

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Inquiry into the public housing renewal program

Melbourne — 10 November 2017

Members

Ms Margaret Fitzherbert — Chair

Ms Nina Springle — Deputy Chair

Mr Joshua Morris

Mr Daniel Mulino

Ms Fiona Patten

Mrs Inga Peulich

Mr Adem Somyurek

Ms Jaclyn Symes

Participating Members

Ms Georgie Crozier

Mr Nazih Elasmr

Ms Colleen Hartland

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

Witnesses

Ms Jan Thorpe, General Manager,

Ms Hilary Smith, Senior Project Manager, and

Ms Suzanne Midolo, Committee Member, Wingate Avenue Community Centre.

The CHAIR — Welcome here today to the public hearing. We are looking forward to hearing from you. I need to remind you that evidence given today is being recorded and that all evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. I think you may have been listening to earlier evidence, so I will do the same and ask whether you would like to briefly address the committee on any issues. If not — you do not have to, that is fine — we could go straight to questions. But if you do make some kind of statement, if we could keep it to about 5 to 10 minutes, that would be great so that there is enough time for discussion. We are in your hands.

Visual presentation.

Ms THORPE — Thank you for inviting us to speak to our submission. That is really good. I am Jan Thorpe. I am the general manager of the Wingate Avenue Community Centre. This is Suzanne Midolo. She is actually on our committee of management. Wingate is actually governed by a voluntary committee of management. This is Hilary Smith, and she is the senior project officer for the housing redevelopment.

Just to give you a visual of where Wingate is, Wingate is positioned on one of the larger housing estates in Ascot Vale. We are very close to the showgrounds. I think we have got about 77 acres of land and about 1000 dwellings on our housing estate. So when you look at a cross of the redevelopment, we are one of the larger ones. Wingate is placed right in the middle of the housing estate, so we offer a lot of support to the people who actually live on the estate. We have been in operation for 32 years. But we are here today just to support the redevelopment of Ascot Vale, and we are keen to see it proceed in a timely and well-thought-out manner that certainly meets the needs of our vibrant community.

This is a picture just to show you a few images of the people that actually live on the estate — the people that we help each and every day. We have quite a few services in our centre as well that support our community. We have got co-located services, one of which is the Moonee Valley Legal Service, we have drug and alcohol counselling, we have settlement services and we have maternal and child health, all under the one umbrella. So it is kind of like a one-stop shop. People come there first thing in the morning to get their cup of coffee. We are really well-connected with our community. If there is something going on, we are probably the first ones to know. There is a housing office two blocks away, and they send them over on a daily basis. So we are here to support our community.

As I mentioned before, we have been in operation on the estate for 32 years. We are run by a voluntary committee of management comprising about 10 people. We also have two representatives that are co-opted from the local council. We currently have 47 staff. That picture is actually the staff at the International Women's Day lunch. We support over 2000 people a week in training alone. We are a registered training organisation that has been in operation for that amount of time, and we run education and social and recreation services across a lot of different areas.

We have a very large team of volunteers. We could not do the work that we do on the estate if it were not for the volunteers that we have. We run an extensive food program that actually supports the disadvantaged, which requires a lot of support. We are a deductible gift recipient organisation under PBI. A lot of philanthropists donate to us to be able to help our community. So we are vital on that estate.

Ms SMITH — In our submission we presented a few statistics about the residents of the estate, such as those statistics that are available to us. Here are a few more. This slide is taken from our 2006 Ascot Vale needs assessment, just to give a picture of the data to the best extent that we could capture it at the time. You can see there is a conservative estimate of just over 1600 residents on the estate. We say a conservative estimate because, as the previous speaker mentioned, it is often a little bit difficult to know exactly how many people are living in a public housing unit because there is a lot of underreporting of people within the tenancy. You can also see the great cultural diversity of the residents of the estate. About three in five residents are from a country overseas, and the remaining 42 per cent are members of lower socio-economic groups in the Australian community.

Ms MIDOLO — Our position at the moment — our five key principles are listed here, and we arrived at them with community engagement. So we support the redevelopment of Ascot Vale as the committee of management and as the Wingate community centre, so much so that the committee of management have

formed a subcommittee to look at the infrastructure — if this goes ahead — and what we could do and how we could keep supplying all this support.

Number two — the better living conditions. The gentleman before us spoke very much about them. We have communicated with all our residents. They formed a community leadership group, so we have had a tremendous amount of feedback through that leadership group as well. We do help and see 1000 people a week who come into the centre. So as Jan said, 2000 a week indirectly, but 1000 a week actually come into our centre. I volunteer there, and I work and teach a group of women. It is very obvious in some of the things that they say how poor and substandard what they live in is. It is very important that we look at that and we support the redevelopment of that.

Housing for large families — once again the gentleman before us discussed this and Hilary discussed it as well. It is particularly important within our community. We have larger families, and the example Hilary gave in her submission that you have read was really great, but also we do not know at any one time how many live there because of domestic violence. It might be a two-bedroom flat. There might be a mother with three children but her friend is a victim of domestic violence so she will take her in, so we never know how many are there at one time. They look after each other and, in turn, turn to us — to the Wingate Avenue Community Centre — to help them look after each other as well.

A safe environment — Jan will speak to that. We are constantly looking at safety. We have had to take safety measures, not just for residents but for staff as well. We do have a lot of drug problems and we do have a lot of abuse down there as well.

More than 10 per cent uplift in housing — given that we are sitting on 77 acres, I think it should be obvious that there should be more than 10 per cent to public housing if the rest is being sold off for private. I think that is a very important point to make there. We are supporting more than 10 per cent.

In summary, as the Wingate Avenue community and committee of management —

Ms PATTEN — Suzanne, just to clarify that. When you say you are supporting more than 10 per cent, are you saying more than a 10 per cent increase in the number of public houses on the site?

Ms MIDOLO — Yes, definitely — if you have got 77 acres.

Ms PATTEN — Yes.

Ms MIDOLO — As a committee of management, we support all the team as they go and they do a brilliant job. But the Wingate Avenue Community Centre is there on a daily basis. It is there to support them. We feed them — we have left today with people lined up with Foodbank and a bank of volunteers doing it. We support them, as Jan said. You can arrive at nine in the morning or one in the afternoon and somebody will be coming in just to have coffee and that social interaction. I see it a bit as the lungs of the community at Wingate Avenue, that whole community, because if they have not got us, they have not got anything really, and it has been there for 32 years. We really need to look at where we stand in the redevelopment. It is really very important to us that we get a place in that redevelopment to continue to educate them, to continue to feed them and to continue to provide for their social engagement.

Ms THORPE — Just on top of that, if the estate were to triple or quadruple in size, then the community centre is going to be a vital part of that. Having worked on the estate for 16 years, I have noticed a huge difference in the safety aspect in the last three to four years. There has been a lot more crime, there has been a lot more drug and alcohol abuse. We have had to put cameras everywhere. It sometimes is not a safe place and that is because of the way that it is actually laid out and designed. If the next redevelopment happens, we need to look at the safety aspect.

We know that they know where the cameras are. They know where to go to actually do the crime. Our estate has got a lot of green space but it is not used because everyone is frightened. You can go on any day and look at the run-down playgrounds, and we will talk about that a bit further, but people do not use the green space because it is so unsafe. There is a drug deal going on around the corner or whatever and that is just a prime example of what our backyard looks like. It is terrible, and it has got worse and worse and worse in the last few

years. We have run a lot of safety things, and certainly the committee of management are looking at it at present because working on that estate and even staying back on that estate is really difficult.

Just as a way forward, I suppose what we want to see for the estate are better living conditions. At the moment their clothes lines are on the roof. Their laundries are in a shared space that you would not believe. You go in there and there are syringes. That is where they hide, in the laundries. If you live on the estate, you actually have to go there, to that laundry, every day. I would hate to do that. Then I would have to go up three or four storeys to actually hang my washing on the line. Do you know how unsafe that is? It really is. Even with some of the consultation process that we have had they have talked about putting greenery on the roof. That is still unsafe, so they need to really look at the design when they do it and make sure that it actually meets the needs of the community.

Listening to what the gentleman said previously, they are planning a lot of one-bedrooms for us as well. Where do the families go? We offer occasional child care under our umbrella, as well as the training that we actually provide for newly arrived migrants and refugees. We have three computer labs where we teach them life skills, because they cannot afford a computer or a laptop or an iPad. We have all of those facilities for them and it is a very large area of disadvantage. We hope that the redevelopment will actually give them a better quality of life — better lives, better conditions, so they have their own laundry — but also enough space to be able to live comfortably, not a dog box but something that is doable. But a one-bedroom! I know a lot of ours are like what the gentleman spoke about. They did have families and they have moved out. They have not monitored that, so for 50 years they have sat in a two-bedroom or three-bedroom flat or a house when there is one person living in it. That is something that ongoing probably could be monitored a little bit more carefully so that we do not pull it out from under them after 50 years.

Ms SMITH — I suppose at this point we are happy to take questions from the committee. We are very keen to find ways forward through this entire process. We are very, very keen to work constructively with government around getting the best possible solution for the community to support them further through the consultation processes that have gone on to date and that are going to continue. We are happy to make any of our data available to you after today or take questions now.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for that presentation, which was very, very useful. I guess just to kick off the questions, you spoke of a balance between having enough outdoor space and having private facilities such as a laundry. The problem that you have identified is something that I have certainly seen locally, one that people have complained about in public housing, and quite reasonably so, but more public housing as well, given the size of the land. Do have thoughts on how it would look? What is your vision of a safer space? I know that might be a hard question.

Ms MIDOLO — Well, according to the ones in my class. There was a discussion at one time that there would not be any ground-floor apartments and that for all the apartments there would be lifts. At the moment anyone can walk up and bang on your door. There is no security, no safety at all. So with the development, the first lot of plans that came out, they were still giving us green spaces and there were lifts and things like that as well, so there was a bit more security attached to it as well as the green space. Is that where you are going?

The CHAIR — Yes. Given that you know —

Ms THORPE — My perspective on that is we have got a bit of green space at the moment but it is not activated. We have looked at the Flemington community centre and some of the other places. If you look at what they have actually done, they have actually created a family environment. Do the drug dealers want to be around that? No, they do not. So I think when we look at the redevelopment, if we can make sure that we got some green space and some spaces where —

If you look at the basketball ring and the thing, they were put in 20-odd years ago, and they have not even been touched since. Everything is run-down — everything. Prior to this we were going to put in for a grant to see if we could activate; we did not know the redevelopment was on the cards. Would you want to go out in a backyard like that? As a community centre, if there was some green space there, we could activate it and make sure that there were things for youth, children's programs. We have built a men's shed — we do not know if we are going to lose that as part of this project — that is only two years old. We actually hope that there will be some spaces that can be family friendly and we can actually run programs that support the transition.

Ms SMITH — There has been an element of self-fulfilling cycle. Jan mentioned that this stuff has not been maintained at all — it was built 20 years ago, and it looks like that now — and that is all true. I think part of what sits behind that is a lack of will to maintain something that is not utilised, but it is not going to be utilised as long as it is not maintained. There is also a real lack of basic amenity for all those public green spaces that currently exist on the estate. There is not good seating, there are no toilets. You cannot take your kid to a park if you cannot take your kid for a wee very quickly.

The CHAIR — We hear you.

Ms SMITH — And that just does not exist for families on the estate currently. If some really basic amenities could be included within that green space, it would be much easier for us to activate it and for people to use off their own bat as well, and that would then create that actual interest in maintaining it.

Ms THORPE — If we run an event, we will have minimum 100 people. They just come out. Even when we built the men's shed, they went, 'Oh, that's really good — there will be people around us'. When they see the people, they all come out.

Ms SPRINGLE — How do you anticipate this redevelopment will impact on your service delivery — how would things have to change?

Ms SMITH — I am sure both of you can speak to this as well. We have made a commitment to have not one day closed. We will continue operation throughout any redevelopments, understanding that we will need a new building in order to be able to continue to grow with the growing community. We are currently operating probably slightly beyond capacity in terms of our use of the physical accommodation that we have. But in a new environment with a new centre we would expect to have more space to accommodate us there because we would need to change up our service offerings as the community profile immediately surrounding us changed.

Ms SPRINGLE — How would they change, do you think?

Ms SMITH — I guess that we would need to work closely with the Moonee Valley City Council around some of their social planning that is going to have to happen as part of this, because they will have more of an idea around a lot of the private residents that will be coming into a mixed estate and what their particular needs are. We have looked at the case studies around the Carlton and Kensington redevelopments and the lack of community integration work that was done there, and we see a real role for Wingate, with support from council and from DHHS, to make sure that we do some really strong community integration work so that you do not get that us-and-them dynamic that the previous speaker mentioned.

Ms THORPE — We actually have a community development manager that works at Wingate, so she is very much in touch with the community. We do a needs assessment every three years, and what we do is identify the needs — everyone has input to that — and our service delivery is based on some of the needs. Sometimes education does not come as a top priority on an estate like ours, but we certainly have pathways all the way through, so we run the social and recreation through. Just in answer to that question, neighbourhood houses' philosophy is we are open to everyone, and if we have to diversify with half private and half public, then that is what we will do. We will change our business model to actually do that. At the moment we actually deliver maybe 99 per cent to our housing estate because they actually need us and we actually want to progress it. We actually have an employment program through the government JVEN program, so we try to progress people that are unemployed on the estate through education and then through the employment program.

Ms SPRINGLE — Just as a follow-up to that, has there been any dialogue with DHHS about transition and how that would be managed and how they could support you in the changes that you need to make in that way?

Ms THORPE — Yes. Look, we have actually said to them, because we are actually resource poor — while we have got a lot of staff we actually only have five or six core staff and the rest are teachers or tutors or whatever —

I have actually met with our local member of Parliament, Danny Pearson, who is extremely supportive of Wingate, and talked to him about trying to get some resources to work our way through that — just to do our submission and to come here today. We had meetings yesterday with the site officers who have landed at

Churchill Avenue, and they are going to do some work with Wingate as well, because most of the people come through our doors.

How it looks moving forward: DHHS — we certainly have got an amazing relationship with them, and the property manager at Churchill Avenue. But bigger picture, we have not actually got into it yet. We started doing the whole estate, and then they came up and said that they are going to stage it, so there is a small stage starting: everyone will relocate by December this year, and then they will knock it down and then they will start. So in actual fact the whole estate — at the moment we do not know what is happening with the rest of it. All we know is that we are on stage 1 that will commence at the end of this year.

Ms PATTEN — Next month?

Ms THORPE — That is right.

Ms MIDOLO — That is right, moving them out.

Ms THORPE — Is that correct? We do not get all of the information. We get part of it sometimes. We have certainly got the maps that have got the stage 1 thing. We have got a noticeboard for residents that come in every day.

Ms MIDOLO — The walk-ups in Dunlop Avenue.

Ms SPRINGLE — You just mention a relocation at the end of this year — next month. Can you just unpack exactly what that means?

Ms THORPE — Yes. The consultation sessions have actually been held. What they did was —

Ms SPRINGLE — What did they entail?

Ms THORPE — They entailed actually having a forum to speak to all those residents in that block to say that the redevelopment is going to take place, and then the team is actually going to start as early as next week to doorknock and speak to everyone one to one to relocate them.

Ms PATTEN — Just the people who are leaving next month.

Ms THORPE — Just on the first stage.

Ms SPRINGLE — Is this for the people who are leaving next month?

Ms SMITH — That is what we have been told.

Ms THORPE — Yes, that is what we have been told.

Ms PATTEN — So they will be leaving in four weeks time, before Christmas?

Ms SPRINGLE — And they are doorknocking to tell them that now?

Ms THORPE — They are doorknocking to see what their needs are.

Ms SMITH — DHHS initially came out and ran some sessions based in our men's shed back in August to say the whole estate is going pretty soon, be prepared. Then they have more recently come out and run these other sessions, saying, 'Okay, now it's just the people from Dunlop Avenue'.

Ms SPRINGLE — I guess my question pertains to what they are being prepared for. Is there any detail that has been given? What sort of —

Ms THORPE — We received a copy of the letter that was sent to them. I met with the relocation team yesterday, who said that they were going to start doorknocking next week.

Ms SPRINGLE — But that still does not really give any detail.

Ms SMITH — I suppose people have been told, ‘Be ready to have this meeting’. They have been told, ‘You should expect someone or two people from DHHS to come and visit you, and in the course of that visit you should be ready to talk about what you want in your transitional accommodation’.

Ms SPRINGLE — Have they been given any information about what their options are or might be?

Ms THORPE — I do know that they have got some vacant flats on the Ascot Vale estate that they are actually trying to hold on to so that they might be able to position them close by. It is not necessarily that they are moving everybody out of the area. When people move on they have not been allocating those flats to anyone, so some people may move from Dunlop Avenue into the estate.

Ms SPRINGLE — Are there enough of those to service the —

Ms THORPE — I do not know the numbers or how many they have got vacant, because that is a DHHS —

Ms PATTEN — What sorts of numbers are we talking about in stage 1?

Ms THORPE — I think there are about 40 residents and there are three towers.

Ms SMITH — It is 24 to 42 Dunlop Avenue, so it is each of the walk-ups on the even-numbered side of the street. So what is that? I cannot do the maths that quickly in my head.

Ms MIDOLO — It would probably be a minimum of 40-something residents. 12 in each block, and if there are two, it would be 80 residents. It just depends on how many live in them. We do not have those final numbers.

Ms PATTEN — Just think, if you had children, you would be wanting to know what school they were going to go to next year.

Ms MIDOLO — Yes. That is one of the things that people from our community spoke to Daniel Andrews about when he came out — where they wanted to be, where they wanted their children and could they come back to their community.

Ms SPRINGLE — What was the answer?

Ms MIDOLO — The answer was that they would have the right to accept a place back. They were told that.

Ms THORPE — Also that they had a certain amount of funds set aside for private rentals and that they would try to accommodate those with children in school so that they did not have to change schools.

Ms SMITH — Basically the messaging has been very much, ‘If you have a particular need to stay near to here we will do the very best that we can to meet that need’.

The CHAIR — Just to clarify, it is anticipated that the conversations about moving will start next week.

Ms THORPE — Doorknocking next week.

The CHAIR — When is it anticipated that people will need to move?

Ms THORPE — I think they are not talking about demolishing until, like that gentleman said, June next year. The transition time — they will start on that. They said they hope to get people out. Some people take longer to actually move, so I think it is identical to what he said: you have got to start the process, and if that process takes three months, then they have got that time because they are not going to demolish until June.

The CHAIR — But the design has not been settled yet, has it?

Ms THORPE — No. We have not received it.

The CHAIR — I do not understand the rush to move people out.

Ms MIDOLO — Just following up from what Nina said about transition, that is what Wingate does for all these people. They come to us in fear, and we help them talk it through.

Ms SPRINGLE — There just seems to be so much uncertainty about this for people.

Ms MIDOLO — Unbelievable.

Ms SPRINGLE — It must be very stressful and a little bit traumatic for them.

Ms MIDOLO — There are special needs. I have one particular woman in my class, and she has a lot of special needs. She is in this first development, and it is just traumatic. I was away, and I rang Mark to go and speak to her. Yes, there is just so much uncertainty.

Ms SPRINGLE — Which is why I was quite interested in how your team is being supported through this. I would imagine that your capacity will need to be more robust to be able to cope with the transition, given that some of these people will have complex needs and will need people to support them in a more intensive way. I would have thought, from my perspective, that if it was being done properly, you would have been offered something that was over and above what you are currently operating at.

Ms MIDOLO — No, we have not, and we need it.

Ms SPRINGLE — Yes, I can well imagine.

Ms MIDOLO — The department of housing can build houses and put people in them and stop. Where is their support? Where is the network that these people need?

Ms THORPE — I think we are a vital link to settling the new community in plus transitioning the old community. We are actually vital because we have been there for 32 years, we know our community and we support it in so many different ways. That is what we are there to do.

Ms SMITH — They trust us and understand their relationship with us. It has been quite difficult for a lot of residents over the last little while to understand the difference between different government representatives coming in and out. Whether they are from DHHS or from planning or whether they are a politician or a bureaucrat is very unclear to a lot of Australians and a lot of new arrivals, let alone people who are facing the multiple disadvantages that most of the people we are supporting are. It is very difficult for them to understand who is delivering what message in this sort of public housing renewal space, whereas with us there is that continual trust because they just know us.

The CHAIR — It is understood.

Ms SMITH — Yes.

Mr MORRIS — My question was certainly along those lines. From what I understand, you have a great relationship with your community —

Ms THORPE — We do.

Mr MORRIS — and there is this huge change that the government is proposing. I feel like you guys have been left out of the capacity there to really engage. People are coming to your own a daily basis asking, ‘What’s going on?’.

Ms THORPE — We have a noticeboard up and we have asked for as much information as we can. We can update that on a daily basis. So we do do that, and we are pivotal in the change, I think.

Mr MORRIS — Indeed. But I imagine the government would have much more information than is presently going to be given to you. It sounds like you would be a great conduit for that information being passed onto the community and that the government has not yet fully realised.

Ms THORPE — We have offered as much support as we possibly can through this because we can see how bad the living conditions are.

Ms SMITH — There are some people within government who we have been working with quite closely around some of that, like trying to get the messages out as effectively as we can. They have been quite responsive when we have said, ‘Hey, you’ve given us all of these info sheets in English, but we need them in

these 10 other languages'. There has been a really good response when we have asked for those kinds of things. It leaves a gap for those people who are not literate in any language, and that is a significant proportion of the estate as well. So there needs to be a whole range of different communication approaches in terms of getting the messages out, and consultation sessions have been run in various different formats to try to account for that, but I think there is continuing good work that we can do together on that.

Ms THORPE — And the consultations have had a minimum of 100 people turn up every single time, so that is a lot of people in one area trying to find out a lot of information, remembering that this is one of the biggest ones that we are doing.

Ms SPRINGLE — Is your estate 100 per cent public housing currently?

Ms MIDOLO — Yes.

Ms THORPE — Sure is.

Ms MIDOLO — The part they cannot touch is the part where the people have actually bought their homes, so there are ministry of housing houses and they have actually purchased them. They are a single-level dwelling so they cannot touch them.

Ms SPRINGLE — And how many of them —

Ms THORPE — It is not many —

Ms MIDOLO — Not many. About two blocks.

Ms THORPE — because there are not many houses. They are all flats.

Ms SPRINGLE — I do not know whether this is something you can answer, but it is striking me as a bit of a theme in some of the testimony that is coming through in that there seems to be a level of support for the project based on the idea that it will improve conditions. If the conditions were going to be improved anyway, would you still support the project?

Ms THORPE — That gentleman spoke before about the fact that they almost need pulling down. They have not been touched. I think there are three or four towers that have actually been refurbished in that time, but the rest are so bad. So are you saying no private there and they just —

Ms SPRINGLE — That is right.

Ms THORPE — That is what you are saying, isn't it?

Ms SPRINGLE — Yes. I am just wondering whether people are supporting this project because the by-product will be that the public housing will be new and there will not be maintenance issues anymore, or is it that you actually believe that the private-public mix is important?

Ms THORPE — I think it is important, but whether it be three to one, I am not quite sure about that, because I think that, like the gentleman said, there is much more need for more public housing. I think the mix is good because we have got so much disadvantage in one area.

Ms SPRINGLE — Entrenched, yes.

Ms THORPE — A business almost runs and people cannot afford to pay for classes, and so it would be good to have that balance. It is a given that if they come to a thing and they cannot afford it, we will just waive the fees, so they are used to doing it. It is a given that we will hand out the food today for them to be able to eat this week. So if there was a balance, the private could give back to the public, because we have a lot of volunteers from the private part, so it would be good to be able to have a mix of both.

Ms SMITH — Currently we operate right in the middle of the estate, as we have described, and predominantly service people who live on the estate as opposed to people from the broader Ascot Vale and Moonee Ponds community, and that is partly because — and I say this as an Ascot Vale resident myself — lots of people who live elsewhere in Ascot Vale do not actually know that Wingate exists. There is a sign to it on the

edge of the estate and you sort of go, 'Oh, there's a sign' and do not necessarily realise that there is this huge, vibrant, diverse community centre right in the centre of a diverse community. I do not want to use the word 'ghetto', but it is kind of like that for a lot of the rest of the suburb. It is a really affluent suburb, it is a very well-serviced suburb, and lots and lots of people live in there non-estate part of the Ascot Vale bubble. There is a lot of work that we could be doing with that community from our position as a neighbourhood centre if they knew we were there and if we had a mixed community around us in a redeveloped estate that had that public-private mix, that would be a really nice entry point for us into being able to work with the rest of the community and bring people together much more than we have been able to.

Ms THORPE — And I think it would break down the cycle of disadvantage; I really do. If they see other people out there working, I think it would. I think they would marry really well together.

The CHAIR — Was there anything further you wanted to say to us?

Ms THORPE — Just that I suppose the message is out there that we do totally support it; we are not against it because we see these people each and every day and it would be great to have better living conditions.

Ms MIDOLO — As long as we can stay there to support them.

Ms THORPE — Yes, I suppose as long as Wingate is around.

The CHAIR — Thank you so much for coming along today and for sharing your expertise with us. You will be provided with a copy of the draft transcript within a few weeks to check that what you have said has been accurately recorded. Again, thank you.

Ms THORPE — Thank you so much.

Ms MIDOLO — No problem. Thank you very much.

Ms SMITH — Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.