

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

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

Geelong—Thursday, 24 October 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**

Mr Bill Mithen, Chief Executive Officer, Give Where You Live Foundation; and

Ms Anne O'Brien, Director, G21 Region Opportunities for Work (GROW).

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for being here for this very important inquiry that we have got going. We have been to Ballarat and Bendigo. We intend to go to Shepparton after Geelong, in a couple of weeks time, and then Warragul. We know the regions are very important in terms of what our objectives are as a Committee. We want to thank you at the beginning for being here. I know that you will go a long way to providing some assistance for this Committee in terms of finding some solutions to the problems we are trying to solve.

Before we start I just want to mention that all evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here, but if you repeat that outside, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by parliamentary privilege. 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.

If you could give a presentation, we will then proceed to ask some questions along the way, if that is okay.

**Mr MITHEN:** Sure. I might go first, if that is all right. First of all thanks for the Inquiry and thanks for the opportunity. I think it is really important work, given the challenges that some people face to find jobs. So maybe background is the best thing to do.

I am the CEO of the Give Where You Live Foundation, a 65-year-old organisation in Geelong. It is a bit of an institution in Geelong. We have been around for a long time. It started as the Geelong Community Chest. It was United Way for a long time, and it is now the Give Where You Live Foundation. So our mission has always been around disadvantage, or addressing disadvantage. We like to say nowadays it is increasing economic and social participation. Even though that is a bit wordy and sometimes hard to understand, it is better in some ways than saying 'addressing disadvantage'. We have been a grant-maker for a long time. We always given grants out, but I think over time, for the last five years or so, we have decided that the small amount of money that we provide in grants is never going to change something like entrenched disadvantage or long-term joblessness and we need to use other methods; we need to find different ways, and I think that is across the board. We need to find different ways and different solutions to some of these absolutely intractable and entrenched issues.

So we do other things. One of the other things we do is GROW. I am not going to steal Anne's thunder. Anne is the Director of GROW and works with me at Give Where You Live, so she can talk about GROW. GROW is an important part now of what we do to try and really look at entrenched place-based disadvantage, particularly in the northern suburbs, in the east and a little bit in Colac.

Maybe the best thing to do to describe how we think about disadvantage now and how we go about it is that we produced a theory of change two years—so really a hypothesis of how you go about increasing social and economic participation. There will be a thousand hypotheses around how you do that. This is our hypothesis. Our hypothesis is put simply as a linear equation. You know, the work is not linear, but our linear equation is that if somebody has adequate education and learning—I say 'learning' specifically because 'education' sometimes goes straight to school and 'learning' is a different thing—to hold a sustainable and sustaining job. And they are critical words too, 'sustainable' and 'sustaining'. 'Sustainable' is ongoing; not part-time, not casualised—ongoing. 'Sustaining' means that it pays a living wage; it pays a wage that sustains you and your family. So if there is adequate education to hold a sustaining and sustainable job—and it is not limited by a life crisis, and there are specific life crises that I think we focus on—then we think that economic and social participation should be increased, and that all places should thrive and that all people get to live their best lives.

That is our focus area, and that is our theory of change and how we are now allocating our resources towards those areas. So whether that be grant-making, whether that be influence, whether that be policy work, whether that be through GROW and the GROW initiative—whatever that might be—we are really trying to focus on those three areas. You have got our submission, so I am sure you will ask questions about that, John. That is enough from me.

**The CHAIR:** Anne?

**Ms O'BRIEN:** I have the very fabulous privilege of working at the Give Where You Live Foundation in the G21 region on a strategy that is quite innovative and quite challenging. It really came out of a partnership between Give Where You Live and the G21 Geelong Region Alliance. Both organisations focus on how in this

region, where we have quite a resilient economy, we can have places, for example, Corio and Norlane, where we have some of these social and economic metrics, some of the most disadvantaged places in the state. So that is high levels of unemployment, high levels of disengagement. You have got families with no-one working. You have got high concentrations of public housing of course as well. How do we as a region think about changing that? It is not through lack of trying. Local government, the State Government and the Federal Government are all investing resources and are all trying all sorts of things and delivering a range of programs, and yet still when you look at the census figures over time the measures in places like Corio, Norlane and Whittington, and some smaller places through Colac, were regressing.

Really GROW was born out of that. The Give Where You Live Foundation and the G21 Geelong Region Alliance formed a partnership, and they worked in collaboration with State Government and a whole range of other stakeholders in this region to create a strategy, which is the GROW, being the G21 Region Opportunities for Work; strategy. It is quite an involved strategy, and put very simply it is an economic development approach to address disadvantage. We are focused on creating jobs in this region and making sure that the job opportunities that we create are made available and linked to people from our target communities, being Corio, Norlane, Whittington and places in Colac.

I was thinking about your question, ‘What are the benefits and challenges of a place-based approach?’. Well, GROW is very much a place-based approach. The region is the G21 region, but we are aligning government, businesses of all sizes, community organisations and influential individuals to what we call a common agenda, which is really about addressing place-based disadvantage here in this region—in those places that I have already mentioned. The beauty of a place-based approach is that in this region you can bring people together, people know each other like any other regional centre, and what we are doing is we are saying, ‘All of us—all levels of government, business, philanthropy and community organisations—what are the things we can do in our locus of control, if we focus on this problem of entrenched disadvantage differently, that might have an impact?’.

Really that is the GROW strategy. It uses social procurement and impact investment as job creation levers, but most importantly—and Bill’s favourite analogy is—in this region we have had an umbrella over certain places, and our job is to poke holes in that umbrella and make sure that the economic prosperity coming to this region trickles down. We do that in a whole range of ways. We have over 130, what we call compact signatories. That is an organisation signing on, committing to the principles of GROW and joining our network to work collectively to create place-based change. Really the change we are making is creating as many opportunities as possible for people from Corio, Norlane, Whittington and Colac.

**The CHAIR:** Excellent. The GROW program I am a big fan of it as you both know, and we have invested heavily into GROW as a State Government. We hope that it will be rolled out in other parts of the state as well. Social procurement, as you mentioned, is a lever that Government has at its disposal in terms of the large amounts of money that the Government invests in infrastructure, and therefore you can leverage that in terms of the tendering process in regard to social procurement. Do you think that is working well so far, and what else can the State Government do, and indeed other tiers of government, in terms of social procurement?

**Ms O’BRIEN:** I think we are at the very beginning of creating a learning environment to maximise the benefit of procurement. You are right, State Government is the biggest spender in our region, but we are a fair way yet from making social procurement business as usual. The social procurement framework is an excellent beginning. I think when you look at the framework it talks about direct social procurement strategies, and I think they are becoming well understood.

I think the indirect way is a more complicated way. It is more difficult to measure and it is what we are doing with GROW. So buying directly, for example, from a social enterprise or an Indigenous business is simpler, it is cleaner and you can count the dollars. The GROW philosophy is any enterprise, and the strategy actually says that it is attempting to encourage the private sector to be a deliverer of impact. That is absolutely the framework that we have been building here through the GROW strategy for four years. So, for example, the Chisholm Road project, which is a big build happening right on the doorstep of Corio and Norlane, is the first time that we have had a big strategic project come to the region and put a GROW clause in. Now, everybody is saying, ‘Great. That’s great’. But how do we actually translate that into real impact? At the end of that project will we be able to point to that as a community and say, ‘That was amazing’, because we can see the impact

that that build had for this region? We can see it in Corio and Norlane and we can point to people who actually had opportunities that came out of that. Businesses that are employing people from our community actually got work, and therefore they are able to continue to employ people from those cohorts and to potentially employ more.

I think it is trickier to understand the how. I know from the event that we had last week where we presented to suppliers what the opportunities are that people kept saying, 'But isn't social procurement just buying from a social enterprise or an Indigenous business?'. So we were saying, 'Well, in this region and on this project we hope very much that we will be able to help the supply chain to understand the opportunities that a big project like this has by using for-profit businesses that are already signatories of GROW, for example, who are already employing people from our target communities, who are already making changes in the way they think about employing and are being more inclusive employers. That is part of what we are talking about when we talk about the indirect social procurement approach.

**Mr MITHEN:** Sorry, I meant to say that, yes, GROW has been rolled out in four other regions by the State Government.

**Ms ADDISON:** We were in Bendigo on Tuesday, and they were very excited that GROW is being launched there on Monday night, which is great.

**Mr MITHEN:** Yes, that is right, it is, but I cannot come. Dennis asked me, but I have a board meeting. So, yes, Bendigo, Ballarat, Shepparton and Latrobe Valley have been funded by the State Government, and we have been very generously supported by the Andrews State Government to continue our rollout of GROW as well. I think is an important project and an important initiative. So once again the current State Government has made a huge step in social procurement by producing a policy, and I think it is the first government—certainly in Australia and possibly even in the world; I am not sure about that—to have a social procurement policy. So that to me is a really great step and an amazing step.

I would like to reiterate Anne's comments: I think social procurement more broadly is not just about social enterprises, although it is simple if it is because it is easy to measure. The best example I can give of that is that we have a current business who is a compact signatory, who has signed up to GROW, who has a compact plan and in that compact plan says, 'I'm going to employ 33%, or a third, of my staff from Whittington'. So that is an enormous social impact that that business is specifically making because of its commitment to GROW. This is a for-profit business, but it is making that commitment. My view is that if you make a purchasing decision to go to that business because that business has decided that they are going to employ a third of their staff from Whittington, then that is social procurement, because you are valuing the social impact of your procurement activity as well as obviously the financial impact, being presumably that they give you a good price. That is harder to measure. That is more difficult, but I think more important. I think if social procurement is actually going to achieve the lofty ambitions that we all hope it will, there has got to be a way that we lean into that space a bit more heavily.

On the question on how it could be done better, John, I think it is being done pretty well, but I think how it could be done better is, for me, measuring and monitoring it. The large contracts that happen, and the State Government is obviously the largest contract holder in lots of ways, there is a commitment at the top, but the reality is that you need the commitment at the bottom because the contracts flow down through contract holders, you know, through builders and developers and then subcontractors, and then subcontractors of subcontractors, and then you finally get to the people who are employing people. If it is not flowing all the way through and those subcontractors do not have the same levels of commitment as, say, the person or the entity that is providing the funding—the Government—then you just get a disconnect and you do not actually achieve the results.

So monitoring it all the way through and pushing that intent all the way through all of those contracts to the point where you have got the plasterer, who is employing five people, saying, 'I'm going to put on an apprentice from Norlane', that is kind of the trick, but hard work. That is some of the work we try and do in GROW and some of the work that Anne and her team are doing in being involved in some of those projects to make sure it gets pushed all the way down the line. So I think there are a couple of comments.

**Ms O'BRIEN:** And the risk, I think, that we are grappling with at the moment on some of these projects—we are right in the middle of the Chisholm Road project now and have just had preliminary meetings with John Holland, the successful tenderer, and we are quite excited, but of course—

**Ms ADDISON:** Anne, what is being created at Chisholm Road?

**Mr MITHEN:** A prison.

**Ms ADDISON:** Okay. Right. I was at Marngoneet the other day.

**The CHAIR:** It is a big project.

**Ms O'BRIEN:** Yes. So the risk is that one of the assumptions that the Government contractual clauses require—and it makes sense—is to say, 'Well, if we're spending \$1.2 billion and we're going to put a number of metrics around what, for example, John Holland has to do to deliver social procurement, then we need to be able to measure it'. So when you go to the simplest, most direct way of measuring it you create a policy incentive that does not necessarily achieve the goals that we are wanting to see.

We have taken an approach where we are talking about sustaining and sustainable employment. When we say that, we are talking about a quality career pathway, a job that actually will mean that the person, for example, if they are coming off welfare, is better off, not worse off. Therefore, counting labouring hours onsite at Chisholm Road as a KPI towards a social procurement outcome for a person who might have barriers to work, for us when you think about that, could be problematic. It could be problematic because what we are trying to do is measure the impact of this spend and the benefit, for example, if the person is from Corio or Norlane. But what we might be doing is not rewarding, for example, a business that has offered a sustaining and sustainable employment opportunity. We have got examples. I just have to be careful about business names and things. For example, we are aware of—

**The CHAIR:** So is your concern that when the project is finished, therefore the job is finished so it is not sustainable?

**Ms O'BRIEN:** And even some of the offers on the job might be just short-term, like a labouring position; they might come in and out of work. It is not a permanent position, it is not an ongoing job. But if the KPIs are just measuring hours of work—do you see what I am saying? Whereas what we are saying is if you are an employer—and I am thinking of one in particular; I could think of five—who has been working on being an inclusive employer and has employed 15 people from Corio and Norlane, so from engaging them and partnering with someone like Northern Futures, for example, to make sure that the person is supported to become job ready, is then supported at work and trained and has a feeling of belonging within that employer's business, then actually buying from that business means that they can continue to employ those 15 people who have been trained and kept in work but also new people. As Bill said, if they could also take on an apprentice, for example, that would be great too. But both those things in my mind are social procurement, because you want to reward the businesses that are doing the hard yards and doing the work and creating more inclusive business environments to actually support people to work.

**Ms ADDISON:** Drawing on Bill's linear equation about education and learning to get this sustaining and sustainable employment, how significant has free TAFE been? Has the pick-up been a game changer, or is more work needing to be done in terms of the free TAFE initiative in Geelong?

**Mr MITHEN:** Anne might be able to answer really specifically, but I think free TAFE has been important, really important, and has been a great initiative and valuable to train people who otherwise might not have been able to get that training. I think we have seen, which I am sure you are aware of and have heard, complications around uptake—as in too much uptake and not being able to find the sessional teachers to be able to teach the sessions.

**The CHAIR:** Good problem to have, though.

**Mr MITHEN:** Well, yes, if you are going to have a problem, that is the right problem, and probably one that can be resolved. But that has been a complication, I think. Certainly speaking with people at The Gordon,

that has been a complication for them, as well as, I am sure you have heard, other TAFEs as well. But I think that it is much better having that problem than no-one going to TAFE. You have got people wanting to go to TAFE. You have got people who are wanting to be retrained, and they have got the opportunity to be retrained—or trained, I should say—in the areas in which we know the economy is moving. So that is the hard task. I think the easy task is still a task, but the easy task is to find the people who are going to teach them. But I think that will be resolved. So it has been important, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Anne, do you want to add anything?

**Ms O'BRIEN:** Probably the two observations I would make are, yes, training and education per se is a challenge when it cannot be agile and responsive to the employer needs—that is one of the things that we are finding—and also place-based. When we say place-based, that is TAFE being enabled to actually deliver the training programs in communities. So when we say that, we mean in Corio, in Norlane and in Whittington. That has been a critical factor. I heard Robyn before us talk about place-based solutions in education and training. That has been able to happen. I think Lyn from Northern Futures, you are going to speak to her next, will be able to talk about the importance of being able to provide, in partnership with The Gordon, training in Corio and Norlane and what a critical piece to the puzzle that is.

**Mr MITHEN:** Can I make one more comment on TAFE?

**The CHAIR:** Sure.

**Mr MITHEN:** It might come up later, so maybe I am pre-empting something, but TAFE has been important, but what we also know with long-term jobseekers and disadvantaged jobseekers is that pre-TAFE work is equally as important—and in fact in some instances more important. So it is really the pre-work. In many instances there is a lot of pre-work that needs to go into helping and supporting some people. It is not accredited. It is not training as TAFE training—it is certainly not accredited—but it is time-consuming and challenging. So the free TAFE has been a really great initiative for people with enough self-agency to take free TAFE up, but there is a fairly large cohort, and frankly probably the cohort this Inquiry is looking at, of people who do not have that self-agency and are not able to take that offer up as best as they can.

**Ms RYAN:** Do you have any sense of how many participants within the free TAFE program would actually be disadvantaged jobseekers?

**Mr MITHEN:** I do not, no. That is not something I would have. There would be others in the region, maybe who you are going to speak to, who probably would. Certainly from our region The Gordon would likely have those sorts of figures.

**Ms RYAN:** And in terms of the list of courses, do you feel that that has been flexible enough to actually meet the skill shortages in the region? Is there a good match between skill shortages for Geelong and the list of courses on offer?

**Mr MITHEN:** I think so, yes. I think the courses have been looked at and reviewed in line with the areas of employment that are growing. So in this region, health and community services is really large and now almost the largest. Courses within that sphere are being provided, as well as others.

We have certainly gone away from having courses that are—I probably should not pick one out because that would not be fair—

**The CHAIR:** No, that is all right.

**Ms RYAN:** Basketweaving.

**Mr MITHEN:** Yes, basketweaving. Is there such a course?

**Ms RYAN:** There is in Balmain, apparently.

**Mr MITHEN:** Is there, basketweaving?

**Ms RYAN:** The basketweavers of Balmain—wasn't that a political statement?

**Mr MITHEN:** The basketweavers of Balmain. Who knew?

**Ms RYAN:** By Paul Keating, or somebody?

**Mr MITHEN:** Yes, maybe. I do not know many basketweavers, but I am sure they are playing an important role. I think we have gone away from those courses, those types of courses where there really is not a pipeline of jobs coming at them. I think the free TAFE courses have matched the right sort of industry sectors. That is from my perspective.

**Ms O'BRIEN:** Not so in Colac. The Give Where You Live Foundation have partnered with Jobs Victoria to deliver a pilot improving sort of program to engage industry there to employ people from their most disadvantaged cohorts. So we have got a Jobs Victoria mentor there, and we have learned a lot about barriers and enablers to work, we have learned a lot about sustaining and sustainable work. In the early days—I probably should not say this on record—we realised we were supporting people into work and making them worse off than they had been prior. Then we realised that these were some of the sort of due diligence questions we needed to ask. We now understand that Colac is an onion. There are systems issues and context. I know from speaking to other people through the JVEN that there are other places that are similar—small country towns. I imagine Robinvale has some similarities.

What you realise is there are gaps in services and supports that come. When you start in Melbourne, if you live in Melbourne really you get the cherry of all opportunities. Sometimes the way that we design the service system is quite Melbourne-centric, so you do not realise until you get to, say for example, a place like Colac and you are trying to deliver a model of service that in actual fact even though services might be funded, the way that they are funded to reach their KPIs in the contract might be at a statewide level. They will never set foot in Colac. Therefore something you can get in Melbourne, you know, when you are setting up systems of support for individuals, when you start looking at an individual in Colac, because of how some of the services are funded and the nature of the way you can deliver that funding, you will have to go to Geelong to get that or a Geelong service will have to outreach to Colac, and so therefore they will be there on a Thursday—those kinds of things.

Even with food security, we grapple with it at the Foundation. There is an amazing amount of food services in and around Geelong, but when we have tried to support people with food insecurity in Colac, well, there is a volunteer service there and it is a part-time thing. It just does not—

**Mr MITHEN:** A different level of service delivery.

**Ms RYAN:** How do you address that at a broader level? Is that something Government needs to look at when contracting, in terms of the KPIs it is putting within contracts, to ensure that there is a certain amount of service delivery outside of regional centres?

**Ms O'BRIEN:** Yes, that is one thing. I guess the other thing, when you fund a service like, say, Jobs Victoria in Colac, is you have to realise that the framework or the structure within which it operates will require more resources. For example, our work mentor ends up being chief cook, bottle washer and shoeshiner, whereas in Melbourne you have got other people you can call in. In Melbourne you have got jobs. Some of the JVENs might be engaging with one or two employers to get all of their outcomes. In Colac, for example, it is nearly one on one, the ratio of jobs per employer.

Also in Colac there is a culture—I know it is in other places as well, but where we are talking about—where there is not a lot of access to sustainable and sustaining work. That is what I was saying about putting people in a worse situation if you support them from homelessness into a job and to start paying rent and bills and what have you and then the work dries up after seven months, because that particular industry goes slow over these months, and there is no work and no income and then getting back on Centrelink. I do not know if you know, but it can take seven weeks. So then all of a sudden, how are you eating and how are you paying your bills and how are you, really, sustaining? Sustainable income is more important than having debt, as well as homelessness, as well as additional crisis. Sorry, Bill.

**Mr MITHEN:** To your question ‘How does the Government get over it?’, they take a place-based approach. Place-based is not designing a program and then doing it in places. A place-based approach is designing a program and then giving it the flexibility and agility to be handled differently in places because of the context of that place. So I think what we have found a little bit with the JVEN contract is that it has been the former not the latter. It has been designed with the right intent and it has been designed to help disadvantaged jobseekers, which I think is absolutely the right intent, and then as is the nature of anything—it is the nature of Government to an extent—because you have got the large populace in the large area naturally the program drifts towards servicing that, but then you have got a lot of other places that that service will not work for. So it needs to be agile enough and flexible enough to be delivered differently.

**Ms RYAN:** How would you change it?

**Mr MITHEN:** JVEN?

**Ms RYAN:** Yes.

**Mr MITHEN:** Anne’s right that in smaller places there are less employment opportunities, so there needs to be a different funding mechanism for that. The most significant change I would make to the JVEN contract is, as I was saying earlier, the work that is done in a pre-employment phase is not properly valued in the JVEN contract, and the reason it is not properly valued is that effectively contract-holders only get paid if they are placed, and they get a bit of a payment.

**Ms ADDISON:** Six weeks.

**Mr MITHEN:** And then if they stay—if somebody stays. Now, I reckon we have already got a contract like that, which is called jobactive. I know that is not the area for this Inquiry, but I can talk about the jobactive contract if you want. I think it needs significant reworking.

**The CHAIR:** You can make comment about jobactive.

**Mr MITHEN:** It is a sort of similar comment to the comment that I am going to make about JVEN, albeit that I think the JVEN contracts are trying hard to address what we know as stream C people, which is in itself a dreadful term, so let us call them ‘people with multiple barriers to work’. I am going to come back to JVEN, sorry. Now you have got me on jobactive, John, I will never stop. The jobactive contract to me is a system that has been developed, and it is the same thing; it is a generic system. For people who—let us call them stream As—have a certain level of self-agency and a certain level of ability to work with jobactive contract-holders, they will be fine in that system. That system is, ‘Pick them up, find a job, they stay there, it’s okay’. Stream Bs may be a little bit of that, maybe not. And then for stream Cs it is the same system. It is still, ‘Try and pick them up, do whatever you can, stick them in a job, cross your fingers, hope they stay there’. What we know is that those people with multiple barriers to work need a different system. They need a different service delivery method, and that service delivery method has to include a whole heap of pre work to get them ready and then probably some training in the role that they are going to go into and then post-placement support to make sure that they get the most benefit out of that job. Now, that is how I would change JVEN.

I think the gap in the employment services market, if you like, is that there is not anyone properly focusing on and designing a service for people with multiple barriers to work. That means then valuing all of that work that you do. Leah does a whole heap of work sometimes with people just so they walk out their front door, and she works with them for weeks, sometimes months, and no-one is getting paid for that, because it is not even close to a placement—not even remotely close to a placement. It might take two years before you even get that person into a placement and then an outcome. No-one is getting paid for that. So effectively what government services are saying is, ‘We’re going to rely on the goodwill of charitable work or the goodwill of somebody’ to just do that work for them.

Then when you finally get them to a position where you can put them in a place; ‘Well, we’ll give you a bit of dough and let’s hope they stay 13 weeks’. That to me is not an effective service for people who have got multiple barriers to work. It could be in Melbourne, where there is a broader spread of opportunity and there are people who have got a greater opportunity, but in places like Colac and to an extent Geelong—certainly the places we are talking about in Geelong, Norlane and Corio—that service does not work.



**Ms RYAN:** So it effectively gears providers towards trying to find the low-hanging fruit, so to speak.

**Mr MITHEN:** Correct, which we have been, as a holder of the contract, fairly constantly pushed towards and very constantly pushed back on, and said, ‘Well, that’s not why we are in this now’. We are a not-for-profit. We are not going to make money out of this contract. Our goal is to try and help the most vulnerable people, so in doing that, that is what we are going to do. That has from time to time caused some consternation between us and the department, but that is okay. It has been good, actually, they have worked through it pretty well. They have worked through it really well with us.

**Ms O’BRIEN:** I understand, but if your KPI—and it depends how you define disadvantage, because somebody who has been out of work for six months, you want them in work. If there are other ways you can support jobactive caseloads that are something like 170, some of them do not really ever get to have a one-on-one. They do not get the kind of support that a Northern Futures or a Leah in Colac can provide.

We got out of Leah’s head before we came here—and we got one of our team who is very good with graphics to kind of capture what she does. She said the first thing is, really—and I am sure Northern Futures will say the same thing—engagement. That is what Bill is saying; it is not funded. So building trust, building rapport and then all the small things—like, getting into a TAFE course you need ID, and a lot of these people do not have identification, so you start to create those small wins, and then talking through with them, like a wheel of life, all of the sorts of things that could be barriers for them and then developing strategies and just working on them one by one so they do not get overwhelmed.

There is kind of, as Bill said, sometimes months of work in that. With the Premier’s JobsBank, one of those applicants that Leah worked with we captured 21 separate, different barriers. They are systemic, some of them, and some of them are very specific to the individual, but that is a lot of work to do before you even think about job ready and job training and then employment, and we do not want to set people up to fail.

**The CHAIR:** We have got a few more questions to ask. If it is okay with Lyn, we might go a bit over time.

**Mr ROWSWELL:** While we are talking about different models, G21 in their submission have mentioned that the disability employment services model is an effective model, or a more effective model, in terms of keeping people in place. Your views on that—are there any learnings from that particular model that could be adopted?

**Mr MITHEN:** Maybe I will speak. I am Chair of G21, so I will try and speak on behalf of G21 a little bit. Of course Elaine would be better to do that. I think the notion of the DES model is more aligned to what we were just talking about. It is smaller caseloads, it is greater face-to-face time, it is working with employers in a stronger way to make sure that they are accessible and they are inclusive and supportive of employing somebody with a disability and then helping that person with a disability to move into that position, into that role and getting some post-placement support as well.

It is still a bit driven—not as driven—by the placement outcome sort of model, but there is certainly within that contract other funding to help work with some of the clients who have a disability. So I think what we would say, and I think what G21 would say, is that there is recognition in the DES contract that this work, that working with people with a disability, takes longer and is more expensive. I think generally speaking everyone says, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah’—everyone nods; even when I said that you all nodded—so everyone nods: ‘Yeah, of course, it takes that’. I think what we would say with people who have got 21 barriers to work is it is more expensive and it takes longer.

In another narrative you could argue that having 21 barriers to work is a disability. We do not view those people in the same way. We view people who have got those multiple barriers to work like us, and they are so removed from us it is not funny—they are so different to us. I think that would be the comment.

**Ms ADDISON:** Putting your G21 hat on again, the G21 submission recommends a long-term commitment of funding and resources for local employment programs. What are the current short-term funding arrangements and how many years of funding would be ideal to sustain employment programs and expand their services?

**Mr MITHEN:** The short-term funding—and in fact I think Lyn will speak to this a lot better than I am going to speak to it—is that there are some particular services, and Northern Futures is one of them, that are coming to a point in time where they are going to run out of funding. It is a valuable, important, critical service for the job employment system in this region. It is actually a valuable, critical employment service for the job system in any region, but not every region has a Northern Futures. We are lucky enough to have one. That funding—again Lyn will speak to you and answer that question better—has been sort of piecemeal for a long time. It has been there for a long time, and lots of people, including local members, have worked pretty hard to make sure that funding has been there.

**The CHAIR:** Considering I formed it back in 2007.

**Mr MITHEN:** Correct; that is exactly right. You would, I am sure, agree: it has been a difficult process to get funding lined up for an extended period of time, and when I say extended, maybe three to five years. The GROW initiative is maybe a good example of a mode, so we at the foundation made an early commitment of 10 years. Give Where You Live Foundation decided we were going to fund GROW for 10 years at \$2 million, because we said there is entrenched disadvantage. The word ‘entrenched’ gives you a bit of a sign that it is hard to move. Then the State Government has virtually matched that, with about \$1.75 million over a similar period—not quite 10 years, but over a similar period. That was a difficult negotiation with the department that we worked with because it was a hard thing to get through people’s heads that we did not want all this money straightaway. We wanted bits over a long period of time, and it was going to cover election cycles. It was a fantastic negotiation and a great outcome to enable us to be able to get that funding over a longer period of time. We at this stage have not had any funding from the Federal Government, but, you know, we are still hopeful. So there is a length of time to this that you do need. To give you an exact time, Juliana, that is kind of hard. It is more than 12 months. It is probably less than 10 years because that is going to be hard. So it is three to five. I would say minimum three. Five would be good.

**Ms O’BRIEN:** But I can think of a person whose success was at Year 7—a Northern Futures person. They had been engaged and disengaged and engaged and disengaged, and the trick is if you have a failure, it is not the end. With some of the employment service KPIs, it means you are exited, whereas the Northern Futures ethos over the years has been that it is genuine community development principles. So that is just a hiccup and when things are better—you have got multiple things going on. You might have some crisis in your family, someone that you become a carer for. You will come back to this when you can. So you did not finish your training or you fell out of that job; it does not mean you will not be able to get back on the horse and continue on. Sometimes people’s journeys are quite messy. I mean, that is just life. Then in the end you can meet that person and they can say, ‘Yeah, yeah, I’ve been in this job and I love this job, and I finished that course’, and it is because they had a Northern Futures to hold the space. That is why I think seven to 10 years funding—

**Mr MITHEN:** I am happy with seven to 10.

**Ms O’BRIEN:** It depends who you want to help. The people that we are thinking about are the quintile that actually falls through the cracks.

**The CHAIR:** That would need a bipartisan approach, because government terms are over four years and obviously that would be pre-empting a government policy. But it is a tough one; there is no question about that. Can I just ask in relation to employment program eligibility about the restrictions that may apply to some people in terms of their eligibility. Do you want to expand on that? Do you think there is a certain cohort of people that would be restricted in the eligibility of certain programs because of where they are?

**Mr MITHEN:** Eligibility or capability maybe, I do not know. I think everyone is eligible. It could just be me, but I cannot think of ineligibility. I think people are eligible to be part of the program. Whether they are able—because of transport, family circumstance, it could be other barriers or mental health issues—to take part is certainly something that I think is worthwhile thinking about. Yet another hat that I wear is as a board member at Gforce, which holds a jobactive contract. We have an office near your office, John, in Corio Village. Quite purposely it is there. I know of other services who have offices in the north, but they are not necessarily where the public transport moves to or where people congregate. So if you pick that service, you have got to somehow get to that service. If you do not have a licence or you do have licence but do not have a car and the public transport does not exactly wander all around the streets in the north, then it is hard to get to, so you are

paying for a taxi or an Uber or something to get there, which you do not have the money to do. So I think there are barriers to being a part of the service.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I know we went way over time, but thanks very much.

**Mr MITHEN:** No worries. That is probably our fault, sorry.

**Ms O'BRIEN:** We have always got a lot to say.

**The CHAIR:** No, no. It is very good information. Thank you for your submission and your presentation today.

**Witnesses withdrew.**