

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers**

Melbourne—Wednesday, 4 September 2019

#### **MEMBERS**

Mr John Eren—Chair

Mr Gary Blackwood—Deputy Chair

Ms Juliana Addison

Ms Sarah Connolly

Mr Brad Rowswell

Ms Steph Ryan

Ms Kat Theophanous

#### **WITNESSES**

Ms Leanne Lewis, General Manager, People and Strategy, Sacred Heart Mission;

Ms Joannah Coetzer, HR Operations Manager, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria;

Ms Sue Sealey, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Anglicare Victoria;

Mr Troy Crellin, Program Manager, Social Enterprise Programs Victoria, Mission Australia;

Ms Angela Dapcevic, Head, Employment Services, Uniting Vic.Tas;

Mr Stephen Ward, Executive Director, Education Training and Employment, Jesuit Social Services; and

Ms Melinda Moore, Head of Work, Economic Security and Social Inclusion, Brotherhood of St Laurence.



**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the public hearings for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

All evidence taken by this 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, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. Rebroadcast of the hearing is only permitted in accordance with Legislative Assembly standing order 234. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible.

The forum will run as a question-and-answer session. Due to the number of participants and our time limitations, it will not be possible for everyone to answer each question. We will hear two or three responses and then move to the next question.

The Committee is keen to make sure that all participants have a chance to have a say. If you wish to respond to a question, please raise your hand and wait until invited to speak. Please state your name each time you speak to assist our Hansard reporters. If there are any important points you do not have the opportunity to make at this forum, you are invited to provide the Committee with your additional comments in writing after the hearing, which we will treat as a supplementary submission. Thank you for attending.

**Ms CONNOLLY:** I will kick off. As service providers doing incredible work at the coalface, what is a realistic time frame for you placing a jobseeker facing disadvantage into sustainable employment, and what steps are typically involved?

**Mr CRELLIN:** Programs I work across are Charcoal Lane and Synergy Auto Repairs. For those of you who do not know those programs, Charcoal Lane works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and Synergy Auto Repairs is an automotive program working with young offenders that have been involved in vehicle theft, so we get them to use their dismantling skills for good instead of evil in a paint and panel shop. Really our programs are a six-month program for each, and what we find in that six months is many young people are having the opportunity to address their barriers to employment. Some of our young people at the six-month point are ready to go into employment. You can understand, I guess, that at somewhere like Synergy young people are working under orders. We like to see them complete their orders before they go into sustainable long-term employment.

At Charcoal Lane it is very much the same. What we are really addressing, I guess, is generational trauma for many of the young people we are working with. So in the cases at Synergy, when stealing a car is a good idea things are not going very well for you. At Charcoal Lane we know—we all know—what the challenges of generational unemployment are for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. So it is an opportunity to address those barriers through a dedicated social worker in our environments to support those young people. From an employment perspective, I guess those barriers play out in behaviours such as fight or flight mechanisms that exist and avoidance—these types of behaviours—so we are really trying to address those long-term, systemic barriers for young people.

**Ms MOORE:** It depends, but for us, because we are working with a lot of refugees and asylum seekers, there are multiple barriers, including the language barrier. So it might take up to three years before someone is ready for sustainable employment. It may take longer. Sometimes it could take up to five years because by the time people actually move through a number of maybe community-based language classes and into accredited training, potentially they move into another sort of course that actually gives them some skills for work. Then they may be needing work experience and then they might move into a job. It is a stepping stone process once you are ready for work as well, so it might be that you have a number of shorter term jobs or jobs that do not have very many hours a week until you get into the job that actually sustains you and is long term. So it is a long process for some people.

**Ms DAPCEVIC:** Similar to the Brotherhood of St Laurence with Melinda, what we find is predominantly our programs are working with people with disabilities, so on average we are looking at a 12-month process. Many times in order to speed that process up it is about the work experience and people having the opportunity to test their capacity in a workplace. We can find them sustainable employment, but for those people, although they may feel that their health conditions have been stabilised, many times they become aggravated once they start working, so it is quite episodic. So it would take a good 12 months before people can actually stabilise their conditions and be able to find that employer that can provide that flexibility and nurturing to allow that time to be taken where it is required.

**Ms SEALEY:** Our submission talks about a particular disadvantaged group, and that is young people exiting out-of-home care. We would certainly say that that is a disadvantaged group within all of the disadvantaged groups in many ways. I think much of the research tells us that when young people leave care, they are not ready to leave care, so educationally they are significantly disadvantaged. So we would probably say that, similar to some of the others, significant work needs to be done with that group of young people because the data and the research tells us that they are often young people who end up as long-term unemployed—homelessness, mental health. So I guess we would say there is a particular group that, whilst there are some good services out there, do not hit the mark with all of those young people, but some of the interventions for those young people need to start very early on, in the early years in their out-of-home care, as part of that system to ensure that we have actually got young people exiting that system who are prepared in some ways for the next stage.

**Mr WARD:** Yes, it can take a long time, but it also can sometimes be more quick than that. People can go through all sorts of disadvantage in their life and all sorts of barriers, but with the right support and the right encouragement and the right development of trust, they can actually, quite surprisingly, get into jobs reasonably quickly. People can be quite resilient.

**Mr ROWSWELL:** I will throw another philosophical cat amongst the pigeons if I may, Chair, as usual. I did ask some witnesses yesterday from a philosophical perspective if they thought assisting those who are disadvantaged into stable employment was principally a government role or a service provider role. What is your view on that? Does government have a part in this, and if so, what is that? And do you feel as though you have enough support from government to be able to deliver real outcomes in the light of people who need assistance, or is there a requirement for more?

**Ms COETZER:** We observe that it is quite an isolated impact at the moment in terms of State and Federal Government services not really coming together to create a more positive outcome for individuals. With a lot of the long-term unemployed that we work with, that we support or that we currently host on our work-for-the-dole programs, the observation is that the significant number of services do not link well together to support a successful outcome. So it feels as though it is quite an isolated impact when it comes to State and Commonwealth Governments.

**Mr WARD:** It is not just government and it is not just community service providers, whether they be private or public, and it is not just the individual participant; it is in fact all those—plus it is also the employer, plus it is also community attitudes. I am thinking about community attitudes—I will start with that first. It is about young people with a justice record getting into a job. Sometimes they just need a second chance, and we need to encourage that within the community. We need employers on board, but sometimes employers do not find it too easy to play their role. They are running a business—they have got to produce what they are producing. They have got to build bridges and buildings and so on. When we work with employers, we need to make it easy for them. We are working with a number of employers—basically 450 employers now—but significantly about five or six employers on a new initiative called Out for Good.

What I have been pleasantly surprised by—really pleased with—is the commitment of those employers at the senior management levels, CEO levels and below that, to give people a second chance. But they need to have it made easier. The Jobs Victoria program supports community-based organisations and, I have got to say—I will say it directly—not-for-profit organisations with a focus on the people they are seeking to help rather than the level of the EBITDA. They are the ones that are providing the support and need to provide the support to those participants. The Jobs Victoria program is an essential and very effective mechanism to support all providers. Providers engage with that to develop local solutions for local problems and do it their own particular ways. It

is an important program and an important complement to the Commonwealth program which, as we know, has a number of failings and probably does not support the most disadvantaged Victorians in health services, housing, mental health, drugs and alcohol, and coming out of prisons as well as it could, and that is a major concern for our community but also the government in terms of its expenditures. The Commonwealth scheme is going to be revised in about two years time, but with the last 14 years history of Job Network and jobactive one cannot be too optimistic about whether that is going to meet the needs of Victorians in need and address the needs of Victoria who also undertake services. I hope that answered part of your question.

**Mr ROWSWELL:** So you would advocate for ongoing funding for Jobs Victoria post 2020, which is what it is currently funded up to.

**Mr WARD:** Absolutely. It is incredibly necessary in terms of supporting Victorians, and Victorians in need especially.

**Ms MOORE:** I agree with Steve. I also think that there are sort of mechanisms that we can use on a local level that really enhance the relationships between the levels of government, particularly bringing in local government, and also businesses and service providers. We have some examples of that with our work and learning centres where there are local groups that actually form to support the community service provider and the jobseeker and they are looking at opportunities on a local level. We have got our community investment committees as well, one operating in Hume that does really well in terms of thinking about, ‘What are the opportunities at a local level?’, and also planning for the future. So it is that demand side as well as the supply.

**Ms LEWIS:** We definitely support the ongoing funding for the Jobs Victoria networks. However, our experience working with people experiencing homelessness is that they alone are not adequate to address the needs of that cohort and that they really do need to be complemented with ongoing support, relationship-based support with service providers where there is already a trusted relationship in place. The biggest issue facing our cohort is the lack of job readiness. There is a lot of work that needs to be done to get them even in the ballpark for being ready for a job employment network, and that is despite in our latest client survey over 30% of our clients saying that they are currently looking for work. That is a surprising number.

**The CHAIR:** Just in relation to that, I know that, Stephen, you have mentioned employers, and they are actually doing their bit, but how can the Victorian Government move towards more assisting the employers in their enthusiasm to help out in this area? What can we do as a State Government? And additionally, I know that you work with both State and Federal Government, those two tiers of government, but do you work with local government in any aspect, in any way?

**Mr WARD:** Mainly the support with local government has been their engaging with the community organisations, and they are playing a role in community organisations, making community facilities available for preliminary foundation skills programs. Preliminary foundation skills programs are not only about English language, literacy and numeracy but job readiness. Just one other part of that—I will come back to the employers in a second—the important thing about foundation skills programs and the funding that is provided through the ACFE system, adult, community and further education, and the Learn Locals plays an incredibly important role for people who have been out of education for many years or never had any success in education, left school early, or have come from overseas countries. That provides an entry level where they can achieve success in education, sometimes for the first time. Sometimes that certificate of completing a course is the first time they have been able to show their family they have been successful. So local government helps provide community facilities to enable that to happen for our programs.

In terms of employers, there is a lot of work going on, particularly with the Jobs Victoria providers and also the jobactives because you are working with the employers, but it is often transactional: it is just, ‘Have you got a job? Can you put a person in a job?’. That is not going to work with most disadvantaged people. What we need with those employers is a sense of a time line. If we know six weeks out, eight weeks out, sometimes three months out or 12 months out, that there are vacancies going to be happening, then we can prepare people through the work readiness programs, through, say, hospitality programs specific to those or construction or aged care, for example—specifically for those roles. How do you get employers on board with that? I think there is a lot of appetite for employers to come on board with that but they often do not know where to go to or they have had experience with a jobactive provider which has burnt them, to be frank.

**Mr ROWSWELL:** This goes to Joannah's better connectedness point.

**Mr WARD:** It is better connectedness but it is also the leadership role I think employers and government can play. So there is an initiative that is just recently announced by Minister, Martin Pakula, JobsBank or JobsBank 2, where on that are going to be some key leading employers talking to other employers. Supporting those employers is going to be pretty much an advisory service to say, 'Okay, if you want to do this, this is how you can do it simply and here is who you go to'. So it is a bit about a set of directions. Yes, there is always a need for coordination between governments, but, quite frankly, the jobactives do not have an interest in the people we are talking about, the most disadvantaged really. They might be in the next iteration, but as I said before, I do not hold much hope for that.

**Ms COETZER:** I just wanted to add to that: I absolutely agree. We are intending to host hundreds of work-for-the-dole individuals over the next 12 months, and we currently host just under 200 in Victoria, and it often feels like it is numbers. We met with Commonwealth representatives just last week and provided feedback about that arrangement. It feels like, as the host employer, you actually have to be the proactive party in trying to navigate the minefield of grants and opportunities and traineeships, and so therefore the end result is not leading to employment outcomes for individuals. They are literally being placed into host arrangements because that is the obligation that they might have under Centrelink, and whether that placement is good for that individual or meets their needs or is aligned to their skills and capability, their wants or desires, their mental health requirements, I think that is where there are elements currently lacking. So the collection of government parties, of all participants to support employment outcomes, and the navigation of how to do that for an employer is essential to creating more successful outcomes.

**Ms ADDISON:** Could we have a discussion about social procurement frameworks. We talked yesterday, and one of our witnesses said that sometimes a big construction company will literally ring one of your service providers and go, 'Well, we need this type of person, this type of person, this type of person—could you send them over?'. I am just wondering is that about developing sustainable opportunities and employment opportunities or is that just playing tick a box? So I would be really interested in your experience with employers when it comes to meeting their obligations under the social procurement framework and what could we do better, how could we improve our social procurement framework to support disadvantaged jobseekers?

**Mr CRELLIN:** I have had that experience myself. Look, I guess from our perspective, the social procurement programs, they bring a seat to the table for people that are experiencing disadvantage. It also helps employers. From my experience working with a lot of different communities, my life is enriched by diversity, and I am a better person for those experiences in my life. I feel that social procurement is the first step towards that, so it is helping businesses to work alongside different communities.

The next step beyond that is really helping those leaders in business, and it goes back to your point that you were certainly making before around industry have a role to play here. I can see the Government of Victoria is bringing industry to the table, and really the effectiveness is that the next step is what industry are prepared to do—now they understand working with disadvantage, what they are prepared to do in terms of the next steps. So we are very lucky to have Suncorp as a partner of ours at Synergy Auto Repairs, and I can see their organisation is addressing two major issues that the insurance industry has to manage: one is vehicle theft and the other one is their members have an ageing workforce of 50-plus.

We have young people that want to work in the industry, that love cars, that are 16 to 18 years of age that are effectively able to fill those roles of apprenticeships, so the whole industry looks at our program and kind of goes, 'Oh, this is something that meets our needs as an industry for insurance'. I am hoping that is the thinking through this process as well with organisations as they start to build opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and CALD communities as well.

**Ms MOORE:** From our perspective, the social procurement framework is a game changer really, but it needs employment services like the JVENs and the work and learning centres and other like services to actually play that sort of in-between role between jobseekers and the big companies or the businesses that are seeking to engage with disadvantaged people. It is the start of the road. We are just starting this process and so I think it is a culture change for employers. I think that there are still some employers who are thinking, 'How can I get out of it? How could I shift the targets for disadvantaged people to subcontractors or across tender partners in other

ways', so I think there is an opportunity to actually put in place some sort of regulatory authority or committee that is actually looking at how we are actually measuring those targets and achievements properly so that they do not get lost. But from our perspective it has allowed us to have conversations at a really high level with some of those consortiums about what part we can play, and that has not been possible before. So I see it as a really positive framework but we are at the beginning of the road and I think that we need to be really aware of the pitfalls and act against them.

**Mr WARD:** Just very briefly, we are quite heavily involved in working on social procurement in companies and construction companies with those requirements. Yes, we have had that sort of response on occasion and that still happens on occasion because they ring up and they are seeking a particular person. That is fine. We like to put people into jobs so that works well. But the conversation we would like to have with companies is about that lead time, that pipeline, because then we can develop people. What I found, as I mentioned before, working together with another couple of organisations—YMCA Bridge Project and Goal Indigenous Services—at a higher level is that they are fully committed to it and they are taking up their opportunity and their challenge to include more disadvantaged people in their workforces with quite a lot of passion and enthusiasm, and quite a lot of understanding for the sorts of workplaces they are going to need to provide for that. I suppose one point is that I do not think you can leave it to chance. I think it needs to be led, but I think it needs to be led in such a way that is not necessarily overly compliant but in a way that makes it easy for employers to know who to contact, who to get support on this, who to make it easy. But, as I say, the conversation we have had with employers is they are interested in the pipeline; they accept the pipeline.

The other thing I would say about social procurement is that it is a significant game changer. I absolutely agree with the comment made. It also gives us an historic opportunity, I must say. We have major construction work happening in Victoria for many, many years, potentially 10 years or more. Infrastructure Australia talks about we are only catching up. Well, maybe that is the case so that it is more than 10 years. I think about that and I think about things like the Melbourne Airport Link. The Melbourne Airport Link will go through the western suburbs. What do the western suburbs constitute in terms of the Jesuit Social Services research in terms of dropping off the edge? A high area of social disadvantage. We have an historic opportunity with a 10 or 15-year time frame to change the economic and social opportunities of all those people living in that area. But we have got to do it in a planned and structured way. I was going to say the market is great on some things; it is not so great on other things. We actually have to give it a bit of guidance and help along the way.

**Ms THEOPHANOUS:** We have had some other witnesses comment on the social procurement framework and that within tenders the requirements around social procurement can be quite vague, which allows employers to essentially try to—what you were saying—off-load to other contractors and things like that. Is there value, in your opinion, in making those more explicit for employers?

**Ms MOORE:** Yes. I think that there is value in making them more explicit and tailoring them to the needs of the cohorts that are in a particular local area. As Steve is saying, if we are in the western suburbs, let us tailor the tender or the requirements to meet that or to address that need rather than it being really general and it is not actually sort of addressing the particular local needs.

**Ms DAPCEVIC:** I agree that it needs to be more explicit, and it is twofold. It is also for the employer so we can actually understand who they are looking for, what they are seeking in terms of the attributes, not just in the skill set, so we can better job match with the clients that we do have, particularly when it is people with disability, and that way we can prepare the employer with what that workplace flexibility might look like—the education—because disability awareness training can be very generic and generalised, and we can actually develop tailored support plans for those candidates if we can understand specifically what they are looking for and what type of roles they are seeking to fulfil.

**Mr WARD:** Just very quickly, yes, in the tender phase I can understand it is difficult for employers to be too specific because they do not necessarily know exactly what tender they are going to get approved on. Also, I would be saying, yes, there needs to be more specificity but you would not want to do that at the risk of not bringing the employer along with you. You really have to bring the employer along with you in a common goal to create more opportunities for disadvantaged Victorians and give people out of the justice system a second chance.

**The CHAIR:** Having said that, it is a big contract, and contracts are signed by the State Government and those enterprises. So incorporating certain stringent guidelines in relation to those contracts, it would be worth the while of the employer to actually be mindful of government policies in terms of social procurement as well.

**Mr WARD:** I absolutely agree, and we are finding that is what is happening.

**Mr BLACKWOOD:** Can I go to post-placement support? We have heard a lot about that over the last day or so, and it seems to be pretty critical if we are going to make these programs work. What have you found does work best in your experience with place-based support, both for the worker and also for the employer?

**Ms MOORE:** I think that from the very beginning when you first contact or have contact with the employer you are looking for sort of support across the organisation for the placement of the person, so you really need the leadership in the business to actually be supportive but also you need to find the placement position or the team for the person to be placed into. All of that requires quite a lot of research and conversations with the employer about where best to place the person. Once the person is placed there needs to be ongoing conversations with the leadership of the organisation to make sure that they are happy with the placement or what they are hearing is good, but also there needs to be fieldwork support for that person so that they have someone to go to if they are not feeling comfortable to talk to their boss or their team leader or whoever and that there is an avenue for those messages to actually be fed back to the organisation. We also work on a buddy system. We try to find for the person post placement once they are in the job a buddy, someone who will actually sort of work with them and be the person that they can go to with any questions. But post-placement support can go on for quite a long time. Usually in the sort of first six months it can be quite intense, and the fieldworkers actually visit regularly to make sure that the person is settled and everything is okay. But then after that it can be sort of ongoing field visits or phone calls from the employer or the person. So it is quite an intense process sometimes.

**Mr CRELLIN:** Post-placement support for us can be ongoing for many young people. I guess Charcoal Lane has been around for 10 years. As an example, there are young people from our 2009 program that are tapping back into those supports. So back to Joannah's point, we really rely on other services to support as well so we can remain nimble. So for a young person coming back with mental health needs, our hope is in the time that they are with us we have tapped them into some mental health supports. When you come back to us I will have you engage with Headspace. When you are with us you are working quite well with X. So we are able to kind of make sure that, I guess, young people have the wraparound support and that there are many services working for our candidates in areas that they need. That might be cultural, might be AOD or might be family violence—many areas that you can tap into for support. Rather than that single focus of one person, we see ourselves and our post-placement support as that person to go to, to then bounce back into the other supports.

**Ms SEALEY:** Similar to Troy, we would see for some of the young people in the particular group that we are talking about who are not placed in employment that whilst on one hand they may have elements of job readiness, their significant histories of trauma, abuse and family violence—the reasons that led to them being placed in out-of-home care—are not fixed when they turn 18, when they get a job or when they move through a range of aspects in their lives. So we would certainly see that for the young people that we work with who struggle or who, we might say, fail or do not continue on the pathway, it is, I guess, a lack of support or limited support, because the complexities of those young people and their circumstances mean that they need a lot of intensive wraparound support, because there will be things that will emerge in their lives or their mental health will deteriorate—all those sorts of things. So we would certainly see it as about some of that intensive, wraparound, whole-of-system support too. For those young people it is not solely about gaining employment. That is important, but that is not their sole issue.

**Mr WARD:** Post-placement support is critical, obviously, as we have all said, and it is based on a good relationship between us and the young person—our employment consultant and the young person—but also us and the supervisor of the young person, so we know a problem is occurring or might occur before it happens and we can fix it. Sometimes we cannot fix it, and sometimes we have to take that person out and put them in a new role.

One of the interesting things, though, in terms of the construction sector which comes up in terms of post-placement support is that our Jobs Victoria contracts—and this is where it might need to be looked at—

generally go for about six months. So we provide post-placement support for six months for people we place into work, and generally that is enough. But on construction sites what we are finding is there are peaks and troughs of construction. So what we are very concerned with is that we do not just put a person into a job on a site or on a project that will only last six months. We want to have at least 18 months or two years to give them a good grounding. So we need to look at that ourselves—what the period of post-placement support is and what taking them out of a project and putting them into another project we might need to do—because of the ups and downs of construction projects. And that is going to, I guess, the question about not just maybe working with one company. It may be working with a full consortium with a whole range of works. We have got to be clever about that.

But in terms of post-placement support, it is absolutely critical. I do not know whether I have got the opportunity to do this, but if, Chair, I am able to circulate our *Spring News*, which came out just yesterday, with a focus on employment, education and training and with half-a-dozen case studies which reflect upon the pathways and journeys of some young people and some of the role of post-placement support in that.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. That is great.

**Mr WARD:** I am happy for everyone to have a copy of that.

**Mr ROWSWELL:** Good timing, Stephen! Good timing.

**Mr WARD:** It was very good timing.

**The CHAIR:** Well prepared.

**Mr WARD:** It actually does have an article in there—I might touch on it—about workplace safety. One of the people previously attending in front of you talked about workplace safety and about gender issues. It does also mention our men's project there, which is a major initiative to work with men to address their behaviours towards other men and towards women of course as well. We are working with some employers at the moment, some companies at the moment, to see what we can do in that space with companies as well, and they are also very interested in working with us on that.

**Ms CONNOLLY:** Can I ask something in a different direction? When you deal with women, and probably single mums or women in an environment where there is family violence, what are your thoughts around child care and whether these women are able to access appropriate child care—be it the times, be it the cost? What sort of barrier do you see appropriate child care as being for disadvantaged women?

**Ms MOORE:** I think it is a huge barrier, particularly if women are looking for flexible hours. We have a number of jobseekers who are working in the aged-care environment—that is one of the courses that we provide—and we also have aged-care facilities at the Brotherhood, and so that sort of work that might be good for them is impossible because child care is just not available. Often women are coming to us saying, 'We really only want work between 10 and 2 because that is when the kids are at school', but that then just so totally limits what we can actually provide and find for them. So I think on the issue of child care, it is not affordable for most women workers. There are a whole range of issues that are connected to child care and women being able to access the workforce.

**Ms SEALEY:** We would certainly say again with the [inaudible] group of young people exiting care that many young women have children. What we would see is not only are they disadvantaged because of their care history; they often do not have family supports. They have exited care so they do not have the support of the services previously provided, so they are quite disadvantaged in that way, in that there may be some jobseekers who have family or family supports; they do not have that. So certainly the option of being able to access child care is very significant for them and adds to the challenges that that group of young people or young mums face.

**Ms CONNOLLY:** Would it be true to say then that some of the jobs that women might want to access might be on weekends and not running traditionally Monday to Friday hours?

**Ms SEALEY:** Yes.

**Ms CONNOLLY:** And that is also a significant barrier—that the type of employment they are most suited to would be that sort of weekend work.

**Ms SEALEY:** Yes, it might be hospitality, it might be in those particular areas, but again Saturday nights do not suit a young mum with a baby either. So, yes, we would certainly say that.

**Mr CRELLIN:** I would agree with both those points. Many of the young women that are accessing our services talk about being trapped at home. That is when you really need that access to community and that access to what work can give you—like an outlet really. If you have got a couple of kids under three and you are a young mum and that is what you are managing, you are spending a lot of time in your own head and that is not where we want young people to be.

**Ms LEWIS:** Just in addition to the financial barriers, that are obvious with child care, there is also the impact of gaining employment on somebody's benefits and housing assistance. Our clients describe being caught in a 'poverty trap', where they are seeking to find employment, but if it is not the right job and they fail, if they are not well enough supported, they run the risk of potentially losing their housing that has been hard and long sought.

**Ms ADDISON:** We had Emma King from VCOSS yesterday come and speak to us and she talked about the high number of people who were employed or did have employment who were homeless. Is this something that your organisations are finding as well—that it is not unemployed people only who are homeless; it is actually people who do have some paid work? I was just wondering if you could provide an insight: a lot of people in the community would believe that if you had a job, you would be able to have shelter, and permanent shelter. Why is that such a challenge for people?

**Ms COETZER:** We absolutely see individuals on the street and in boarding houses that will be employed but perhaps on minimum wage and/or on part-time hours. That subsequently has an impact on their affordability to live. We are seeing more and more that there are certainly individuals that we are having to support in terms of material need and other assistance who are in employment but, similar to the speaker prior, are facing underemployment.

**Ms LEWIS:** I just looked at some statistics of our client group to give an example: 14% of our clients have completed university, 17% have a trade and 62% have completed high school. So these are homeless people accessing our meals programs and crisis services—highly employable.

**Mr CRELLIN:** In many cases at Charcoal Lane especially if I look at our last intake of 10 young people, 90%, nine of those young people, are experiencing homelessness. Not aware of what homelessness represented—couch surfing, overcrowding—these are the types of experiences where they become aware of what these challenges are over time in our programs. At Synergy, it is precarious housing. A lot of young people moved out of the justice system, out of the Parkville Youth Justice Precinct, into housing. But again, similar to employment, you are not given and equipped with the skills to be able to manage living alone when you have got homeless family members, so these are the kinds of struggles that young people are facing as well.

**Ms SEALEY:** Similar to I guess what others have said, we know that young people exiting care often are over-represented in the homelessness system, and even young people who have exited care and are doing okay. Certainly in terms of the support that you need, in terms of accommodation—you know, all of the sorts of things you need to set yourself up for employment many of those young people struggle with. So we would certainly have young people who are homeless but working but have those challenges of the very practical things about showering, all of those sorts of things. How do you maintain a job when you are couch surfing at your friend's place and you have had no sleep all night? So it is a vicious cycle for many of those young people as well.

**Ms CONNOLLY:** Can I take the conversation to early intervention for youth that are probably known at school as being high risk. What are your opinions about the careers pathways and helping educate young people, whether they finish school or not, about actual pathways to employment and also services like yours if things start to get really tough—those pathways to employment and support services. Do you think there is an

issue early on at school about careers advisers and educational institutions understanding pathways to employment and what you guys are doing in support services to wrap around some of these kids?

**Mr CRELLIN:** Many of our Synergy students that I can kind of talk to, they are leaving school in year 7, year 8, so they are not engaging in the education system. They are naughty kids, and that is how they are viewed. They are not going to access a teacher. They are not going to access the education system. They do not fit our education system. They fit a TAFE system better. But really by the age of 13 and 14, they have no access to employment, no access to other educational settings unless it is found with them and supported with them. So we are meeting 16-year-olds that have been disengaged and on the wrong side of the school fence for three or four years. You can kind of then start to see how the offending has started: you know, 14-year-olds giving 13-year-olds advice—that is what it kind of comes down to.

**Mr WARD:** I am not sure that it is just a matter of career or even employment pathway advice for young people who are at various stages in school. I think there are a couple of good programs the Government has already put into place, such as Navigator, to help young people stay in school. I think there is a program called Skills First Reconnect, which helps them find other employment pathways. And there are lots of Local Learning and Employment Networks around, which are already in place to do that sort of work. Now, whether more needs to be done, we might have to look at that.

Fundamentally, I think the challenge we have got is a challenge that is the legacy of things that happened in the 70s, 80s and 90s. What I am talking about there is young people who did not want to go on to further education and training; they went and got jobs in apprenticeships or they went and got jobs in factories and the like, so there was a structured system in place for young people who were not necessarily right for or were not interested in the education pathway. The factory jobs have gone, the apprenticeships have gone. All those companies that used to provide all the apprenticeships for the young people to train up for Victoria's workforce—the SECVs, the boards of works and all those sorts of organisation, are all gone. They do not do that anymore. There is a major gap in our system and it has been there for about 30 years. We have got 17 and 18-year-olds. When are they right for some sorts of jobs? Sometimes when they are 20, 21. What do we do with them in that gap? Is there an opportunity—and it is a major challenge for us all—to create a major structured work training opportunity for all those young people who do not go on to other things? I think that is what we have to look at. It is not something that we have wanted to address for the last 30 years, but I think that is where we have got a major gap.

**Mr ROWSWELL:** Compulsory military service, Stephen.

**Mr WARD:** Hey, what? You have got me there. There is something about a structured opportunity, which is an opportunity for young people to go into, which serves the community. So I will pick up on the serving the community. I think what we hear all about from people much, much, much younger than me is they are very concerned with contributing to community, very concerned about helping their community grow and contributing back, of whatever cultural group they are from. Is there an opportunity to provide opportunities where they do give back, whether it is in the metropolitan areas, whether it is in country areas, or whether they actually do go into country areas, remote areas and learn a lot about life and contribute to society? I probably would not go as far as you are suggesting there; I would not go as far as you are suggesting.

**The CHAIR:** We have run out of time. But just quickly, I do not think the Committee would mind, in relation to access to IT, and that just does not mean an iPhone, being on social media, but actually having access to proper internet services, having email, there are some in the community that cannot afford it or do not have access to that. How do you think the State Government can help with that or the Federal Government?

**Ms COETZER:** We have just under 12,000 volunteers in the Society of all demographics and age ranges, but we significantly have issues around technical capability and savviness on IT, and this limits our capability to support those individuals and create more job readiness opportunities for them. In terms of support, funding or some sort of training and development more broadly across the state would benefit certain age groups, particularly those in the 45 to 60 barrier who still want to work and are capable of working but perhaps are being disadvantaged because of their lack of capability or access to technology.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Can I on behalf of the Committee thank you for attending today and providing very important submissions. I want to thank all of you collectively, your great organisations. You are the angels of the community. You provide that service that we desperately need, and I want to thank you on behalf of the Committee.

**Witnesses withdrew.**