

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System

Melbourne—Thursday, 21 October 2021

MEMBERS

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Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Lee Tarlamis

Ms Sheena Watt

WITNESSES (*via videoconference*)

Ms Melissa Hardham, Chief Executive Officer, and

Ms Anoushka Jeronimus, Director, Youth Law Program, Westjustice.

The CHAIR: Good morning, everyone, and welcome. I would like to declare open the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System.

I first begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the various lands that we are meeting on and pay respect to any Aboriginal elders, any Aboriginal people, who are joining us today. I just really want to acknowledge that this inquiry needs to hear the voices of Aboriginal people. We know the over-representation of Aboriginal people in our justice system is a blight on our society—it is a blight on our community—and I hope as a result of this inquiry we will do better.

Welcome to any members of the public, as I mentioned, who are with us today. I am Fiona Patten. I am joined by Tania Maxwell and Sheena Watt, and there may be other committee members joining us throughout the day.

We are very pleased to be joined by Melissa Hardham, who is the CEO of Westjustice, and Anoushka Jeronimus, who is the Director of the Youth Law Program at Westjustice. Thank you very much for your submission and for the time you are giving us today.

I will just let you know that all evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege. That is under our *Constitution Act* but also the standing orders of the Legislative Council. Therefore any information that you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you were to repeat those same statements outside this hearing you may not receive the same protection. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

As I know that you are aware, we are recording today's session. We have Hansard in the background. You will receive a transcript of today's hearing, and I would encourage you to have a look at it and make sure that we have not misrepresented you or misheard you. As you know, it will form part of our report and will also go up onto our website.

We would welcome some opening remarks from you. Melissa, you have the stage.

Ms HARDHAM: Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to appear today. I appear in my capacity as the Chief Executive Officer on behalf of Westjustice, and I am joined by our legal Director of the Youth Law Program, Anoushka Jeronimus, who has already provided evidence in her capacity as the co-convenor of Smart Justice for Young People. We would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. We are both meeting on the lands of the people of the Kulin nations, and we pay our respects to elders past and present.

Westjustice services individuals and families in Melbourne's west. We are funded to provide legal support, education and advocacy to communities in the cities of Wyndham, Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay. However, as one of two western suburbs community legal centres, we cover a large part of the west as well. Given this, we have recently refined our impact areas, and we focus on young people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people experiencing family and gender-based violence and those experiencing economic injustice. Most of our services are delivered in situ, and we work in multidisciplinary partnership models to ensure that we are positioned where our clients and communities attend to access education, employment, health, financial and wellbeing services, the intention being to reduce multiple storytelling and fatigue associated with referral merry-go-rounds. We work with partner programs, communities and community leaders because we know we cannot do this work alone. Therefore on any given day our teams are in high schools, employment services, hospitals, settlement services, health centres, mental health services, youth hubs and, more recently, in out-of-home care centres.

We are pleased to be invited to attend this inquiry and to offer the perspective from the west. Our communities are over-represented in many areas: poverty, discrimination, exploitation and financial hardship. However, there is also a great deal of cultural diversity, resilience and determination, highlighted during this pandemic.

Sadly we also hear stories of families and children who have experienced food insecurity and children missing school to work because they are one of the few—or the only—breadwinners in the family. This all takes its toll on families and manifests in many problematic ways. Sometimes this results in antisocial and offending behaviour. Other cases involve the criminalisation of poverty through perversities with the fines and debts schemes and systems. When these issues occur, our system places a disproportionate emphasis on incarceration and punishment rather than attending to the causes. State funds are injected into criminal justice whilst not-for-profit organisations struggle to secure long-term funds for prevention and early intervention programs, despite copious evidence as to the benefits, much of which has been presented over the course of this inquiry.

Given these statistics and this research, as a collective we are at risk of doing bad a bit better. Therefore we need to work smarter and collectively if we are to reduce the financial and human costs of an overburdened and ineffective criminal justice system. Projects such as the new Wyndham justice precinct provide the platform for Victoria to reset our justice system. Further, the implementation of a multidisciplinary youth and families community hub alongside the second-largest court in the state to be and the sizable police complex that currently sits alongside it will illustrate that health and wellbeing of our communities is of equal importance while also providing critical support services.

I will now hand over to my colleague Ms Jeronimus to briefly address the committee on some of our specific recommendations and suggested service reform.

Ms JERONIMUS: Thanks, Mel. Madam Chair, committee members, thank you for the opportunity to come back today and to speak to you about what we are seeing in the west. I spoke last time on behalf of Smart Justice for Young People about the need to end the systemic over-representation of particular groups of children and young people in the justice system. Madam Chair, you mentioned Aboriginal children. You are right, there is no other way to describe it—it is a blight. And also, added to that, you have got children in residential care; girls and women with complex needs, including, perversely, those experiencing family violence, over-represented in the justice system; and also children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The over-representation in custody right now of African and Maori and Pasifika-Australian children and young people is at crisis point in the west, and to that end we commend to you the Centre for Multicultural Youth's justice statement and briefing paper released last week. You said it was a blight in relation to Aboriginal kids, and we are now coming before this committee saying it is also a blight on our system, this over-representation, and we must now collectively mobilise around it to eliminate it.

In relation to Aboriginal children and young people, we defer to our colleagues, our partners and the experts—VALS and the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, who are appearing today, and other ACCOs—and support their recommendations, in particular in relation to Raise the Age and also implementing the recommendations from the fantastic *Our Youth, Our Way* report, as well as Smart Justice for Women's recommendations. In relation to Raise the Age, we call on the government to commit to raising the age now to 14 and also that it be given bipartisan and crossbench support to be able to enable that reform to happen.

In relation to bail reform, in concert with many other sector partners who have been before this committee, we too call for the repealing of the reverse onus provisions and creating instead of presumption in favour of bail except where there is specific and immediate risk to the physical safety of another person or there is a real flight risk. We also, Madam Chair and committee members, call for the repeal of the category A and B mandatory uplift and committal stream provisions in the CYFA for non-homicide-related offences which see young people being treated as adults.

In relation to the Raise the Age reform we also urge the committee to consider adopting by way of complement other related reforms, including raising the minimum age of youth detention to 16, raising the jurisdiction of youth justice custody to 25 years old and expanding it to include community supervision as well, and also rethinking how we police children and young people.

In terms of policing we recognise and commend the genuine efforts by Victoria Police to increase diversionary options for Aboriginal and CALD children and young people and, here in the west, reduce their over-representation in the justice system through, for example, earlier referrals to support services at the local level. We remain wary, however, at the statewide level about the continued use of proactive and predictive policing approaches to youth crime detention and offender management, and we note to that end Sergeant Gatt's evidence before this committee the other day and echo his concerns about the task force approach to policing

that we are currently seeing and proactively pushing children and young people into the system as opposed to the opposite. We also have concerns about the increasing reliance on police as first responders in crisis situations. Where we diverge, though, is on the role that community policing plays in crime prevention. Whether they are task forcing or in the community, they remain police.

To that end we have two projects that we wanted to really showcase and highlight to the committee today and, ideally, if you think they are good ideas as well, obtain your support on. They are examples—and we are partnering with many people in the sector in the west, including Victoria Police—of everyone playing their part and working together towards a common goal of youth crime prevention. The first project is the youth crime prevention and early intervention pilot, also abbreviated to YCPEIP. We have been working with Victoria Police, specifically the Wyndham and Brimbank police service areas, to design it. Our other partners include Victoria Legal Aid, who is coming after us today, the relevant Magistrates Court, the Children's Court, prosecution units, youth justice, the Youth Support and Advocacy Service, CMY, Headspace and Orygen, Jesuit Social Services, Youth Junction and YouthNow. The project is soon to be implemented, and it is the culmination of an unprecedented level of cooperation and collaboration amongst these agencies. Our shared goal is to reduce the rate of offending and reoffending amongst children and young people in the west.

Target Zero is another project that we really want to bring to your attention. Westjustice and CMY have conceived an ambitious collective impact child and youth crime prevention model known as Target Zero, and it is designed to eliminate youth criminalisation in Wyndham, Melton and Brimbank and also the over-representation of children in out-of-home care; Aboriginal children; Australian-African, Maori and Pasifika children and young people; and other minority Australian children and young people in the youth justice system. We currently have the support of 15 expert youth support agencies, and we have established an interim working group to continue to develop the model. We have got terms of reference, a project concept logic and a project plan developed. The commitment is strong and based on the acknowledgement that if we are serious about youth crime prevention in the west, then a new collective way of working is required. We have a grand vision that entails a commitment over 10 years. But, principally and critically, for Target Zero to succeed we need everybody in the community: traders, stakeholders, Woolies, Westjustice, schools, police—everybody—the courts. We cannot do it alone, and if there is one thing that we have learned over these years in practice and also now as directors and stakeholders, it is that this work in crime prevention cannot be done alone. And we would be happy to talk to the committee specifically about some of the matters we have raised today in more detail.

The CHAIR: Thank you—thank you both. I really enjoyed reading your submission, and I will ask a bit more about Target Zero in a moment. I particularly loved that good legal outcomes are inextricably linked to good life outcomes. I think that goes to that sort of whole-of-community approach. I just wanted to start. The statistics and the key facts that you raised at the beginning of your submission are, you know, startling—I think certainly, as you touched on, Anoushka, the different approaches that we are seeing for the CALD community and for our Aboriginal children compared to white young kids: a third of young people in custody were from CALD communities and, by contrast, only 8 per cent or 6 per cent of people from African-Australian or Maori-Pasifika communities were placed on youth court diversion. I wonder if you could just talk to how we fix that problem. It seems that there are such startling statistics. Is it more of your YCPEIP program, or are there other ways for us to address this real disparity?

Ms JERONIMUS: The first point to make, Madam Chair, is that it is complex. So it is not necessarily a linear kind of equation and that the more diversions and cautions the more direct and immediate reduction in remand you will see. To be clear, the reforms that we are recommending in relation to bail, for example, are also inextricably linked to starting to eliminate and disrupt and starting to turn around that figure that you have just cited in terms of the third of young people in custody. However, speaking from the west, we think at the moment that the youth crime early intervention pilot—YCPEIP, as you have now picked up—is a fantastic way of starting to see if we can start to increase the number of cautions and diversions for young people in the west firstly and then, secondly, in relation to young people who are over-represented in remand.

The CHAIR: Do we need some legislative reform in that area as well, or can this be done at a program level?

Ms JERONIMUS: In relation to the YCPEIP the beauty of it is that we are actually working within existing legal infrastructure. We have got the fantastic Children's Court youth diversion program. We have got that in

existence. YCPEIP is actually about all of the different services doing their bit to work, kind of, a bit more deliberately but also—and why we are saying it is unprecedented—working together. That is unprecedented, the fact that you have got this many people going, ‘Yes, let’s do something—and do what we have been doing before—but together to try and achieve this goal’. That is new, and that is what we really want to see play out. We will evaluate it. We will monitor progress along the way.

We really also commend, for example, the Magistrates Court for thinking it is a terrific idea and being open to the idea—the Children’s Court of Victoria and youth justice. You know, you have got all of the different agencies working together, and I think that, from our perspective, it is something worth getting behind and ideally hoping that it succeeds and getting in behind it and doing whatever we can to make it succeed, if that makes sense.

Ms HARDHAM: Can I add just another layer as well, if I may, and that is that while YCPEIP is a critical component, there are a whole lot of other aspects which we have learned over the years through the work we do across families and communities at Westjustice which are also critical. So it is not just focusing necessarily on the young person but also on those influences and components, such as what is happening with the families, what is happening within the community, what is happening within the society they live in and what is happening within the systems the interface with. So we are looking at programs across Westjustice that also support mortgage stress, tenancy issues and eviction rates, family violence and family law issues, consumer exploitation, particularly in the workforce. So in amongst programs like YCPEIP we also have to look at the components of stress and impact on the family as a whole.

The CHAIR: Thank you, and if I have got time, I might come back and explore how far back, how early we can go and how wide we can go. I will go to Tania, then Sheena.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, ladies, for attending today and thank you for that fantastic submission. It responds to everything that we have already heard, and you have given some great recommendations there. I just wanted to go back to discuss magistrates and judges and the work that you have recommended within this submission. We need to have that holistic approach and, Anoushka, as you said, you want organisations to come together and be able to work together and share that information and be very proactive. What role do you think that judges and magistrates should play in relation to that, because we do not want them having a siloed approach to their sentencing and the ways in which they give directives to young people—the conditions et cetera? What is your take on that? What is your perception of how they should be involved in this process?

Ms JERONIMUS: Committee member Maxwell, in terms of just making sure I have got the question right—and I might take that and, Mel, feel free to jump in afterwards if there is anything further to address—in relation to judges and magistrates, are you asking in terms of what training and support they need to be able to make their decisions well, or in terms of—

Ms MAXWELL: Both, Anoushka. I think the training that they need to do well but in order for them to have full and wholesome absolute knowledge to know what orders they can place, particularly for these young children, particularly if we are talking about raising the age for criminal offences. What role do our judges and magistrates play in being able to put these young children through a referral process to organisations that can support them, as opposed to a punitive incarceration measure?

Ms JERONIMUS: There are two aspects to that, and we noted them in our submission. The first point to make is that we think recruitment of judicial officers really should value the expertise and knowledge of core competencies, including trauma, gender, cultural awareness and safety, and understanding the experience of victims, what that means and the value of restorative justice. So there is the recruitment aspect but also then foundational training that is provided, as well as ongoing training. Part of that ongoing training then could be and should be—and it is in practice in some areas—complemented through regular information sessions in terms of referral pathways, programs and services in their jurisdictions, which can augment and aid the work of the court. Because the court obviously has to work within the bounds of the legislation, it is limited in some respects. In a lot of respects they have few levers at their immediate disposal, but that is when the service sector can come in to let them know—update what we are doing, how we are doing it and how we can get their support, as an example.

Ms HARDHAM: And in that, it is a recognition, which is clear in projects like Target Zero and the YCPEIP, that we have all got a role to play in being culturally safe environments and being effectively trained and developed as people working with the various groups we work with. It is on us to make sure that our house is in order and that we are delivering those services in the most safe and able way that we can, and that includes the judiciary. And just to emphasise Anoushka's point: having the full breadth of options, levers and discretion available, rather than curtailing and limiting the options available to the courts on any given day, is also critical.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you, ladies. Just wondering, if we were to raise the criminal age, which appears to be the general consensus throughout these hearings that we have had—and I know you have suggested this in your recommendations, but just to have it in the transcript and have it on the record—I think it is imperative that we talk about what early interventions you would suggest for ways in which we can prevent these young people from becoming immersed in the justice system in the first place.

Ms JERONIMUS: If I may, I will take that question, committee member Maxwell, and start by talking about the process. What we are asking and urging the committee to endorse is that the commitment is made, that everybody supports that commitment to raise the age and that while the legislation is being drafted we assemble a group of cross-sector and agency experts to advise the government and confirm the social and service system responses once the age is raised, as you quite rightly said, to make sure that any young person under the age of 14 exhibiting behaviours previously considered offending gets the familial, therapeutic, restorative and rehabilitative assistance required to address them. Critically, we would also urge the committee to endorse the reform and that there are no exceptions for serious offences, because the point of the reform is the age, and if there are any exceptions, for example, that will undermine the intended benefit of the reform. That is the first point to make.

Going directly to your point, committee member Maxwell, the ACT recently commissioned the ANU to undertake a needs analysis of its child support systems. That report was recently released, and we would be happy to provide it to the committee after this. It goes to your question in terms of what is out there already and what is remaining and needs to be stepped up, if that makes sense. And we have also got a diagram. It is a work in progress, but the Smart Justice for Young People committee have also done a bit of a diagram showing the current service system and how it could support young people under the age of 14 who indeed need support—as well as their families, because Mel made a really important point earlier: they are children. They remain totally reliant on adult caregivers. And so when we are talking about helping prevent youth crime, the only way you can do that meaningfully is if you put as much support around their family and their caregivers and their schools as you are able to help that young person stay out of the justice system. It cannot be just around the kid themselves; it has to be around the family as well, particularly the mothers.

Ms MAXWELL: Anoushka, that is music to my ears.

Ms HARDHAM: Can I just add that when you look at the cost of incarcerating a young person and if you were to reinvest those costs and apply them to some of the initiatives that have been discussed throughout this inquiry by a number of organisations, you would see the cost-benefit not just in terms of the fiscal reallocation but the human lives factor.

Ms MAXWELL: And I think a collective impact framework. It is an oldie but it is a goodie, and it is looking at that big picture of the family's generational trauma et cetera et cetera, and it is imperative that we have that mapped out and documented to lead us into what the best practice is moving forward. So thank you, ladies.

The CHAIR: Sheena.

Ms WATT: Good morning. Thank you both for joining us. I again enjoyed your submission. I just want to go to the point made earlier by Melissa around financial and economic justice, and injustice, and I wonder if you could talk a little bit about any work that Westjustice has done with respect to family violence and economic abuse. I am really thinking that there is a strong connection there, and if you indeed have done any work in that space—I think I got a sense of that in your earlier comments—I am wanting to hear more about the connection between economic insecurity and family violence. What have you got for me—anything on that to share?

Ms HARDHAM: Yes. Thank you for the question. Recently we launched our *Restoring Financial Safety* report, which is the culmination of many years of work that Westjustice has been doing across the western suburbs. It is a project which is again showing the benefit of collective impact and working across organisations. It is a partnership between McAuley Community Services for Women and Westjustice, and it is an in-situ, place-based partnership, like I canvassed earlier in the introduction, that we have become much more proficient at over the years. Our lawyers attend at McAuley and work with women experiencing family violence. McAuley provide the wraparound service, and we provide a focus on economic abuse and trying to restore women and their families back into a position where they are financially safe and secure while McAuley provide all those other really important psychosocial supports in order to ensure that women feel safe when they rebuild their lives.

The report was conducted over two years. It supported 137 women, and we were able to recover or waive debt and compensation to the tune of \$900 000. The other aspect of it which I think is really interesting is we have just started some preliminary work on looking at the cost savings to government by virtue of the fact that a lot of the matters resolved pre court, which I guess is very relevant to discussions today in terms of the overall costs of criminal justice systems and justice systems in general. What we were able to find in terms of some of the early cost-benefit analysis that we have conducted is that we have, over a 12-month period, saved just over \$360 000 in that regard for matters that did not proceed to court.

So it is fair to say that this project is not only really critical in its own right but interfaces with a lot of the work we are doing that Anoushka has mentioned in terms of Target Zero and YCPEIP insofar as it supports the women particularly, because it is a program that is focusing on women and their families, restoring and rebuilding their lives. What we have heard throughout this inquiry is the impact of family violence on people and the over-representation of people who have experienced family violence in the criminal justice system.

Ms WATT: All right. Thank you so much. If we get a chance, I will get back to another question, if we have got time.

The CHAIR: Thank you. In that case I will be very quick. I had a stream of questions, but just thinking about Target Zero and the program, I think it is really exciting and it is very optimistic and this kind of whole of community, which I am really keen on. I think you mentioned we would need businesses to be involved. I wonder if you could touch on that just quickly. When you say that, what do you mean? How is a business engaged in this?

Ms JERONIMUS: It is a very good question and the project at the moment is just the target. In terms of designing the interventions and the frameworks, we need to co-design that. That is where we would bring in businesses, we would bring in the schools, we would bring in police, we would bring in courts—everybody who is affected by it and principally the communities themselves—and co-design what the interventions look like. So there are a range of ways that businesses could, for example—thinking out loud in terms of supporting Target Zero, I think the important thing from a conceptual perspective to think about when we are talking about this project is that you have got this headline target of zero crime but not everybody is in the business of directly kind of working in the criminal justice system or preventing crime. So a business might say, ‘Well, what’s my role in it?’. It might be then a set of subtargets that you see contributing to that target of zero through, for example, increasing employment opportunities. Likewise in the school space—for example, a reduction in absenteeism, a reduction in suspensions. And so we are not telling people to down tools, we are not telling people to stop doing what they are doing. What we are encouraging and hoping through this project is that we get everybody to work together and see how their work is contributing directly or indirectly to that target across every domain of a child and their family’s life.

Ms HARDHAM: And I think it is time to get creative. I think we are done. There has been so much narrative throughout this inquiry and long before. I was listening to Tania Maxwell, your comments in June 2020, with the motion in terms of ‘we recognise that the system is broken’. I think we do not need to conduct further research and collect further evidence that the reform needs to be had. So in order to do something really disruptive, we need to be creative and we need to look at all the different levers that we can pull in order to have a really comprehensive solution to what has become a very complex problem.

I just want to highlight one program which shows the way in which a collaboration can affect, hopefully, real reform. We will wait to see with the next state budget, but we have been advocating for a long time about

assisting young people to get to and from school with prepaid public transport. Our Travel Assistance Program 2019 was an example of a legal service discovering problems many years ago, in terms of young people getting fined to travel to and from school. We legally require children to go to school under a particular age, yet we also legally require them to travel compliantly, and those two concepts are juxtaposed to families experiencing the levels of poverty that they have experienced, certainly in the west over the years and in particular as a consequence of the coronavirus. Now, that project saw a number of people on the steering committee—various departments, the Public Transport Ombudsman, Wyndham City Council, VCOSS, Metro Trains and Westjustice—all working collaboratively towards a really simple solution. What we did find was that if you give a young person a ticket to travel to and from school, they will go to school. Their attendance will increase, their punctuality will increase, their attendance with the wellbeing services and the sporting opportunities will increase, they will get to their job after school and their lives will improve. So it is not unprecedented. Maybe of this magnitude what we are suggesting is to some extent, but I think the problem is unprecedented so therefore it requires a really creative and comprehensive solution.

The CHAIR: And you say that it is comprehensive but sometimes it is that simple. I remember, it was probably in my first year at Parliament, raising that issue of kids, Spanish kids, who cannot afford to get to school and their parents have the choice of petrol for the car or topping up the Myki. They are invidious decisions that people have to make. It is a simple thing which has far-reaching results.

Ms HARDHAM: And cost effective.

The CHAIR: And cost effective, exactly. Just so simple. Tania and Sheena. We have got just a couple more minutes.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you. Just a quick one. In relation to having a target of zero crime, particularly for our young people, I am really interested to get your feedback. It may seem like it is out of the scope of the inquiry, although I think it is something that needs to be—

The CHAIR: Nothing is out of the scope of this inquiry, Tania. This is about as broad as you can get.

Ms MAXWELL: I am very passionate and have been doing a lot of work with the government on child and maternal health, and early intervention for me is a child in utero, because we see that generational trauma. We see that if parents have not been educated they do not have the capacity to support a young person to get to school, to have their check-ups as a baby et cetera. I am really interested to hear your thoughts on whether you agree that that is a really good place for us to start.

Ms HARDHAM: I just wanted to jump in on that, because there is a study—a project that we are embarking on with a number of agencies and the Murdoch institute—looking at this particular issue and what ‘good’ looks like or what ‘great’ looks like when you wrap comprehensive services around a family in those really early stages of a young person’s development. So that is in the early stages, and I think the evidence that will come from that will be really critical in better understanding the impact. And what we also know from some of the projects we have working with women in the hospitals, through the hospitals’ referrals, in terms of early intervention across family violence, is it is really important in terms of how we support families and how we respond to these issues at the critical stages when decisions need to be made about long-term safety and opportunities that a family can create by addressing those really underlying problematic issues that they face as a consequence of family violence, like economic abuse and financial uncertainty. So there is certainly the research being done. It might sound like a leap across, but the work we are doing in settlement services in terms of the experience of newly arrived families in the first five years of their settlement experience I think will also be really informative to better understand the types of problems that families are grappling with and also how that then transpires to some of these issues that we are discussing throughout this inquiry. Sorry, Anoushka, over to you.

Ms JERONIMUS: No, I totally agree with everything Mel is saying. Committee member Maxwell, you are absolutely right that maternal and child health, including in utero health, has an absolute role to play here. What we would say is that a strength-based approach is the most effective when you are talking about supporting people to achieve the goals and do what they need to do to stay safe. What we would also say is that certainly Target Zero contemplates, as I said, every aspect of a child’s and family’s life, including from zero. The other thing to note is that the government’s youth strategy is about to be released. That is 12 to 25. In both Smart

Justice for Young People's submission and also Westjustice's we made the same call. We asked for a child and youth strategy that goes from zero to 25, because what you see are examples of great practice. You see examples of great programs. You have got, for example, the government's new road map to reform initiatives. All of these are fantastic, and actually the work is being done. What we need is something to bring it all together, and we are suggesting that a child strategy could actually do that—and/or one that is combined. But I think that ship has kind of sailed. But also supporting a childhood strategy—imagine if we had a minister for children and their families as well. At the moment we have got a Minister for Child Protection, so it is at the crisis point again. Imagine if it was kind of redirected to early on and when you are making sure and there is beautiful coordination across government, the whole of government, and you have got this kind of strategy—with shared outcomes. Then everybody would be able to keep doing what they are doing but have a shared view of what 'good' looks like—ideally great.

Ms MAXWELL: And we know that there is a significant lack of resources and support for six- to 12-year-olds. Organisations are funded for up to 10, and then from 12 onwards—I used to be a youth worker and found that incredibly frustrating—they are the years that we need to be capturing these young people whose behaviour is seen as disruptive at school. And they are suspended or whatever, and they miss that opportunity to have that complete holistic and strength-based intervention, because there is nobody funded enough to be able to go in and work with that young person and their family in that age cohort.

Ms JERONIMUS: I could not agree with you more, and actually there is something that we are starting to work on as a collective in Melton on that issue. You know that the government's Empowering Communities initiative is also another way in which these types of issues are starting to be recognised—and again, getting everybody together to try and work on the problem. We talked about it I think on the last—Navigator, for example, not being low enough. So you are again waiting until crisis hits. We need to reconfigure it so it is early, so you are not waiting for 30 per cent absenteeism. You are thinking, 'All right, this young person hasn't been to school one day, two days. Let's give them a call. What's going on?'. Then the school is empowered and equipped and resourced—not high school, primary school—to try and engage and re-engage that young person but also their families, because we know the more engaged a family is with their child's schooling, the more successful that child's education outcomes are going to be.

Mel talked about the savings. The Jesuit Social Services gave evidence about it costing \$2450 per child to detain them. You had 29 children in 2018–19, I think, who were under 14. If you calculate that out, that is nearly \$26 million. Imagine if you put it into schools—imagine. And that is within our reach; it is literally within our reach. So my sense is it is not about there not being enough resources or not enough will. This is about how we organise ourselves and having a single goal of what good is as opposed to individual measures.

The CHAIR: Hear, hear. Sheena, unless you have got something burning, I am going to let—

Ms WATT: I was just going to ask for the report that, Melissa, you spoke to in my earlier question. I did have a separate question, but I will not go there. I just am after possibly a copy of that report that you spoke to around economic security and abuse. So if that is something you are able to provide, I would be really interested in the finding.

Ms HARDHAM: I am very happy to do that—

The CHAIR: The ACT report.

Ms HARDHAM: and I can also send you the speeches from the launch and in particular the honourable Minister for Women, prevention of family violence and aboriginal affairs, who spoke to the impact of this type of work.

Ms WATT: I would appreciate that. Thank you so much.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Thank you both. Thank you again. Thanks for your continued work in this area. I fully anticipate this report will be solution focused. The innovative work you guys are doing is really inspiring. It is terrific. It is great. Thank you again. You will receive a transcript, so please do check it—make sure that we have not misunderstood you. We appreciate you following up on a couple of those reports.

Ms HARDHAM: Thank you for the opportunity.

Ms JERONIMUS: Yes, thank you so much.

The CHAIR: The committee will take a short break to reset and will be back in 5 minutes. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.