

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria

Traralgon – Wednesday 27 March 2024

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WITNESSES

Anthony Rodaughan, College Principal, and

Michael Stubbe, Hands on Learning Program Coordinator, Kurnai College; and

Lisa Vagg, National Partnerships Manager, Hands on Learning, 54 Reasons.

The CHAIR: I would like to welcome everyone back to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee public inquiry into state education in Victoria. I would like to welcome Anthony Rodaughan, Michael Stubbe and Lisa Vagg from the Hands on Learning program and Kurnai College.

Before we proceed I just want to read this information to you. All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same thing, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence given today is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. The transcript will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee website.

Before I ask you to introduce your names, I might just quickly introduce myself. I am Trung Luu, the Chair. My Deputy Chair is Ryan Batchelor on my right. Renee Heath and Melina Bath are with me. Also, we have Dr Sarah Mansfield and Mr Joe McCracken on Zoom.

Welcome. I ask you please for the Hansard record to state your full name and your role in your organisation. Let us go from left to right.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Sure. I am Anthony Rodaughan. I am College Principal at Kurnai College.

Michael STUBBE: I am Michael Stubbe. I am the Coordinator of the Hands on Learning program at Kurnai College.

Lisa VAGG: And I am Lisa Vagg from 54 Reasons, Save the Children, which are the custodians of the Hands on Learning program.

The CHAIR: Welcome, all. I will invite you to make an opening statement about the college.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Sure. Kurnai College is a rather large four-campus college in the Latrobe Valley. We have two year 7 to 10 campuses, a flexible learning campus and a senior campus situated on the side of Fed Uni at Churchill. We probably work in a low socio-economic area with significant disadvantage but have had really pleasing outcomes in recent years.

The CHAIR: Is there anything else that you want to let us know, going into the school, or are there any recommendations or issues that you would like to see?

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Generally?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: As a principal I would say the biggest issue that I need to deal with across our learning community is mental health and wellbeing and the effects of trauma in so many of our families and students. To that end we extend a lot of our resources on programs that support families and students to stay at school. Hands on Learning is one of them. We have established a flexible learning campus, a young mums campus and numerous other initiatives to try to support our families and students that find themselves in difficulty, much of which is connected to poverty – generational poverty – but also mental health.

The CHAIR: Michael, is there anything that you wanted to add?

Michael STUBBE: I have been involved in the Hands on Learning program now for 15 years, and I have felt that over the 15 years that we have made a difference in a lot of the students I have worked with. Again, as Anthony said, there are mental health issues. There is a lot of truancy and behaviour in the classroom is at the high end, but I believe that the Hands on Learning program has really made a difference in helping those students.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Lisa?

Lisa VAGG: I wonder when it is appropriate – I have got a couple of slides to introduce Hands on Learning and how it looks in a school. And I will look to Anthony to acknowledge the local custodians of the lands here, because I am not as familiar.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Certainly. We are gathered on the lands of the Gunnai/Kurnai people, as I know you would understand and probably have already recognised, and acknowledge their elders and thank them for their custodianship of the land and ask that the spirit of the elders and the old people that still live on this land and in this land join us and add their collective wisdom to our work today.

Visual presentation.

Lisa VAGG: Thank you, Anthony. Could we go back one, please? Just the basics: you will have seen the submission, but I want to get you in the mood just quickly for the Hands on Learning background, but then mostly I think we want to hear from Anthony and Michael in terms of on the ground. From our perspective, this year, if we do our maths, it is 25 years ago that Russell Kerr started Hands on Learning in Frankston. Basically, the principal at that time charged him with a group of year 9s who were struggling to engage in the classroom. He took them out to a forest. They built some stick furniture, and he was blown away that they immediately engaged in something that was meaningful and purposeful.

What I want to acknowledge today is this program has grown from Frankston and the south-east – we will get to the numbers in just a moment – because we partner with school leaders and they put their skin in the game. Anthony has been doing it for 15 years with Michael running it, and that is replicated across the state. Students come out of class. They spend one whole day. They get their high-vis gear on, and they go out. I will get Michael to speak to what that looks like at Kurnai, but it is about being in a small team. What you will pick up are the strong relationships in the smaller group and what you are able to do to basically provide the students who might not necessarily always get the chance to shine in a classroom – to give them the chance to show their talents and what they can do. Doing the work that Michael does – I think you will get the gist of it – delivers a sort of a toolkit for their life: the way they communicate, the way they work in a team. All of us know that not all adults are so good at that – if you can get that as early as possible.

If we could go to the next slide – thank you. Just giving you a bit of a taste, you can see that obviously born and bred Victorian innovation is now creeping over the borders, but we are predominantly in Victoria. Two-thirds of the partner schools are in rural and regional, and these guys will attest to how well it works in that kind of a setting. We have gone across to a small number in Catholic predominantly low index of social disadvantage partner schools, and these days a third of the implementations are in primary schools. A few years ago the education department said, ‘What are you doing? You can’t take kids out. They’ll miss literacy and numeracy in primary school. You’re joking!’ We said it is the principals coming to us saying they want to intervene earlier. They are seeing disengagement in 4, 5 and 6, and they want to do something earlier.

Can we go to the next slide? There are four key pillars that Hands on Learning will look like in any setting. The one in the top middle is the Kurnai precinct. The students very much build a place to belong on the school site. Deliberately Hands on Learning is located on the school site because what we want to do is build those skills on the one day in Hands on Learning and then ensure that they are readily translatable back the other four days, and Michael will talk about his work doing that. First of all, we have got to create a place to belong, and I think you will be familiar that 30 per cent of the kids in our schools, PISA is saying, just do not feel like they belong. So we are doing that in this way, and that number has grown quite significantly after the last few years. Then obviously we want to have that small group where you really have the opportunity to build the kinds of relationships that Michael will speak to and work together.

If we keep going: before I alluded to there having to be real, meaty, purposeful, meaningful projects we are on, because that is where the engagement comes and that is what we are missing. Stubbsey, I would say it used to

be pizza ovens were the biggest thing, but gaga pits are huge, which is the top right, and Stubblesy has just built one at Kurnai as well.

Then the last pillar of Hands on Learning – go.

Melina BATH: Gaga pits?

Lisa VAGG: Yes. How would you explain what they do?

Michael STUBBE: It is a gaga ball pit. It is an arena where they have got, like, a volleyball. They hit it with their hand up against the wall, and it reflects and hits a person in the arena on the legs. Then they are out. It is also called poison ball.

Melina BATH: Yes, a gentler version of poison ball.

Michael STUBBE: It is becoming a big thing in schools at the moment. We have been asked to build a couple at different primary schools around the area using our Hands on Learning students.

Lisa VAGG: Thank you for picking that up, because perhaps the most obvious way a student walks taller is when they can see the impact of their work – so, as Stubblesy says, around the school, their own school and then going out in the community. I will just use one example, on the far right again: they are the seats at the footy oval in Corio. It has also been running at Northern Bay in Corio for – I cannot bring that number off the top of my head at the moment – 10-plus years. It is very much that projects also are driven by the students and that opportunity for them to have their voice and agency in what is needed. The team at Northern Bay were saying that when they go to footy on the weekend, the bench seats around the oval are disintegrated. So they partnered with the local Geelong council for the funding, for the materials, and the kids built those seats, so on the weekend mum and dad and everybody else knows the impact that they are having.

What has 54 Reasons, Save the Children, got to do with the show? We were very small. I have been for 15 years banging on about hands-on learning and met Michael way back at the start of that. We were a small not-for-profit. We merged, which is perhaps a misleading term, with Save the Children, because we were a tiny not-for-profit and they were a big NGO. We came under there because they were looking for evidence-based education programs. Basically, I think Michael and Anthony will attest there are lots of people doing things like hands-on learning, individuals in schools, but it is easy to burn out if you are flying solo and working with some of the most challenging students in the school. The difference if you are part of a network – over the 25 years can you imagine the level of materials that we have developed and refined and tested what works and what does not work, and I can go into anything later on that.

The evidence base is crucially important to us. Back in 2012 Deloitte Access Economics did an investigation on basically socio-economic benefits of intervening early to prevent school leaving – I do not think I have to spell them out – across health, welfare, corrections and all sorts of things, the earlier we get in. Most recently Dandolo Partners did an independent assessment. That is what I am highlighting up on the screen. The Kurnai figures are in that. We found that 95 per cent of the students that we have referred into hands-on learning stay at school to finish year 12 – Stubblesy and I were just talking, and he will give you an example of Holly later – or go on to a pathway. I just hope you will bear with it. There is a 3-minute video that is Kurnai, and then I want to hand over to these guys.

Video shown.

Melina BATH: I would give you a round of applause, but –

Lisa VAGG: Well, these guys are the front line.

The CHAIR: Anything else you want to add, gentlemen?

Michael STUBBE: Well, actually that sort of left a bit of a lump in my throat, because that is actually probably about six years old, which you probably would have realised by the young me in that video.

Lisa VAGG: It was only yesterday.

Michael STUBBE: Look at me now. Some of those students I can sort of remember working with the first day they came into Hands on Learning as year 7s, and to see them graduate year 11 and some of them year 12 is, for me, a great outcome. For the school, it is a great outcome. I suppose at the end of the day that is what the Hands on Learning program is all about, trying to get these students that are struggling in the classroom into a program where they can succeed. They come to school every day and want to be at school every day. Part of my role in the program is ensuring that I talk to the students and talk to them about making the right choices and respecting the teachers in the classroom. For me, that is where the real reward lies.

The CHAIR: Anthony.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: I guess things come and go in schools, and you try things. Sometimes you might use them for two or three years. They get a bit tired, and you might change to another program. We were looking for something for some of our disengaging kids, and we found hands-on learning, as I said, 15 years ago. There is no way we could take it out of our school; it is in the DNA of our school now. All of the teachers love it. As well as the break for those kids, that one day a week when they can get out of class and work with Stubbesy and his team, there is also a break for the teacher, because some of those kids are pretty demanding at times. Then there is the other benefit – Stubbesy has this leverage with those kids, and he can pop into class if they are having a bad day and work with them and settle them down or help them make better choices and get them refocused. Those are the benefits of the Hands on Learning program: the work they have done together, the trust that they have built together and the self-esteem they have grown by beautifying our school in lots of areas – saving us money on the lawn mowing too, which is also a bonus. It is something we have stuck to and something that we would not change.

The CHAIR: Thank you for your presentation. I am a big advocate of keeping kids at school. There are a few questions I want to ask in relation to the program itself, both on the vocational lessons and also from a principles point of view. Just on the program itself, we are actually here to make sure education is, overall, for the whole state. Where do you think this program is most appropriate in relation to schools adopting it, and once they adopt it, how do the students take part in the program? Is it on an individual basis? Another question is: how many periods per week does the program run for a student, along with their other studies, other courses and other subjects in the school?

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Sure. Just in terms of schools, I think there is a place for Hands on Learning in any school. There are kids in any school that disengage and do not feel comfortable in the classroom. I think there is room for it anywhere. At our school we run it at both our junior campuses, and we have run it at our third campus in a different format. We have run it for primary schools as well. I think there is a place for it just about everywhere. Stubbesy can talk about how kids get in and out. I think they are referred and have the interview.

Michael STUBBE: As part of the process of getting into Hands on Learning all my referrals come from the learning teachers, then they are referred to me, and we will sit down and have a little interview with the students prior to them coming into the program. During that conversation we talk about why they want to come into Hands on Learning, what some of their behaviours are, what their likes and dislikes are at school. We find a lot of the time that the majority of the students we are working with come from really dysfunctional families. There are single-parent families, a lot of alcohol and drugs in the family. The program for some of the students that I work with becomes a really safe spot at school. On a particular day, my day will start off at quarter to 8 in the morning. I will have the students roll into my classroom, we will sit down and have a coffee or Milo together and we just have a general chat about what they were up to on their weekends, how school is going for them, how their home life is going. It gives me the time to get a better understanding of the student and being able to put things into place for them and talk to them about their behaviours and how important school is. Keep in mind these students are only doing Hands on Learning one day a week, so we have got them basically for the whole day.

Their uniform is a high-vis top, so it is a bit like a workplace situation. We spend a lot of time on occupational health and safety, which is paramount to the program, so they understand when they do use some of the tools we use that it is done in a safe manner, which is great for when they eventually leave school and they get into the workforce: they are up to speed with a lot of the tools we use, so they are not just going into a workplace. It helps build their confidence, so that is a brilliant part of the program. The kids always say – and they said it in the video – that they struggle in the classroom, so when they come into Hands on Learning they feel part of a

program and they want to learn; they want to come to school. We find that some students during a normal week might only attend school one day a week, and that is Hands on Learning. It is great to keep them engaged in that way, and then we can build from that to hopefully engage them back into full-time studies. There are students that are in the program that might come into the program but, after they have been in the program for two or three years, elect to go back to normal classes, which for us, for me, for the school is a green tick. It is great.

The CHAIR: I think it is great and will definitely assist. Obviously, there are a lot of challenges students are experiencing at the moment. I think this will actually help it. I will ask one more question before I pass on to Ryan to ask a question. Regarding funding, how is the program funded? Is it private or is it government?

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Just out of our budget we fund it. Initially when we began it was just Michael, and Michael would work at two campuses because that was the only room we had in our budget to pay for it. Since equity funding has come in it has made it a little easier. We have more discretion and more resources that we can put towards it. Consequently, we have a bigger team and we can offer more places for kids across our college. So yes, it is just out of our general funding.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you. Ryan.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Just a follow-up on that: the extra money that you are getting because of the equity funding model enables you to do these kinds of programs?

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Initially, before equity funding it would have just been whatever we could scrape together, and it would be three days or four days depending on what our budget permitted. Now we have two Hands on Learning leaders like Michael and Wayne and sometimes assistants to work with them, and we can offer it for more days through equity.

Ryan BATCHELOR: The way that funding is structured and allocated gives you the freedom to do that.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: We have to account for it every year in our documents, our AIP and so on. But it is easy to do, and it is certainly easy to justify in terms of the outcomes for the kids and keeping them at school and connected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: And Lisa, would that be a similar experience at other schools?

Lisa VAGG: Anthony's school is reasonably big, and I was just going to say, the testament that he has been for this long putting his own – so he is still within his equity budget. He has got to prioritise what to do with it and is voting, and so are the hundred other principals in Victoria, but some others struggle a bit more. And particularly, you know how I said about the two-thirds rural and regional, so a lot of the smaller schools do genuinely struggle. I suppose I want to just highlight the Hands on Learning model in terms of deliberately the two staff on the ground are employed by the school and that is to make sure that that connection – just exactly what Michael is talking about, how he works with the leaders who refer down, all of that. But I have got more on funding, but I will wait until you –

Ryan BATCHELOR: Everyone has always got more on funding, but I am interested in the dynamics of how funding models do or do not support these types of programs. Is it one of: clearly where there is scale it works well, but where there is not scale, it might be more challenging? Would that be your assessment?

Lisa VAGG: Yes, and I do not want to contradict what Anthony is saying, but I do have to say that a number of other schools struggle. There has also been the mental health menu, which you might be aware of. We applied a couple of times but are not considered to fit that because it is not very easy to identify exactly how much Hands on Learning will cost, because it depends on the qualifications of the staff member in the program and it is modular – the number of days the school elects to run the program – so it does not fit neatly in a box. But we have been very fortunate. There are the schools putting their skin in the game, employing the staff, so it has really grown not in any way from government or departmental support but from the principals investing themselves over that length of time.

Just as a contrast, in Tasmania, we started there with a small number of schools and they saw the results. So the Tasmanian education department – not Victoria, where we were born, but Tasmania – is investing in our support role so that we can grow and support more schools.

Ryan BATCHELOR: So they are regularly funding you for program support, rather than delivery?

Lisa VAGG: Yes, exactly. There is a small kick-starter of \$1000 for tools for the schools, and then they are funding our quality assurance, best practice role and rolling that out over three years. I suppose that will be relevant at some stage. Just so you get the clarity, the schools employ the staff and our support comes from philanthropy, and after 25 years they think that their role is to innovate and refine and test, and then in education, government, you know, so that is what Tasmania has done. Anyway, enough.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Melina.

Melina BATH: Hello. I am jumping in with about 13,000 questions; this is very exciting. First of all, a very basic one: 103 Victorian schools, could you provide to the committee a list of those schools? Is that possible?

Lisa VAGG: Yes, and the very quickest, fastest way is on our website. There is a live link straightaway to the partner locations. I will just say that it keeps changing every moment, and I do not think that I will shock your committee, or definitely not Anthony – staffing is the biggest problem and so programs go on and off hold. But I think it is pretty absolutely mind-blowing that schools are still running Hands on Learning in the current staffing, because you think they straightaway only put it into maths. Anthony, I am just meaning, you know, straight, normal curriculum. I cannot believe how many schools are still running HoL when it is a real struggle – and this is across the four states we work – to staff the program. So, a really good question.

Melina BATH: My second question is about teacher capability and staffing. How do we sustain the Stubbesys, the Michael Stubbes, of the world? Because clearly you are a huge asset, a pivotal asset, and you had another teacher there. How are we, the Victorian education department – is that coming through? How do you sustain that model clearly with the personality and the person so pivotal?

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Yes, well, as an education support worker, Michael – like most of our education support workers, we do not remunerate them anywhere near enough for the valuable work that they do. We do the best we can to keep people like Michael involved.

Melina BATH: So he is not a teacher, he is an education support worker. They are gold. I have been a teacher, and they are absolutely gold.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Yes, absolutely. He left a much higher paying job to come here and do this, but I knew he would be good at it, and that is why way back when I asked him to come. We do not remunerate them enough, but we certainly try to support Michael and his team with professional learning and other supports – going to conferences and all of that. Hands on Learning provides a suite of supports for people like Michael, but with Michael's experience he has tailored the program to twist it and bend it to work for our kids and our community.

Melina BATH: For a sustainable model – and I am not saying anything about your age at all, but there will come a time when you want to continue this program on and Michael might want to take up golf or something in that space – genuinely, how do you continue? Fifteen years it has been going for – how do you continue that on? How do you upskill or identify –

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Michael has an assistant, and we have already identified him to take over from Michael.

Melina BATH: Sure.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: He is, as it turns out, a plumber who broke his foot and cannot walk on roofs anymore, and he is great with kids.

Melina BATH: Fantastic.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: I guess with our community connections, we are always on the lookout to find the right people, because they are gold and they are special people.

Melina BATH: Yes, that is right.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: So when Ryan takes over one day, as a plumber, Hands on Learning might look a bit different.

Melina BATH: It will adapt and change to fit his expertise.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Stubbesy is a gardener and a landscaper, so he does lots of that sort of work.

Melina BATH: Yes, which can be a refresh or a change in direction or an expansion of direction. I will put it in that context. I guess for the other smaller schools that can be a challenge too, so I am interested in how Hands on Learning copes with that or supports that.

Lisa VAGG: Absolutely. And again – exactly what Anthony said about the local community – I just want to emphasise, Melina, that we have got a well-established model and resources and all sorts of things, but nothing matters; unless you get the right person on the ground, that is all peripheral. But once you have got the right person – so when we are talking about Ryan coming on – our team then step in and go through all the induction training and share all of that stuff, so it will lend to the specifics, as Anthony said, of Ryan's new talents. But with the smaller schools, that is why we constantly have schools going on hold until they can find them. And to tell you the truth, it is often easier in rural and regional communities to get somebody in than in the metro areas.

Melina BATH: I know I have run out of time. I want to ask a quick question, Chair; I am just not looking at you so you cannot shut me down. We used to have VCAL, right, and now we have VM in VCE, so vocational major. Are there any crossovers – i.e. can you get credits for your vocational major if you are enrolled in this Hands on Learning? Or would it just complement that program?

Lisa VAGG: More like pre – because it is middle years.

Melina BATH: My other question was on age groups. You said junior campus – is it year 9? What is it, years 8, 9, 10?

Michael STUBBE: Year 10s.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Yes.

Michael STUBBE: Yes, year 10s.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Eights, 9s and 10s.

Melina BATH: Okay. So it could feed into the vocational major.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: It certainly could, and with things like the OH&S work and getting the white card and things like that, there have been things that have been useful.

Michael STUBBE: So with Hands on Learning, as part of their program, each student that comes in at the start of the year will get a folder. We call them portfolios. We run a program called OnGuard training, if you guys have ever heard of that. It is where they will sit down, and it takes, for argument's sake, a cordless drill where they have got to click on the cordless drill and read up on all the safety aspects of the cordless drill. Then at the end of that they will have an exam of around about 10 questions and they gain a little certificate, which again goes into their portfolio. We also do a lot of risk assessment to let the students understand the right PPE that they have got to be wearing when they are using the equipment. Within the program we have found that those students that eventually go off to the senior campus and do the new –

Anthony RODAUGHAN: VM.

Michael STUBBE: VM program, and they have come out of Hands on Learning, they have got a little bit more experience than some of those students that have not.

Melina BATH: It can benefit them.

Michael STUBBE: Yes, absolutely.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Melina. Renee.

Renee HEATH: Thank you. Thanks for the presentation. It is really incredible work you are doing. A couple of questions – there was one of the students that said it has really helped him with his maths skills. Are there mathematical or are there learning outcomes within the program, or is it just things that they sort of learn while they are hands-on learning?

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Stubbesy is the best bloke to answer those.

Michael STUBBE: Yes. With the measurements and that, the hut that you saw up in the photo on the slides we actually built with the kids 14 years ago. It was 2½ years in the making, hence the reason why I have got no hair, but it was a great project. There were a lot of measurements. And if you understand the building trade, when we are talking about materials, everything is sold in measurements – you have 90 by 35 by 2.4 metres long, or 90 by 45, which are structural building timbers and stuff like that, so there is that sort of mathematics. Volumes are used when we are putting down a concrete slab to build a chook house or something like that. So the mathematics is basic building –

Lisa VAGG: But, Stubbesy, could I just say – it is deliberately incidental. We are not doing straight curriculum, because we want to engage them. They want to have that breather from the traditional classroom. So wouldn't you say they will say, 'I can understand the maths here, and in class I' –

Michael STUBBE: Yes.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Stubbesy is an expert. Jai, who said that, is now a chef, by the way. He rang me from Queensland earlier this year to say that he had finished and was working in a restaurant. But Stubbesy was brilliant – one day Jai got kicked out of maths when they were doing decimals, and Stubbesy asked him to measure up a board. And he said, 'Now, you know when you said that was useless, what you were learning around decimals, this is what it's for.' And they ruled out the wood, and he showed him. He said, 'And that's why you're learning it, because it helps you do this,' and made the point. And he does that all the time.

Lisa VAGG: They will just thank him.

Michael STUBBE: I will just carry on. Also, as part of the program, we cook on a daily basis. We share lunch together, and we also make a packet cake mix. Now, we take it for granted that the cake needs 150 ml of milk in the mixture – some of these kids do not know that. So even just doing something as basic as making a cake mix helps them sort of understand measurements.

Renee HEATH: Yes, the practical application.

Michael STUBBE: Later on in life they sort of go home and they leave school, and it is sort of circle of life – they get a job, they find a girlfriend, they get married and stuff like that. And that is the brilliance about it I think. Some of the students that I have worked with over the years, and I have been doing it for 15 years – I am sort of walking down your local shopping complex, and this person comes up to me. They have got a big, long beard, and they go, 'Yay, g'day, Stubbesy.' And I go, 'G'day, how are you?' I have got no idea who they are; they are mature adults – 'I'm such and such,' and I go, 'Yeah.' Over those years I have probably worked with 600 or 700 students, so I have worked with a lot of students in that time.

Renee HEATH: That is fantastic. What percentage of the students are involved in Hands on Learning from the school?

Anthony RODAUGHAN: I guess 30 to 40 at any one time. Each of the campuses have probably 400 kids, so perhaps up to 10 per cent.

Renee HEATH: Great. That is fabulous. And do kids come from other schools to participate in the Hands on Learning program?

Anthony RODAUGHAN: We have reached out to primary schools in the past, but mainly teachers and principals come from other schools to see how Stubbesy runs the show.

Renee HEATH: That is fantastic.

Lisa VAGG: Actually, that is exactly what happens.

Renee HEATH: Sorry about my rapid-fire questions, but do you think that there has been an improvement in mental health outcomes because of using this program?

Michael STUBBE: Absolutely.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Not Stubbesy's, but –

Renee HEATH: Yes, that is right. You have lost your hair. But do the students?

Michael STUBBE: An example I will give you is we had a student that was a year 7 come to school for the very first day and did not want to go to class and so basically for the whole day would stand in front of the library and ignore instructions. Everybody tried to help him out. I saw him standing there one day, and I went and had a chat with him. I said, 'Look, I've been watching you over the last few weeks, and I've noticed you're just standing here all day doing nothing.' I invited him over to Hands on Learning and said, 'Look, we're just about to cook a cake. Do you want to come over and see if it's any good?' I got him into the classroom, and he soon made mateship, friends, with the students who were in the class. They welcomed him into the program, and he then got referred into the program and hence is now in year 9, attending school and attending class every day. He is probably one that really stood out for me that in the initial first few weeks of school was not engaging at all and did not want to be at school. We were able to coax him into coming into the room, and I think he felt safe in that environment. It was not a big classroom; he was working with 10 other pupils in the class.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Stubbesy's room, the hut you saw up there, is a safe place in the college. I mean, over time they have built a beautiful indigenous garden all the way around it and so on, but it is a hive of kids at lunchtime, partly because he gives out Zooper Doopers but also because it is a safe place and a place where they can come and belong, which is one of the principles that Lisa mentioned.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Renee. Sarah and Joe, we are running out of time, but please feel free to ask questions. Feel free, Sarah.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. My only question you skirted around a bit anyway. I am just curious as to whether you feel that a lot of what you do should be standard issue as part of what the Department of Education manages and does.

Anthony RODAUGHAN: I think we talked before: would it fit in any school? It certainly would fit in any school. It would have a different flavour in every school, the flavour that suits that school, but it could be a winner in any school in my experience.

Lisa VAGG: Sarah, that is just a great question. Poor Stubbesy has had a bit of the attention in that we are on the home straight in terms of working and that sort of thing, and I think that is what I really want to emphasise. Like Anthony highlights, we have got the base methodology and the framework. It needs to be tailored to the context of each school. But to keep it going past, that is the role of that central quality assurance. Now the Tasmanian education department has picked that up and is running with that, and I suppose I am pleased that you can see that to keep going we have to keep sharing. Stubbesy just last week I saw at the botanic gardens in Cranbourne with a whole pack of Hands on Learning artisan teachers from the south-east of Melbourne, and you do pick up some ideas from each other, don't you, as well. It is just that side of it. We would love to talk to the education department.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Joe.

Joe McCracken: Thanks very much. Look, I am a big fan of experiential learning models like the one that you have got here, and I congratulate you on the work that you have done. It sounds like you have got some excellent outcomes over the course of the program, and by the sounds of it, it is going from strength to strength. I guess my question was a little bit like Sarah's as well in a sense: what do you think it would take or what sort of evidence base do you think would be needed to justify normalising this in I dare say standardised curriculum across the education system? Obviously I know every school has a different context, but even something like a very basic outline, template, that sort of thing could be crafted in order to say, 'This is something that you might want to model around, putting in your own differences unique to your context.' Is that something that you have given thought to at all, and how might that come about?

Lisa Vagg: Look, Joe, definitely, eyes wide open. We have been trying to bash on the door of the federal government for many years to look at whether they would support it, because we have got basically all of that ready to roll, a quite fine-tuned methodology and framework that has been rigorously tested, so we are ready to go and that can then be tailored to the individual context. It is appetite from department and government, because we need to keep nurturing the multiple Stubbesys in whatever form they take in all of those different schools, so we need that ability to provide the quality assurance. The one thing I would definitely say is schools try all sorts of things, but as Anthony is invested for 15 years, let us go with something that works instead of constantly reinventing the wheel if we have got that evidence base. That is the bit that I find frustrating.

Joe McCracken: Yes, absolutely. What would you recommend to government then, in terms of a change that you would like to see, particularly in your context? Because we are obviously wanting to take evidence and get ideas that we can recommend to government. What would you like to see happen?

Lisa Vagg: Just two parts: that our operation, as I told you, that central support, is sustained, so that government has a fund that could sustain our operation, but that schools then could also be supported – because we are struggling to keep going, we have had to institute a membership model in Victoria only, because every week we get two new schools inquiring. In the other states we are trying to grow – but we are trying to bat them back in Victoria because capacity is full. We had to institute, for Anthony, a membership model where he has to pay, on top of employing the two staff, a membership model. I cannot remember off the top of my head – I can provide those details to the committee – it is scaled for the size of the school. It is a very small nominal amount to support our operation to be able to keep going, because basically philanthropy is propping us up.

Anthony Rodaughan: I think when these programs start in particular is when the support is really required to get them up and going at first. Perhaps a foundation grant to get a school up and going if they have opted to go into Hands on Learning might be something that – and then they would see the value.

Lisa Vagg: Put their toes in, yes. Anthony, that is what they are doing in Tasmania with that kick-start, is that what you mean? Even just the costs of tools and –

Anthony Rodaughan: And perhaps a bit of mentoring, either from another one or perhaps from members of your network.

Joe McCracken: I really appreciate your feedback. The current model for applied learning in Victoria, which I know as the old VCAL, I just do not really think it hits the mark. It is a bit of a cookie-cutter approach, and I think I like your approach a lot more. But anyway, well done on your work and thank you. I have probably run out of time there, Trung, so I will leave it at that.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Joe. Thanks, Sarah. Do you want to quickly wrap up?

Melina Bath: Could I? Thank you very much. We will note your recommendations in your submission, so thank you very much. And also the Dandolo Partners independent analysis – we can click on it and open it, but can you send it to us? Because then is far more official.

Lisa Vagg: Absolutely. Patrick, I will do an attachment and all of that, because that is extensive.

Melina Bath: Thank you. Or if there is an executive summary or a collation of what is in there, maybe that is the request I have, because what we want to understand is the longitudinal benefit. We all talk about kids

refusing to come school and the cost of them going down the wrong path. This program is the right path, from your point of view.

Lisa VAGG: And they have got financial numbers on exactly investing that way.

Melina BATH: Could you give us a trimmed version of it? Thank you, Chair.

Lisa VAGG: Okay, got it.

The CHAIR: Time has now caught up with us. Thank you so much for coming and actually presenting this.

Michael STUBBE: Just one last word: we would like to invite anybody that is sitting here today to call into Kurnai –

Anthony RODAUGHAN: Have some cake.

Michael STUBBE: have some cake. If you ever want to come and have a look at the program that we run, you are quite welcome to come and visit, and we will show you around.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Michael, and I will definitely look at taking up that offer down the track. But I will say thank you so much for coming to present the submission. Being a policeman for the last 28 years and seeing kids dropping out of school, and programs – it is very important. At the moment we have a youth issue relating to crime and stuff, so I think this stuff is a part of it in relation to how we implement and recommend financially keeping it stable and going as the path forward, so I commend you for doing that. Any future information, please forward it to the committee. Again, thank you.

I also want to thank the staff for the last two days for their help in Bairnsdale and here, and I want to thank the Bairnsdale RSL and the Century Inn here in Traralgon. And thank you to all of those who attended in the gallery. It is much appreciated, all the information we gathered this last two days out east here. We will go out west on our next stop and we will get as much information as we can before we go into metro and seek from them. All the submissions will give us enough evidence, or hopefully enough evidence, to make some good recommendations to improve. I am not saying our state education – it is a good system, but we always can do better, and hopefully we will be able to make it better and then encourage kids to continue school and improve their education. Thank you so much for attending.

Committee adjourned.