered by OzChild, and we are investing \$4.3 million into the multisystemic therapy program, which is often referred to in the sector as MST. And also we have been investing around the \$5 million mark in the functional therapy—FFT—program delivered through Anglicare to continue to work with kids with very complex issues and complex needs and utilise the contacts and services that are needed as a holistic wraparound engaging the family. With MST, it does not simply see a young person as an offender or a future offender; it treats them as an individual member of a family and a community and engages clinicians with their families to work on one-on-one time but also family time, and they are visited at least twice a week in the home with that program.

Mr MAAS: Great. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Maas. Mr Hibbins.

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Minister and team, for appearing this afternoon. Budget paper 3, page 9, has \$30.7 million for ‘Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of people in contact with the criminal and youth justice systems’. Now, we know that a relatively small number of children under 14 are held in custody in Victoria—I think it is around 30—and that usually they are held on remand and released without serving any time under sentence and that there is a consensus from many organisations that these children are seriously damaged from this experience. Is any of this funding specifically allocated to children under 14 who we know are particularly damaged from custody and detention in Victoria?

Ms HUTCHINS: Thank you. Yes, a really important question. And we acknowledge and know that the best outcome for young people is to avoid contact with the justice system in the first place, and I do not think any of us want to see kids in custody. But unfortunately I do not have the magic wand to make crime go away within that age group, and at the same time we know that we have got to do better and that evidence and data tell us that the longer children are kept out of the criminal justice system, the less likely that they are to reoffend or escalate their crime long term. And that is why we are tackling the root causes of crime. And we are doing that with our investment in mental health, but we are also doing it through a cross-government range of initiatives in early intervention from the Navigator program in schools and keeping kids connected that way or helping their parents to get a job or certainly supporting them with the outreach services that our youth services provide when they seem to be getting off track.

In terms of our rollout of money in terms of 14 and under, certainly the introduction of the new expanded statewide specialist youth forensic mental health programs will definitely, I think, benefit all young people. And we know that young people are at risk of self-harm and suicide attempts and that certainly every dollar that we are investing in the mental health space with young people in custody and in contact with the justice system will help with the mental health issues and the trauma that has been experienced by some of these young people. I do not know if you want to supplement that?

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks, Minister. I also want to know, in terms of the youth justice portfolio, do you play any role in terms of young people under the age of 14 who have been held in custody? Is there any subsequent monitoring or engagement with their social outcomes, their health, their education once they are no longer in custody?

Ms HUTCHINS: I might ask the Commissioner to supplement the answer on that.

Ms HENDERSON: Yes. Thank you. Generally those children present to us through the community part of youth justice and are often known as part of the multi-agency panels where children are at risk and detected early in terms of leaving school or other risk factors. So the important part of that is that those children are picked up and monitored and supported through either a cultural lens, if they are from CALD backgrounds, or Aboriginal-controlled organisations, and then they can often end up on bail or supervised or intensive bail, where the whole social kind of factors are addressed, whether it is family violence, sexual abuse, drug and

alcohol, mental health. Sadly offending is sort of the end product of usually a combination with those very complex, small amounts of children, and there is a concentrated effort from our whole-agency approach. When they end up in remand then we will often convene a professionals meeting. There is one tomorrow for an 11-year-old child that I am convening to bring all the agencies together to really unpack how a child at 11 ended up being remanded, and that includes NGOs and ourselves and what else can we be doing. So yes, we throw everything at trying to work through this.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. Mr O'Brien.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, all. Commissioner, can I continue on some questions that Mr Riordan was asking, in particular with respect to the youth accessing pornography. Can you advise how many instances did this occur utilising the resources that we referenced earlier—that is, laptops, iPads and other internet-connected devices such as TVs?

Ms HENDERSON: I do not have it with me. It has been subject to an investigation, as the Secretary has indicated, and depending on the availability of the information in that we can come back to you with the specific amounts. It is fair to say, though, that the children were able to access, through that smart TV, sites that were unauthorised or restricted. So yes, they did. But in terms of the exact number I would need to come back to you.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Was it multiple times, though, was your understanding?

Ms HENDERSON: Pardon?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Multiple times?

Ms HENDERSON: It was multiple times, yes, when they were not being supervised.

Mr D O'BRIEN: How many instances of inmates contacting victims of crime occurred using these resources—

Ms HENDERSON: Sorry, what was that?

Mr D O'BRIEN: How many instances were there of inmates contacting victims of crime?

Ms HENDERSON: None.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Zero. So this is in relation to—

Ms HENDERSON: This was contained to one area of one unit at our precinct. It is a very concentrated group of young people where the cabling was enabled and we did not know, and it was very focused just in a small group of children in one of our units. It is not that the whole of the precinct had access to this.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. What about accessing social media?

Ms HENDERSON: I would have to go back and check. I believe there was some access to—

Ms FALKINGHAM: Mr O'Brien, it was mainly YouTube and social media they accessed during that period of time.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Right. Well, the *Herald Sun* reported on 16 September that staff were increasingly concerned about the ability of prisoners to contact the outside world via social media, including victims of their crimes.

Ms FALKINGHAM: Which is why we did a forensic audit, Mr O'Brien, to really understand. We would absolutely make immediate contact if there were any victims who were contacted during that period, but there were not. As the Commissioner has said, it was one unit. It was very contained, and the majority of the time they spent was on looking at things on YouTube and social media. So we spent a lot of time going through all that material. There was a lot of material to unpack to understand and to make sure that we had explored every

single option. We understand that obviously those children had their access taken away, and we interviewed each of those children to understand the motivation and why they had sought that and why they had not reported to their YJ workers that that access was available. So it was a very forensic process.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So that audit is still underway, did you say?

Ms FALKINGHAM: No, that audit was completed.

Mr D O'BRIEN: It is completed? Is it available publicly, or available to the committee?

Ms FALKINGHAM: I can take that on notice for you.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay, thank you. Obviously the request is to have a copy of the report, if we could.

Are you able to advise what games were purchased for Nintendo Switches and at what cost?

Ms HUTCHINS: We do not have the cost—I assume you do not have the cost in your notes—but can I just put into context the question that you are asking. This is in response to us having to isolate young people for very long periods of time to keep them COVID safe, and that is why there was an investment in this sort of gaming product, to keep their mental health stable and to keep them entertained in the very long hours that they were in a cell on their own. I am sure we can provide some further detail around the types of games, and I am sure they were appropriate, but we will come back to you on that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: If we could have a list of the games and what the costs are in total. A table of what was purchased was good. There is no judgement in the question; it is just a question.

Are you able to provide an update on the youth justice worker allegedly caught smuggling pornography into Malmsbury in September 2020? What happened in that situation?

Ms HENDERSON: That staff member was subject to a misconduct investigation. You appreciate I cannot comment any further on the details of that individual, and he is no longer working in the youth justice system.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. That will see me out. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. Ms Richards.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks, Minister and officials, again, for your time this afternoon. I would like to explore the workforce and refer you to budget paper 3, page 89, specifically the youth justice 'Community based diversionary services and opening Cherry Creek' initiative. I am interested in having you outline what initiatives the government is undertaking to ensure that youth justice staff are properly supported in their work. I am conscious we should be very grateful and perhaps again ask you to pass on our appreciation for the important work that they do.

Ms HUTCHINS: As I mentioned before, I actually had the privilege of launching the custodial workforce plan back in January this year, and that plan was really about attracting and recruiting but also stepping up retention, which has been a significant issue in the sector. That includes being able to have flexible work arrangements—they were quite fixed in place before—and comprehensive staff support, including psychological support.

I cannot overemphasise the intensity of the work that was undertaken by our staff at Parkville and Malmsbury during the height of the pandemic, particularly managing COVID-positive prisoners and keeping a high number of them separated and safe and mentally supported. That was a very big challenge, and a very big challenge for the mental health of our professional staff there. But also occupational health and safety we know is an ongoing issue in youth justice. A lot of young offenders come in angry. They come in having experienced physical violence themselves most of their lives—not all of them, but some of them—and they are very difficult to handle. That can result in incidents that our staff face, so this workforce plan is about providing the training and providing the wraparound support to really drive down the injury rate and the stress rate for our workforce. We have also created, or we are in the process of creating, a certificate IV in youth justice, a qualification that will be mandatory for new entry-level staff once this is in place. We are currently out consulting around the content of that. These measures are all designed to attract the best workforce, particularly

ahead of us opening the new Cherry Creek facility, which will help us to implement so many of the recommendations that came out of the youth justice review that we have embedded in our youth justice strategy going forward.

Ms RICHARDS: Okay. Thanks, Minister. So in reference to the \$7 million in funding, I am interested in having an understanding of what that funding is being used for.

Ms HUTCHINS: So the \$7 million that came with the announcement of having a workforce reform strategy that has been put in place is really about attracting and recruiting, and part of our challenge has been attracting and recruiting diverse peoples into those roles and also enhancing the learning and development. As I said, the cert IV is a big step forward—leadership and supervision, giving a career path to our workforce. So many of our workforce in this sector are young—making sure that they see a future for themselves and that they stay around but also giving them the behavioural: how to deal with difficult behaviours in place and having some support specialists located at the sites to give that debrief and support. I mean, the Commissioner here, she deals with this every single day with her workforce, so I am sure she would have a lot more detail to provide—but I think really putting the backing of the funding in with this program so that we can get our workforce retention issues right now across Malmsbury and Parkville in order to expand our program with Cherry Creek into the future.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks, Minister. I have only got a few seconds left, so unless the Commissioner wanted to add anything to it, I will leave it.

Ms HENDERSON: I just probably would like to add that as part of that funding 10 behaviour support specialists have been included in the uplift, and they are specialised staff with social work backgrounds to support our staff on the ground and the complex behaviours of the children—really taking a kind of forensic, evidence-based approach.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks, Commissioner. Thanks again, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Limbrick.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister and team again. I am going to continue on from some questions that my colleague Mr Hibbins was asking about with children under 15 years in custody. I am not trying to speculate too much on future legislation, but there has been talk about the possibility of raising the age of criminal liability. If it was raised to 14, does that mean that the performance measure on page 296 of budget paper 3, so the very first number there, the performance measure ‘Annual daily average number of young people in custody’—would that completely go to zero if that was the case? Or am I misunderstanding that?

Ms HUTCHINS: I think talking about hypotheticals and how they will affect budget measures makes it pretty difficult for me to give you a straight answer about future budgets, but certainly, as we have just said before, having people 14 and under in incarceration is not good for their long-term trajectory. That is why we are working on diversion plans and diversion programs. Of course there has been a conversation around this at a national level amongst all of the attorneys-general, who have been looking at this. I believe WA or Northern Territory have been doing a range of work in this space. Was it WA? WA, yes. But while that national conversation goes on, we are really committed to just trying to drive down the level of offending amongst young people and how it is that we can better engage young people at an earlier age.

I have heard loud and clear from many of my senior police officers that some of our programs need to go lower than the age of 10 in terms of targeting that risk of offending in the community and having young people engaged. We are absolutely seeing a trend of decline—going down—of 10- to 13-year-old cohorts. I think the work that we have been putting in to keeping young people engaged in schools, working with their parents as a whole and also investing in some of our crime prevention strategies out in areas that really need it, whether that is engagement in sport or engagement in some sort of youth service, is probably the most important work we can do for the long term to see our incarceration rates of children declining.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you. Two of the performance measures on this page would appear to me to overlap—the one that I just mentioned, the average daily number of young people in custody under 15 years, and the average daily number of Aboriginal children and young people, 10 to 17 years, in custody. I take it that

is an overlapping group. I suppose what I am trying to get to is: what proportion of that ‘under 15 years’ in the first metric that we are talking about is Aboriginal children?

Ms HUTCHINS: I think there is a recognition by government that in that particular age group there has been an absolute over-representation of Aboriginal children, no doubt about it. It has certainly been fleshed out in the recent report that has been tabled in Parliament by the Aboriginal children’s commissioner and the task force that he worked on—I think it is called *Our Youth, Our Way*—that we do see a concentration of kids in this area. We hear loud and clear through that report just how important it is for us to better get a lens that is on self-determination, that is focused on our Aboriginal community leaders working with us as a justice system to make sure that we get those diversions and those offending opportunities absolutely minimised in community. Did you want to supplement that?

Ms HENDERSON: I can just tell you how many for the year. So in 2019–20 there were 45 unique young people aged 10 to 13 in youth justice, custody and community. The majority were Aboriginal children, and that was 15 of them, so they are over-represented in that vulnerable cohort indeed.

Mr LIMBRICK: All right. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Minister and officials, you did refer before to the Cherry Creek facility, so I think it would be helpful for the committee to explore that further. If we can look at budget paper 4, page 93, could you please explain how the \$419.651 million investment in the new youth justice facility in Cherry Creek will deliver a system that best helps our youth justice staff so they keep safe at work and most effectively rehabilitates our children and young people and also obviously keeps the community safe as well.

Ms HUTCHINS: Thanks. It is an important question and it is a massive investment, there is no doubt about it—\$419 million-plus that is committed to this new facility. It has been an evolving project in that at the time the need for the project was identified—I think it was back in 2017—we were actually in the throes of receiving our report from Armytage-Ogloff around what systematic changes needed to happen across the youth justice system. So in absorbing those recommendations in making plans for a youth justice strategy for the next 10 years, there were quite significant changes that needed to happen around the design and the delivery of Cherry Creek and what it was that it needed to be able to stand up. So the new facility at Cherry Creek is a really important part of us taking on those challenges.

I am really pleased that the work at Cherry Creek was able to continue through the pandemic in terms of the construction and of course a lot of the policy work that complemented that behind the scenes. I was really pleased after we came out of lockdown—I think it was in December last year—to be able to visit the site. The site will give opportunity for around 250 jobs once it is fully operational, but we have seen lots of employment created as well as investment in boosting the local Werribee economy as well. So a safe and secure facility where we can do the real work that we need to do to tackle the root causes of crime and really help those young people turn their lives around and keep our staff as safe as possible—and of course our community—means that we are delivering a state-of-the-art system that will address some of the gaps that we had in the system previously. The design allows for flexibility in accommodation of how we house young people—the young men that will be there, those that are on long-term remand, those that are sentenced—and also basically building all of those services that are needed for those young people to rehabilitate, including new education facilities, new work experience facilities and new standalone mental health facilities as well, which will play a significant role within the precinct.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. And you did refer to COVID-19. I am just wondering: how precisely is the project tracking in terms of what has been physically delivered at the site?

Ms HUTCHINS: As I said, construction is well underway. I think most of the foundations are in place and walls are going up all around the place. There have been about 400 construction workers engaged, and they celebrated just recently the milestone of construction hours being reached at that site. I cannot remember how many hours. Five-hundred thousand hours of construction were reached there. All of the site-wide earthworks have been completed, all of the rock exportation. That was a major issue with the landscape out there. It is quite extraordinary the amount of rock they had to take out to build the foundations. And of course the facility will be standing up 140 beds with, as I said, the intensive intervention unit, specialised health care, an intensive drug

and alcohol rehabilitation unit as well, as well as education and vocational skills facilities there. I am proud to say that at least 90 per cent of the materials used in construction are local, and 15 per cent of the work hours have been going to apprentices and trainees, which was really notable when I visited the site to see all those young people employed.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Commissioner, just on the line of questioning that Mr Limbrick was on earlier, and I thought you might have it in your brief, do have the number of full-time equivalent staff that are in the youth justice Aboriginal focus team, or if not take that on notice?

Ms HENDERSON: I can answer across the spectrum. There are around 20 to 22—

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you.

Ms HENDERSON: being led by an Aboriginal director in our custodial environments—

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you.

Ms HENDERSON: You do not want to talk anymore about it?

Mr NEWBURY: No. Sure. I was just after the number, but you have the number, so thank you.

Ms HENDERSON: Okay. Thank you.

Mr NEWBURY: Minister, how many assaults on staff occurred in the last financial year within the youth justice centres?

Ms HUTCHINS: I am happy to say category 1 assaults were down 34 per cent.

Mr NEWBURY: Beyond category 1?

Ms HUTCHINS: In terms of numbers, just give me a minute. I am not sure I actually have the overall numbers included in my papers. Offences recorded at youth justice centres—these are at December last year at Malmsbury.

Mr NEWBURY: For a six-month period or a 12-month period?

Ms HUTCHINS: That is a 12-month period. At Malmsbury, 173, and at Parkville, 197.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. And that was category 1 or everything?

Ms HUTCHINS: Everything.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Commissioner, are you aware of any instances where staff have refused shifts over fears of personal safety?

Ms HENDERSON: No.

Mr NEWBURY: Minister, the report on government services data shows that the cost of a young person subject to detention-based supervision has increased in Victoria from \$80 000 roughly five years ago to \$165 000 more recently. Why have the costs doubled?

Ms HENDERSON: You are referring to custody or community costs?

Mr NEWBURY: Custody costs—detention-based supervision.

Ms HENDERSON: Yes, so custody costs. It is only slightly out. I will just have to pull it up—

Ms HUTCHINS: I might just jump in and say that obviously the pandemic has played a role in those costs—both the health costs of monitoring particularly young people that were COVID positive, plus all of the testing, but also the mental health needs that needed to be serviced. We actually did a lot of work with Orygen youth mental health in supporting and assessing some of those health needs during that pandemic period when people were in lockdown or were restricted in being able to do their normal day-to-day activities at those sites.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. I note you talked about Cherry Creek previously, and I also jumped ahead in the slides to the slides that we did not get through that were provided to us. Page 93 of budget paper 4 shows a total estimated cost of \$419 million, but the number of beds has dropped from 224 to 140. Why has the total cost increased if the number of beds has almost halved?

Ms HUTCHINS: I think the answer to that lies within the recommendations that we took on board from the review into the youth justice services that was recommended through the Ogloff-Armytage review, which talked about the need to have facilities that are age-based appropriate but also the flexibility to have young people interacting or not interacting, and that means we have had a purpose-built facility like Cherry Creek having to adapt in the time. We also had to ensure that we have got the safety improvements that were recommended by former Commissioner Comrie, who did the work into safer workplaces, and these are some of the recommendations that we have taken on board with the design.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Newbury. Mr Richardson.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Minister, department officials and Commissioner, for joining us this afternoon. Minister, I want to take you to the issue of youth and after-hours service funding, and I refer you to budget paper 3, page 89, specifically the youth justice ‘Community based diversionary services and opening Cherry Creek’ initiative. For the committee’s benefit, can you outline what investments the government is making to ensure young people are properly supported under youth justice supervision, supported in the community, especially after hours?

Ms HUTCHINS: Thanks. This is a really pertinent question for both when we did have COVID lockdown and post, as we recover from COVID. There are a lot of young people, unfortunately, who have become distant and isolated as a result of the pandemic, and we are making sure that we can step up services that involve after hours and weekends, making sure that these young people, when they are in a time of need, are getting the services that they do need. I was happy to announce the \$15.5 million of funding for the Youth Justice Community Support Service. These are intensive supports for young people involved with the youth justice system. It gives after-hours support to them on both legal and administrative matters, and the funding will mean at least 964 young people aged between 10 and 21 will get vital and timely advice and help. I know this will be key for us to continue our diversion success that we have had.

The service has been developed in recognising that young people involved with the youth justice sector present with a range of complex issues. They do not necessarily present during 9-to-5 business hours, and in fact there has been a real need that we have got in our feedback from the services for services on a Friday and Saturday night, particularly late. The service will work with partner organisations in each region to provide a range of services like the intensive casework, integrated access and supported referrals to services like mental health services and housing, training and also transitional housing, which is a really important part of the youth justice sector, and that is that pathway that is desperately needed. I heard a statistic last night: for every one homeless person you see on the street there are probably eight to 10 that you do not see who are couch surfing, who are living in their cars, and unfortunately there are a lot of young people who are living at the edges in those circumstances.

Mr RICHARDSON: Obviously there is a number of service providers involved. I am wondering for the committee’s benefit if you could outline the services and the funding targeted to certain areas.

Ms HUTCHINS: Sure. Youth justice engages with a range of community service organisations to deliver this service in particular. They are the likes of Anglicare; Barwon Child, Youth & Family; Brophy family services; Jesuit Social Services; and Mallee Accommodation and Support Program. Their providers are spread across the state and leverage their local experience in the regions to support and refer young people into the services that are needed. There is really high demand for the after-hours service, and it is important to note that

these services form a really critical component in effective bail and parole planning for young people. The after-hours services supported around 370 unique young people during the 2019–20 financial year. Young people engaged in almost 4000 sessions of after-hours support during that year. So there is a power of work going on. We do not always recognise this great work that happens, but certainly you can point to it when you look at our overall drop in numbers within the custody setting—that this service is absolutely working and is decreasing the risk that young people face.

Mr RICHARDSON: I might leave it there, Minister. Thank you so much.

Ms HUTCHINS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Richardson. That concludes the time we have set aside for the consideration of these estimates with you, Minister. We thank you very much for appearing before the committee in relation to this portfolio. Any questions which were taken on notice will be followed up in writing, and responses will be required within 10 working days of the committee's request.

The committee will now take a short break before moving to consideration of the victim support portfolio with you at 5.30 pm.

Witnesses withdrew.