

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Early Childhood Engagement of CALD Communities

Dandenong—Monday, 2 December 2019

MEMBERS

Ms Natalie Suleyman—Chair

Mr James Newbury—Deputy Chair

Ms Christine Couzens

Ms Emma Kealy

Ms Michaela Settle

Mr David Southwick

Mr Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Ms Tracey Gibson, General Manager, Disability and Mental Health Services (Interim) and Disability and Mental Health Services and Early Learning,

Mr Darren Youngs, Executive Officer, Early Learning, and

Ms Donna Matthews, Area Manager, Early Learning, North West, Uniting Vic.Tas.

The CHAIR: Good afternoon. All evidence taken today by the Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege; therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, these comments may not be protected by this privilege. All evidence given today is recorded by Hansard to my left. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check as soon as it is available. Any transcripts, PowerPoint presentations or handouts will be placed on the Committee's web page as soon as possible. I invite you now to proceed with a brief, and then it will be followed by questions from the Committee. I also take the opportunity to welcome Tracey Gibson, Darren Youngs and Donna Matthews from Uniting Victoria and Tasmania. Thank you.

Ms GIBSON: Thank you very much. First of all I would like to commence by acknowledging our First Peoples as the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear at the hearing on what is a really important topic for enabling Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse children to get the best start in life. In terms of our expertise and our experience, Uniting Victoria Tasmania is a non-profit community services organisation that has worked alongside local communities across Victoria and Tasmania for over 100 years. Our services cover the areas of child and family services, disability, mental health, crisis housing and homelessness, financial wellbeing, alcohol and other drugs, and early learning and development. Uniting supports children and their families, providing early childhood education and family services to strengthen the wellbeing of families and their local communities. We are the largest early learning provider in the state, with 60 early learning services across Victoria and Tasmania. We understand the integral role that early learning can play in enhancing CALD community connectedness, inclusion and sense of belonging.

Giving children the best start to life is at the core of our work. Our early learning, family day care, occasional care, kindergarten, out-of-school-hours care and vacation care services help strengthen families, enabling parents to work while balancing their parenting responsibilities. Our kindergarten inclusion support and preschool field officers provide further support for children with additional needs, promoting and strengthening the best start to learning. The early learning language program funded by the Victorian Government also allows us to deliver language programs at 10 of our kindergartens in the north-west regions of Melbourne at no additional cost to parents. The children learn in another language for up to 3 hours per week, and by encouraging diverse language skills in our kinders we can build stronger local communities and prepare children for a more globalised and connected world.

Our vision for CALD children and families is that they feel empowered to participate fully in the Victorian community. To achieve this, services across the spectrum—from health services, early childhood education and care, early years of schooling and local community programs through to child and family support services—need to be affordable, accessible, inclusive, culturally responsive and family centred. This means providing both accessible and responsive universal services as well as the specialised services tailored to meet the needs of CALD communities. We see continued investment in early learning through recent initiatives such as funded three-year-old kindergarten as central to improving social, educational and economic outcomes for CALD communities.

I am accompanied today by Darren Youngs, who is our new Executive Officer for Early Learning, and Donna Matthews, Area Manager for Early Learning North West. Darren will now summarise our recommendations.

Mr YOUNGS: The recommendations that we make are drawn from our experiences of CALD families who attend the early learning services as well as reflections from our early learning staff. We recommend that the Committee consider the following actions to enhance early childhood engagement for culturally and linguistically diverse families. The first is enhancing inclusion and participation by bringing families together at early learning centres through things like supported playgroups, for example; by utilising community networks and local leadership that promotes early learning; by providing employment pathways and a transition for volunteers into becoming bicultural workers for early learning services; and by supporting community engagement approaches that create more responsive services—for example, our Komak Afghan community support group.

We also see merit in improving community awareness and service navigation. It is not the simplest service sometimes to navigate, so anything we can do that could streamline kindergarten enrolment processes would make life a lot easier for families, especially when they are moving between areas or living in an intersection

between two local government areas which might have—or do have in fact—different processes. Also we are targeting promotion of our early childhood education through translated information, community events, information days and school referrals. We recommend ensuring cultural competency and trauma-informed care, including embedding financial support for cultural activities into the state service agreements, investing in children's language acquisition programs and early childhood settings, increasing training in cultural competency and trauma-informed care and improving oversight and benchmarking of services to drive quality improvements.

As touched on earlier, we also recommend promoting workforce diversity by developing a CALD workforce strategy that expands the bicultural workforce as part of the implementation of three-year-old kindergarten. We recommend improving language service provision, which includes the language services that are currently available, in early learning services to expand that so it is available for all kindergartens and allocating early years budgets for translated resources for children services. We recommend expanding initial investments in service models that improve accessibility and flexibility of universal services for culturally and linguistically diverse families, including flexible programs that build trust and stronger relationships over time—for example, Cradle to Kinder—outreach services and the opportunity for drop-in clinics, integrated services that provide a more holistic form of care and mechanisms that support service collaboration and partnership. Finally, we recommend that all services are equitable and available to all families—for example, increasing their financial subsidies and supports so that all families can receive a service—addressing the unmet demand for kindergarten, and considering practical barriers for families in service planning.

Much of the evidence we provide today is well documented through previous audits and reports. What we need now is genuine government commitment and real investment in implementing the recommendations of this Inquiry. In doing so Victoria continues to demonstrate our capacity as an inclusive and welcoming society that cares equally about all of our children's futures. We now welcome the Committee's questions.

Ms COUZENS: Thank you. We really appreciate your coming along today and giving your time and expertise. We do really appreciate it, so thank you. I have just got a few questions around your recommendations. The CALD workforce diversity strategy—can you give a bit more detail on what that involves? I know you have got some things in there, but does that mean you will encourage people from CALD backgrounds to go to TAFE or enter into some sort of training and be a part of that process? Can you just expand a bit?

Mr YOUNGS: Yes absolutely. The simple answer is: yes, we will. Donna, are you are happy to talk to that a little bit? Thanks.

Ms MATTHEWS: Sure. I actually think that is an excellent idea, so taking it to that next level of the connections that we actually have with families to look at actually supporting them in making decisions about training. We were actually talking about volunteering just this morning and the necessity for that underneath the child care subsidy in regard to the 12 hours of care—being a volunteer or a student and how we can actually facilitate that at Uniting because of the breadth of services that we have. But, yes, the workforce issue is bigger than just bicultural workers. It is a huge issue for Victoria in regard to the three-year-old kindergarten capacity and just generally now. But for bicultural workers we at Uniting have an invitation for all members of our community to apply for positions with us, and we would be seeking people looking at our different communities—we have services in Gippsland, we have services in Wimmera and we have the north-west region. So we would look to what skills those people bring, and part of that would be their culture and their ethnicity and how they actually can share that.

So I think there are some strategies that we need to unpack within our recruitment that would help us as individuals, but across the state I think there needs to be more of a vision about what that can actually look like as we recruit supposedly 6000 more ECT people in the next—what is it?—11 years or eight years or something like that. So we have got the opportunity now to put in some parameters around what that would look like. I do not think it is necessarily going to be easy—I think it will have to be worked out in partnership with the State Government to be able to actually do that—but now is the opportunity to do it, so we need some thought put into what those strategies look like.

Ms COUZENS: I think taking the opportunity to train up some of these people—

Ms MATTHEWS: Yes. So we already grandfather. So with a lot of the service staff that are in place now we would talk to them at their performance development time of the year and talk about, 'Okay, so you've got your diploma in children services. Are you interested in moving forward into early childhood teaching?'. So we would look to those things now. We actually had previously worked in partnership with Practical Outcomes Australia to move our certificate III and diploma workforce into early childhood bachelor of education qualifications. So we still do those types of things, but I think, having sat down and been through this now, there is more that we can actually do with the linkages that Uniting has. So there are some ideas that we are garnering from being here today that we hope that you are also garnering from us.

Ms COUZENS: Fantastic. You talked about the language program. Are you offering English classes that actually bring the CALD community in?

Ms MATTHEWS: Not within the early childhood area, right across Uniting, currently.

Mr YOUNGS: They are not English classes as such—

Ms COUZENS: Yes, I get that. I am asking why, then, are there not English classes that are bringing people in.

Mr YOUNGS: I see, as an avenue for—

Ms COUZENS: Yes, because we have heard from other communities that that is what they do, and it brings mums and their little ones in to, say, a playgroup or a hub, and then they get the benefit of learning about other services.

Ms MATTHEWS: And I think we have a prime opportunity to do that at our Rupert Street service in Collingwood where we are actually at the bottom of the high-rise apartment areas. That is one of the things that, from an operational level, we have been actually talking about: how can we utilise the service outside of hours, and what else can we do, because we have a kindergarten and a long day care service on site. The kindergarten operates only four days a week, so we have a day where something can take place there. Now, the logistics of working that around the regulatory compliance, in regard to who can be on site, is something that we need to look at, but they are the types of things that we are currently looking at, particularly after this focus group opportunity. It has actually led us to think more cleverly about what we can do. So, yes, there are some options there for us to be having English classes, potentially on site.

Ms COUZENS: Yes, and that certainly was not meant as a criticism; it just struck me that there were no English classes, when other services do that to bring people in. That is all.

Ms MATTHEWS: We have a lot of families who work with AMES, so a lot of our families are already students who are attending English classes, and we are facilitating their child care for them. But yes, there is that one step further that we could potentially look at.

Ms COUZENS: Are you running playgroups?

Mr YOUNGS: Some. Some supported playgroups are run, yes.

Ms COUZENS: Are they CALD specific or mainstream?

Mr YOUNGS: I would have to check that. I do not think they are CALD specific.

Ms MATTHEWS: No, I would not think they would be CALD specific. They are the general supported playgroups across the local government area.

Ms COUZENS: How do they operate?

Ms MATTHEWS: I actually am not over this one, but I will go for it. Is it the Gippsland area?

Ms GIBSON: Yes.

Ms MATTHEWS: It would be the local government area, and they would be operating in one of our facilities and supported by a person who would run the group. Gippsland's diversity I am not quite sure of in regard to ethnicity background.

Ms GIBSON: It is not as diverse, perhaps, as in your metro areas. There is a high proportion of children from an Indigenous background, definitely.

Ms MATTHEWS: And we have a couple of programs that are specifically for Indigenous families within that area. But again, because I am north-west, looking at the north-west, for us would also be working with local governments—supported playgroups are already allocated—so that we can look at, okay, we have had this opportunity to really narrow our focus onto CALD families and to actually find some of those strategies falling out of that and what we can do. I think it is important. I think more of us should be looking at it. Yes.

Mr YOUNGS: It is also the sort of thing that, just generally speaking, there is less of now than there used to be. Some of the supported playgroups—they can talk to you—are funded through family services funding. They tend to pick up where, if you have got good relationships with maternal and child health, for example, they might set up a couple of playgroups, but then they will not keep them going after a certain amount of time. They will seed them and then after that hope that the families themselves are functioning in such a way that they keep the group going.

When they know or identify instances where that is less likely to happen, there are usually conversations with the family services team around whether or not they can continue to support it. It is still a reasonably light touch, compared to things, but it is about the organisation, facilitation, the space and so on. That can happen, usually in quite a useful way, but there is a limit to the resourcing and the demands on people's time and how many different things can be operated. I think that there is an enormous amount of space for supported playgroups to be a bigger part of sort of that continuity of support that some families need, but it is quite difficult. Certainly from an early learning perspective, there is not any mechanism to directly fund it, so you have only got those opportunities where organisations like Uniting provide the early learning and also provide the family services where you can help that joining up occur, and you can say, 'Okay, well, we'll support this family to have a relationship with maternal and child health. They'll go through a supported playgroup. Then they can move into one of our long day care or kindergarten services'. But it is sporadic. If you do not happen to be in an area where the same organisation is providing that range of services, you might drop in and out of support at various points in time.

Ms COUZENS: And we have heard particularly from regional and rural communities that playgroups are the key point where CALD communities are actually engaging.

Ms MATTHEWS: Absolutely. It is the connections that are made with that very early stage—MCH is important for that—and I think metropolitan perhaps does not do it as well as rural and remote rural do because of those connections with community.

Ms COUZENS: Yes, could do. How do communities actually access or how do they find out about your services? Is it through the settlement program or other multicultural organisations? How do people actually access your service?

Mr YOUNGS: Any number of ways, like you say. Direct referrals from AMES, from any family service provider. Really any community service organisation would be expected to understand enough about the service system to be able to make the referrals through. And then there is all of the usual sort of advertising that you would expect as well, in the sense of awareness on Facebook, LinkedIn, websites and so on, and we are providing enough information—

Ms COUZENS: Is that done in languages or is it just English?

Mr YOUNGS: It is a work in progress. It is not just in English, but certainly it is not representative enough of the community and the breadth of languages that we hope to have. We are going through a process of updating all of the materials and slowly getting there, to the point where there will be a much better answer to that question in the future. But at this particular point in time it is actually as part of a work plan to upgrade all of that information and keep all our flyers up to date.

Ms MATTHEWS: I guess there is a bigger responsibility also in assisting people to navigate service systems, not only from an organisation's perspective of advertising themselves but also in regard to the broader community—and local schools, because a lot of our core families will arrive with children who go to school and they know, and they value that and they are there at the door. So it is about the school being able to reference back to MCH and being able to reference back to supported playgroups or to the local kindergartens and those types of things, and it is about making connections with leaders and elders in communities—and knowing where the Vietnamese mothers group is and our asylum seeker program mothers group and linking into those so that you have that individualised connection, you build that relationship and you can take a family from the cradle to kinder, even though it is not necessarily in that program.

So for us it is very much about unpacking those relationships and knowing where our communities come from, because it is not about the written document in a lot of instances—in most of them. That is the confusion. So for us we even found with our focus group for this Inquiry that in actual fact we thought we were only going to get a handful of people, and when they started talking to each other we had 12 at the end of the day. So it is about that relationship, and that is where we are spending our time and investing in our staff to make the connections with people and so spread the word.

Ms COUZENS: That is great. You also in your recommendations talked about flexible funding. Can you expand a little bit on that, what you mean by that?

Mr YOUNGS: I guess one of the difficulties is—and this in some ways is not overly unique to this space—what you have is a very specific sort of target or widget or something that is being funded in order to be achieved for the money. While overall you can understand that that is a particularly useful method for government to be able to give money to community organisations to run these sorts of services, it does not allow—or it does not always allow, I should say—for the nuance and the local variation to be had. So if there are reasons why something needs to look a little bit different for a particular group of people or in a particular location, the flexibility often is not there. That could be down to the actual parameters around the funding requirements, or it could just be somewhat the element of some funding being available in certain areas and just not available in other areas. So there might be a situation where we will see demand for a particular level of support being really high in a certain area, but we are funded in a different area and so therefore there is not that flexibility to say, 'Okay, this is where we think the need is greatest'.

We can go into detail specifically if you sort of want to know the different ways in which we are funded for the different services, but as a general statement the greater the flexibility that can be built in, I think, will only allow for more tailored support for CALD communities, because even within a short period of time what a particular community needs can change. You can appreciate that particularly if you have got kids coming through three-year-old kinder or four-year-old kinder, you get a fairly quick change in terms of the sorts of children that might be in that service, so what is needed in one year is not necessarily the same as what is needed in the next, and the way that the Government funds is not necessarily responsive enough to make those changes.

Mr TAK: Donna, you talked about building a sense of belonging; can you elaborate more on that?

Ms MATTHEWS: I think one of the things that we have been focusing on as Uniting, being one voice and uniting, is—and I think it is a well-known fact—relationships are where we are going to get the best bang for our buck to help families, so that sense of connection and that sense of belonging. CALD families do not necessarily feel that when they arrive in our country or even if they have been in our country for a period of time. So for us, even talking about the flexible funding, it is about: how can we spread our dollar to make that connection? Back in the 1980s kindergartens looked very different; it was 50 per cent contact and 50 per cent non-contact. Now I think it is 75 and 25 percent. I was a kindergarten teacher way back. I used to go out on home visits and sit down with families to talk them through the paperwork, talk them through the educational program, make that connection, talk to them about their MCH nurse, talk to them about where they could go for disability services and make those things. Our staff cannot do that now. There is no time for that, and there is no allowance in our funding formula for doing those types of things. So that is where we are trying to burrow down into that and to build those relationships in our long day care services and in our kindergartens in the time that we do have.

So we are trying to think of better use of technologies, better use of group activities, better use of champions from different cultures. Like if you have got a parent who has been at the kinder for two years or whatever and she is a personality who can bring people along, we will ask the person to assist and support us in sitting down with a small group of people and perhaps even translating to move through paperwork. Building in that sense of belonging and that community connection with the kindergarten is one of the first ports of call that people actually make with young children. There are lifelong relationships that people make from kindergartens and long day care settings. It gives them an opportunity to move into the school system and all of those things. I can talk for a very long time, so I will stop now.

Mr TAK: Thank you. And would you suggest that it is better if the staff come from the CALD community itself or if it is better to train the staff that are already working there to understand more the needs of the CALD community?

Ms MATTHEWS: I think there is value in both, and fortunately for us in our Collingwood and Richmond services in particular we have both, so we do see it. We can call on a staff member who is working in the babies' room, swap out the staff and bring somebody down into the kindergarten room to talk through an issue that may be happening for a family there. But that also allows the opportunity for a person who has only English to actually see and learn some of those skills that may be able to assist and support them to do that in the next instance. So whilst you may not be able to speak the language, there is the gesturing, there are the facial expressions and there is the use of whatever language you can, and also acknowledging that some of our families do not write and do not read. It actually is all through verbal and relationships. There is value in both. In the first instance having the language is amazingly and extraordinarily valuable, but in the second instance we have all got to learn to be able to communicate whether or not we share the same first language or not, so there is value in both.

Mr YOUNGS: In addition, if I could just say as well that what we would ideally be hoping for is a workforce that is representative of the population that the kids are coming from, so is not really a case of, 'Oh, yes, we need this particular person for this particular group that is represented'. It comes to your point earlier as well about having that opportunity of even seeing some people in the community and then working on that pathway, because maybe it might seem like a step too far for someone if they see a flyer or an ad or someone saying, 'Hey, have you considered being an early childhood teacher?'. But if they are actually volunteering when they have got their own children in kindergarten and then knowing that they have got something to offer and that is a rewarding experience and it goes well, then you can build on that to sort of say, 'That was some great volunteering. Have you considered doing a cert III or a cert IV? Have you considered doing a diploma?'. And then sort of over time it will hopefully also lead to a better representative workforce of the families that are actually coming to that centre. So I think it is sort of all connected.

Ms COUZENS: But we need to help that happen.

Mr YOUNGS: Yes.

Ms GIBSON: And building the cultural competence of all of our staff is in all of our best interests—not just relying on a few people that might be, like Donna was saying, language competent, but building a better understanding of all of the cultures that people come from actually helps children to integrate better into the program.

The CHAIR: I will just follow up with one question just in relation to cultural diversity and how our workforce needs to better reflect our communities. Our Government has been really good in encouraging and having a very strong stand when it comes to equality and making sure that women are equal in government and also on government boards. What is your view in relation to having—of course considering merit—a quota for diversity in government departments and agencies?

Ms GIBSON: Quotas are an interesting thing.

The CHAIR: Yes, they are. We have seen a positive step in relation to the quota when it comes to affirmative action and increasing women's participation. We have seen an increase in the last six years. There

seems to be still a massive gap, and you cannot be what you cannot see. One suggestion has been having a quota but of course keeping in mind criteria and merit.

Ms GIBSON: It has also got to meet the need of the community. You might have certain quotas, but then you might miss the mark completely, particularly if people are not adequately qualified for the role. I hesitate with quotas, because I have seen how that has not worked for women, particularly on boards. I am on a couple myself where they have just appointed people for the sake of their gender, and then you go, ‘Well, that really didn’t work, because they didn’t have the skill to participate’, and that has kind of worked against us in the end. So I am hesitant about quotas—as long as whatever you are recruiting for meets the need of the community and it is representative of community as well. Particular strategies? I think it is really an assertive outreach to engage with people who might be able to contribute rather than just an ad in a paper. It is a robust conversation with people around truly engaging with them around the value that they think they can actually bring to that platform.

The CHAIR: I suppose it is about whether government needs more scholarships as well, more mentoring and more opportunity for people of multicultural backgrounds, whether it is to get into local government or other agencies and departments. What would be your suggestion, because at the moment it continues to be a challenge?

Ms GIBSON: I certainly think mentoring. It is about identifying those people and then having the conversation and offering the support to them to actually follow through with either the education requirements or the application process. I think having someone walk beside you during those early days really helps. Having sponsorship of someone who is actually already on those committees I think really helps. I was fortunate enough to have that in my very early career. The value of that is great, because it opens doors for people that might not have normally considered that in the past. I am not sure if you have got anything.

Mr YOUNGS: Probably at a broader level but also bringing it back to early learning specifically, what I think also is really useful is valuing that diversity and valuing difference—that sort of thing. For example, there is a program at the moment around language in kindergartens. It is not only about supporting the children to get exposure to and have interest in another language other than predominantly English, but it is also an opportunity for them to understand and learn about another culture and to really appreciate and get a real sort of richness and difference to something that they would have otherwise experienced. So I think there is a lot of merit in that, because it is not only in and of itself a valuable sort of moment for those children to learn or see something different, but it just says that, yes, this society that we live in is made up of so many perspectives and so many different ways of doing things.

I know that it is a very long-term plan for those people, but if you have got children at the age of three and four and five going through an education system that continues to support that difference, eventually when they are in decision-making positions years ahead, they are not thinking, ‘Oh, do we need a certain number of quotas to achieve something from a particular group?’, it is just, ‘That’s normal’. That is the society that they live in; they have been exposed to differences of opinion and different cultural backgrounds for as long as they can remember.

So it is a slightly different way of answering the question, in some ways, but I think that it just brings it back to that there are some really good things that are happening at the moment. So more of that, for example—that being something that is possible for every young person, every child in every kindergarten—would be hugely valuable. At the moment it is for some but not all. That is the sort of thing that I think in the long-term is also going to really help with that.

The CHAIR: Your submission notes that there is unmet demand for kindergarten spaces in areas where there is a high density of culturally diverse children. You also discuss access to early learning programs, in particular in Dandenong. Can you expand on that point?

Mr YOUNGS: The language program that I was just referring to is that same program where there are additional supports put in for—is it five hours a week, Donna?

Ms MATTHEWS: Three hours—

Mr YOUNGS: Three hours.

Ms MATTHEWS: with the language program.

Mr YOUNGS: Three hours of contact time for the language program, so that is something that is providing additional support to kindergartens at the moment in relation to cultural diversity through the lens of differences in language. Sorry, what was the first part of what you said? I think I missed that part of the question.

The CHAIR: Unmet demand for kindergarten spaces in high-density areas such as Dandenong.

Mr YOUNGS: I think that one of the really significant challenges at the moment for the early learning system is that there is a mismatch between where children most need services and where the services are available. In terms of the way that early years is funded, it is actually quite difficult in some instances to make a financially viable service operating in an area that is going to have a lower fee structure. So the more accessible the service can be to families, often the less viable it is to run, so all organisations are having to make decisions about how best to support, for example, the most vulnerable families that Uniting is committed to support whilst also having services that are financially viable. As a result, there ends up being pockets of areas where there are quite a lot of demand but not necessarily the capacity.

Then, layering in additional complexity, things like the actual bricks and mortar—like where these childcare centres are going to be built, the capital improvement dollars that need to go into either upgrading existing services to allow for more spaces or actually completely new builds and so on—there are quite a few layers of barriers that get in the way of meeting demand, and this particular community here in Dandenong is a good example of that.

The CHAIR: We have heard, throughout this Inquiry, about the difficulty and the challenges when it comes to navigating the enrolment process, whether it is IT access, whether it is the complexities of the application form—and the list goes on when it comes to the enrolment process. Do you have any suggestions for how, practically, the process can be streamlined?

Mr YOUNGS: We do see a lot of opportunity. If there were a state-wide approach to enrolments—and there are layers to that—simply, state-wide we could all just be asking for the same information in the same way and have that sort of form and template. Then obviously there are more sophisticated IT things that can go on behind the scenes, but at the very outset there is probably no reason we see why you could not still at least be able to put the local flavour, if you need to, to an enrolment process whilst still having quite a lot of efficiencies to be gained for everybody and simplicity for parents trying to enrol kids in multiple LGAs at the same time.

Ms MATTHEWS: Right from the beginning of registering across local government areas or in central enrolment schemes—so right from the beginning of that to the actual enrolment procedure at the door of the kindergarten—there is the opportunity, we see, for some uniformity in that, whilst carrying the local flavour, as Darren said, and actually making that a much simplified process for families who may be in Mildura one day and in Melbourne the next and enrolling their children. So I think there is a really great opportunity there, an immediate win.

Ms GIBSON: To reduce duplication as well for families.

Ms MATTHEWS: Yes.

The CHAIR: On behalf of the Committee thank you so much for taking the time to provide evidence to the Committee. The next step will be that your evidence today will be part of the deliberations of the Committee. A report will be completed next year, which will be handed down to Government with some strong recommendations. You can keep up-to-date with the progress of the Committee's work by staying tuned to the web page. Again, thank you so much for taking the time to present to us. We have really enjoyed that.

Ms GIBSON: Thanks for the opportunity.

Witnesses withdrew.