

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors

Melbourne—Friday 23 June 2023

MEMBERS

Ella George—Chair

Annabelle Cleeland—Deputy Chair

Chris Couzens

Chris Crewther

Gary Maas

Cindy McLeish

Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Ms Thea Stinear, Chief Executive Officer, and

Ms Naomi Nicholas, Head of Community Engagement, Cool Australia.

The CHAIR: Good afternoon. We will now recommence public hearings of the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee's Inquiry into increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors.

The next witnesses I welcome are from Cool Australia: Thea Stinear, Chief Executive Officer, and Naomi Nicholas, Head of Community Engagement. Thank you very much for joining us today.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live.

While all evidence taken by the Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts and other documents provided to the Committee during the hearing will be published on the Committee's website.

I invite you to now make a brief opening statement of 5 to 10 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from Members. Thank you.

Thea STINEAR: Thank you, Ella. Thank you for having us here today. My name is Thea, and I am a former science teacher. I did a science degree and a diploma of education and got my first job in a Victorian state school and realised quickly that the types of resources provided to me were not the types of resources I wanted to use to teach the children that I was teaching. I just found that they were a little bit out of date, were not contemporary and were not about things that my kids wanted to learn about. That led me on a bit of a quest to find some teaching resources that were curriculum aligned, high quality, evidence based and about real-world, interesting things. I came across the founder of Cool Australia Jason Kimberley at a conference. He had just got back from his trip to Antarctica, where he saw some of the environmental issues that were occurring down there. He came back and spoke to his kids' teachers and said, 'Are teachers equipped?' and, 'Do you have resources to teach about environmental issues?', and they said, 'No, the curriculum's crowded. We're not confident to engage in this stuff. We don't understand the science', and Jase created an online education organisation called Cool Australia, which provided free resources for teachers around environmental issues.

I just thought that was such an amazing thing. This guy that had not come from the education space really saw educators as the catalyst and key to the door to create change around some wider environmental and social issues. So I left the classroom five years later and joined the Cool Australia team, and I have been there for 10 years now.

I think what sets us apart and is special about what we do at Cool Australia is that we create education resources for teachers, which are free—we are a charity with DGR status, a not-for-profit—but they are about complex or tricky topics that kids want to learn about and teachers want to teach but do not feel confident in doing so. We started in that environmental space and moved into the social justice, social issues and financial literacy spaces. Our education model is about marrying these topics to the Australian curriculum, to the syllabus, to the outcomes and to the skills that are mandated by the Australian government and state bodies, but what we do is we work with partners out there who are content specialists and we create resources that are punctuated with this idea that kids can make change and kids can actually be the catalyst for change in their community.

We are very lucky to have a really amazing team at Cool Australia of 20 educators and marketers and digital specialists, and what that has allowed us to do is acquire 175,000 Australian educators who use Cool Australia, who are free members of our platform. During COVID our traffic went up between 300 and 900%, and we acquired 22,000 parents who were interested in getting resources to help them teach their kids. So it is a very special organisation that we have here.

I think the other thing that is important is that we create resources that are curated and co-designed with experts in the field, including psychologists. So if we are creating—and Naomi will talk through the DonateLife resources that we have created in a second—we work with the right people to create a resource that is really trusted and high quality for teachers. That lives on our platform, and the other part of it is that we are a trusted source that teachers come to to find these resources. A big part of education is that just because you build a resource, it does not mean teachers are actually going to use it or find it. So we invest very heavily in getting

these resources into classrooms across Australia through digital marketing. We have got a really great team that measures the downloads and the reach of these resources, which Naomi will talk about in a second.

Naomi NICHOLAS: At Cool we have been working to increase awareness and registrations to donate through education since 2018. Over this time, we have taught 121,000 students about donating and having conversations with family and their community. In 2021 we received a grant under the community awareness grants program that is run by the OTA. This grant was \$50,930, and we created nine lessons covering years 9 and 10—English, health and physical education, civics, science and work studies. We consulted a psychologist that we use regularly—she is contracted on a when-we-need basis—who is a clinical psychologist and practice director. Niclés Bestel is her name. She did a big research piece to start this project off, and she consulted with us throughout the production of the lessons. As Thea said, that is a really important part of our process when dealing with a sensitive topic like this one. And then the grant also covered the production of the lessons and the outreach that Thea spoke about before—communicating that these resources are here to our community of teachers.

To date, having taught with these specific nine lessons that were funded and collaborated on with DonateLife, the reach is—we have taught for this specific project—12,901 students, and the cost per student is \$4. We will be reporting back to DonateLife and OTA in October this year. Through our business insights tool, we can tell how many of those students are from low socio-economic areas and rural, regional and remote areas. Those numbers are: in the low socio-economic schools we have taught 4,250 students; and in the rural, regional and remote schools we have taught 3,190 students.

Prior to working under that grant with DonateLife, we did a more extensive project around a documentary called *Dying to Live*. I am not sure if you guys are aware of that one, but it really beautifully captures the stories and tells the heart of people who have donated and who have received a transplant. It is a really moving documentary and was really helpful to get kids engaged in the conversation. In both of those projects—each of the separate projects—we focused on enabling kids to have the conversation with their families and other people around them that obviously need to know. That has been discussed throughout the course of the day, the importance of letting your intentions be understood. So that was a key focus of both of those projects.

Thea STINEAR: DonateLife Week—teachers love and schools love to get behind R U OK? Day or Tree Day or whatever it might be, and so we focus our marketing efforts around those particular resources so that we can try and get whole-school engagement around the issue for DonateLife Week.

Naomi NICHOLAS: That is what we are up to at this point. When we acquit our grant in October, we hope to continue working with DonateLife potentially –

Thea STINEAR: and continue to get more people to use them.

Naomi NICHOLAS: As Thea said, as a not-for-profit as well, we need to secure funding before we can do further work, but I have highlighted a few ideas that we would like to develop—and there are a few new ones since following today's session.

We could really benefit—it is the whole sector that we are talking about here—from doing some very in-depth research with all the students and teachers that we have engaged in the most recent project, and we would love to create some resources that start a whole-of-school-community conversation. We have done some resources around educating consent, which was a new thing that came through the curriculum of late, and we have got a professional learning course that is directed both at parents and teachers. We have done some resources that make it easier for teachers to engage parents and guardians and get them to the school to do a bit of a workshop before they deliver the curriculum to the kids. It is a really good way of getting everyone on the same page using similar language and all being enabled to have the conversation that we are hoping they will have. We have not scoped out these bits of project; they are just light-bulb ideas at this point.

But we would also like to create specific resources for CALD and First Nations audiences or ensure that the resources are helping to communicate with those cohorts and do a targeted approach in our outreach to get to rural places and schools with high CALD populations of students. This would all require further funding—and also now I have got the tissue bank on my list of ideas, because that was so interesting. The science curriculum linked with encouraging people to donate would just be really interesting.

One other point I was going to make was that—obviously we are an education organisation, so maybe we are not really equipped to provide general ideas—I think it would be worth reducing the minimum age for registration. I know early on today it was discussed that the outcome of that and the efficacy of that is debatable, but I really think that student leadership and student voice can actually make a really impactful change to the narrative. Since it has been highlighted that conversation and awareness is a huge part of it, having younger people be able to at least register their interest and then maybe receive some sort of follow-up email—I think there was some discussion about that before—so that kids not only are enabled to feel like they are acting and helping but can also influence their parents or family members et cetera. Sometimes student voice and power are overlooked, but I think that would be a real improvement. Do you want to add anything, Thea?

Thea STINEAR: No.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you for that excellent opening statement. I will start with two very quick questions. Just with the first question: I am assuming that the educational resources that you have provided for schools—are they an optional add-in to the curriculum.

Thea STINEAR: Yes, so schools and teachers have autonomy to teach topics that they deem appropriate for their children. The government sets the syllabus and the state interprets that syllabus for the teachers to then use, so our resources are not mandated by any government, necessarily, but teachers are out there googling every day, looking for fresh ways to reinvigorate their classrooms and connect with their kids with interesting topics.

The CHAIR: Great. They sound very interesting. I think school has come a long way since I was there. What I just wanted to explore a little bit with you—we heard on Monday from some researchers at La Trobe University who are looking at the opinions and knowledge of young people around organ and tissue donation. I am wondering if you leaned on any research around young people and their views about organ and tissue donation and maybe some of those barriers that they have in their minds about registering to become a donor. I am just wondering if you leaned on any of that research or if you are potentially looking at doing your own.

Thea STINEAR: Yes, we did. Niclés, in the beginning of the report, which we can submit and send through as well—there were young people's views on how to encourage family discussion about organ donation from the University of Queensland and communication prompts about donation, which was the *British Journal of Health Psychology*. So we leaned on some of the research there when we did a lit review. Was that from La Trobe, that research?

Naomi NICHOLAS: Yes.

Thea STINEAR: Yes, and I think it showed that kids want to learn from a trusted adult, like a teacher. We also look at—Mission Australia has some interesting research about what topics kids actually want to learn about to connect into their classroom as well. When we get a project in the beginning, that is what we want to do, and that is why we have worked with DonateLife as well, because they supplied a lot of great information around the conversations and how we do it. That is why we work with a psychologist—to make sure it is age appropriate and suitable and done in a trauma-informed way as well. One big thing that came out of this report was not to shy away from the discussion and use euphemisms and things like that—that kids want to be spoken to in a direct way and a real way. So that informed how we created the resources too.

The CHAIR: Great. I think the Committee would really appreciate you sending through any learnings that you have gathered as a part of your research if that is something you could provide to us.

Naomi NICHOLAS: Sure.

The CHAIR: Over to you, Gary.

Gary MAAS: Thank you, and thanks for a wonderful presentation. I have just one question: why did you target year 9 and year 10 students?

Thea STINEAR: That is a very good question.

Naomi NICHOLAS: It was stated in the grant, pretty much, that that was the target set out by the OTA.

Gary MAAS: But why that target in particular?

Naomi NICHOLAS: I think because of the registering age, but I would have to look back at the grant.

Gary MAAS: Yes, the age of 16 for registering.

Thea STINEAR: Yes. The work we did on *Dying to Live*—we did not have to work to the confines of a grant to get the grant. It was funded by philanthropy, that particular project, and we went down to years 7 and 8. But it is also to do with the curriculum alignment, because organ donation is not part of the curriculum. But what we do at Cool Australia is align it with different areas of the curriculum that it can lend itself to. So for example, those ones we did—civics and citizenship, science obviously has some lovely links, English as well, and health and PE. So it is also guided by the practical elements of how it fits into the curriculum as well.

Gary MAAS: Excellent. Thanks very much.

The CHAIR: Annabelle.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you. I just got confused with two figures you said. 129,000 students you have engaged with about organ donations?

Naomi NICHOLAS: Yes. So that is adding the two. 122,000 –

Annabelle CLEELAND: I had 129,000.

Naomi NICHOLAS: Let me check. 121,000—that is kind of adding the two projects together. So the one with the documentary was 108,000 under the existing project, which was from 2018. That one has had a much longer outreach period of us promoting the lessons to the teachers. And then the one with DonateLife and the OTA, that was commenced in 2021, and that one is currently up to 12,900.

Annabelle CLEELAND: So my question is—let us maybe just focus on the 12,900 students: do you know how many have gone on to register as donors?

Naomi NICHOLAS: No. So we have got the reach and we have got where the schools are located, but it would take that kind of research concept that I mentioned to get that level of information, which we would love to do.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Us too. You need to do it then, because having this education element has come up repeatedly throughout the inquiry—about the awareness and the language as well. How many schools are using your resources in Victoria around just specific organ donations?

Naomi NICHOLAS: I am going to have to come back to you on that.

Annabelle CLEELAND: And my supplement to that question would be: how many are public and how many are independent—the ratio?

Naomi NICHOLAS: Yes. Let me write that down too.

Annabelle CLEELAND: If you do not mind.

Naomi NICHOLAS: Not at all.

Annabelle CLEELAND: So when the grant runs out in October, all of your prior work still is available—it is complete, it is just –

Naomi NICHOLAS: Yes.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Does that mean you kind of do not promote it as much from then on?

Naomi NICHOLAS: We have got DonateLife Week on our permanent calendar of teacher engagement topics, so even when the grant runs out—what we also have been doing for the prior *Dying to Live* doco resources is promoting them with DonateLife Week.

Thea STINEAR: But yes, is the short answer. So in order to promote them we need resources to continue to, you know, fund the marketing and the reporting and all of that stuff. So we will promote them as part of –

Naomi NICHOLAS: Once a year, effectively.

Thea STINEAR: We will promote them once a year, but we would love to do it much more often and get more and more engagement with schools across Australia.

Annabelle CLEELAND: And just finally: when you talk about your in-depth research, have you got any application for a grant or support to quantify the effectiveness of your education in terms of getting the donors in the registry?

Thea STINEAR: Not right now. We would love to. We would be open to discussing that with interested parties. We have done research previously on other projects from different social justice issues. For example, we have got a linkage grant in with Professor Fiona White from Sydney Uni to study our anti-racism resources and the change that we have done. She did *The School That Tried To End Racism* on the ABC. I do not know if anyone saw that. It was really good. Anyway, we have also assessed our education model across time, but we would need more resourcing to answer that question. But it is a really, really interesting and good one that we would be up for.

Naomi NICHOLAS: Just on that point, the efficacy of our resources, we have done independent—well, we did not do it; we asked someone to do independent research. So our pedagogical model is that it is real world and students are encouraged to take action themselves on the topic at hand. And the independent research shows that students are—is it 93%?

Thea STINEAR: Yes, I think it is 93%.

Naomi NICHOLAS: more aware and then 82% more likely to take action on the topic at hand.

Thea STINEAR: Yes.

Naomi NICHOLAS: I think that is about right, right?

Thea STINEAR: Yes.

Naomi NICHOLAS: So we know that our methodology enables students to become change makers and take action on their new knowledge. Maybe I will send that through as well, because I do not think I am quoting it correctly.

Thea STINEAR: Yes, and we can send through perhaps as well, as part of what Ella suggested, what the lessons are about. By their very nature they are about having—like, one is literally called having discussions.

Naomi NICHOLAS: ‘Having the conversation’.

Thea STINEAR: Yes, ‘Having the conversation’.

Naomi NICHOLAS: You might find it interesting, because some of the topics that will come up today are in the lessons, like a debate about the opt-out and the opt-in consent systems.

Thea STINEAR: Which is tied to the English curriculum because, you know, it is a real-world topic that you can tie to the skills of debating and persuasive language and things like that.

Annabelle CLEELAND: I am well beyond my time, but if I can just do my third supplement for the school breakdown. Do you know the demographic of students, whether you have been able to appeal to a variety of different cultural and demographic backgrounds, if possible at all?

Thea STINEAR: Yes. We can add that in. We use the government ICSEA score, which is a level of disadvantage of school, so we can segment the data by that too.

Naomi NICHOLAS: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Cindy.

Cindy McLEISH: I will be very quick. So with the OTA funding that you received, did you receive that because you were looking at different grant sources for different things?

Naomi NICHOLAS: Yes.

Cindy McLEISH: Yes. And you already had the *Dying To Live* –

Naomi NICHOLAS: Yes.

Cindy McLEISH: Yes. So it just was a nice little segue to help grow it.

Naomi NICHOLAS: Yes, exactly.

Cindy McLEISH: Is *Dying To Live* easily available for us to –

Naomi NICHOLAS: Yes, it is free to register on our site and free to download everything, but I can send you the links directly so that it is easier to find.

Cindy McLEISH: That would be good.

Thea STINEAR: And we send the links to the lessons because we take little vignettes and stories and put them as the learning object in the lessons, so kids are watching those beautiful little stories throughout.

Cindy McLEISH: I will commend you for linking science to everything.

Naomi NICHOLAS: Yes, naturally.

Cindy McLEISH: Naturally. Done.

Thea STINEAR: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Cindy. Chris.

Chris CREWOTHER: Thank you. Firstly, thank you very much for your time in giving evidence today and your evidence so far. Having had a look at your website as well, you have obviously got a significant amount of educational resources for preps to grade 10–9 and 10 in particular in this space but across a broad range of different issues as well. Well done on all your work there.

Given your education for this age cohort, do you think that the age should be reduced so that kids can register themselves for organ donations before 16, and/or do you think parents should be able to—obviously in consultation, if it is possible, with their kids—register their kids or, as you used to be able to do, register an intent to register at a future point in time? Do you think this should be expanded upon?

Naomi NICHOLAS: I would like to see it expanded upon. As I said, I probably am not informed enough as to why the decision came to be that it starts at 16 in the first place for them, but I think kids are definitely able to make this decision much, much earlier. Let us say—I do not know—at 12 I think that they could be informed enough to make a choice and register their intent. So I think so. What do you think?

Thea STINEAR: I agree.

Chris CREWOTHER: I guess particularly if the age of criminal responsibility is moving from 10 to 12, if you can have criminal responsibility at 12, then perhaps you should have at least the ability to consider –

Naomi NICHOLAS: Yes, maybe those two ages could come together, you know, at 14 or something.

Chris CREWOTHER: Yes. I am interested as well in your views as to the curriculum we have in schools and what more can be done to ingrain organ and tissue donation encouragement and education about it generally into our curriculum.

Naomi NICHOLAS: I will let you take this one, Thea.

Thea STINEAR: Well, it is interesting that it was removed. You know, it was ingrained and then it was –

Chris CREWOTHER: When was it removed?

Thea STINEAR: I would have to check the dates, but the La Trobe Uni research speaks to that, I believe, Chris. I think the more explicit you can be in the curriculum about important topics, it gives lots of teachers agency to embed them in their classroom. Teachers are a savvy bunch that will find creative ways to be able to teach important issues, because you can still teach what the syllabus says—maths, science, English, arts, whatever—but you can do it through the vehicle of a topic that is super-duper engaging and important to kids. I think it would make it easier and it would connect teachers that perhaps have not thought about this before, but my opinion also is that we have a role to inform teachers about the importance of issues like this too. That is why Cool Australia was born, really. It was to create that blend between curriculum and important social and environmental topics to make it easy for teachers to be able to confidently deliver lessons like this.

Chris CREWOTHER: And so in terms of educating the educators, particularly those who are going through teacher training at the moment and into the future, what more do you think can be done in that space, and what are you doing in that space just to inform us all as well? Do you think that sort of education for teacher training around organ and tissue donation should be a compulsory part of the educators curriculum?

Thea STINEAR: Yes. Well, we actually have two online professional development courses. So in addition to our education lesson plans and units, we provide online professional development courses. We would love funding to do more resources across a wider area of subject areas and professional development courses. But I think there is a lot of work to be done in the teacher education space with universities to inform teachers that they have licence to teach things like this. If we teach them the skills or give them the science, the understanding and the background around topics like this and teach them really great curriculum design, then they can do it with heaps of cohorts of teachers. As a science teacher I saw 150 kids a day, which is an opportunity in every single class to talk about really important issues like this and increase engagement and increase change on important things as well as tick off all of the learning objectives set by the Australian curriculum and state bodies too. So I think, yes, more could be done.

Chris CREWOTHER: I know you have got different programs, such as debating opt-in and opt-out consent systems in English in year 10, for example. Do you get data from that? I imagine all sides of the debate would then come forward, which would perhaps inform our Committee as well. Do you get data or information from that that could be shared with the Committee from those sorts of courses?

Thea STINEAR: No. We would need to do the research, to actually talk to teachers and get some case studies on the learning output and the growth in education. The 50K that we got for that particular project was really for the resource development. But, yes, it would be a great thing to do.

Chris CREWOTHER: Yes. Thank you. That is all.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Chris. Well, thank you very much for appearing before the Committee today and for your contribution to this important inquiry. We really appreciate the time and effort you have taken to be here with us today and share your experiences. Responses to questions taken on notice are requested within two weeks, and questions taken on notice will be provided to you along with transcripts. We will now take a short break before the next witness.

Witnesses withdrew.