

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers

Ballarat—Wednesday, 23 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 Jaiden Lillyst, Burrton Guli Program Facilitator, and

Mr Alec Carson, Workforce Development Coordinator, Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative.

The CHAIR: Can I firstly acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet, and I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. Thank you very much for being here to give a presentation to this very important inquiry. There are just a couple of things before we start. All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check, and a verified transcript, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible. If you would like to give a 5-minute presentation, and then we will ask questions accordingly.

Mr LILLYST: Well, I guess more importantly before I do, I will give the right kind of acknowledgement, and that is not just paying respects to the gorgeous weather that we have been blessed with today for the Wathaurong people but for me as a Gunditjmara man from south-west Victoria who has resided on Woiwurrung Country for most of my life and some three years in Wathaurong Country, paying respect to that and to all those people who helped me along and around the way, like Uncle Bryon Powell and Uncle Norm Stanley, who have, you know—

The CHAIR: Yes, I know both of them.

Mr LILLYST: They have helped me along, to get comfortable and to make sure that I acknowledge the land completely and reverently. In cause with that, although some people here are not present, I think it is still worthwhile as part of this acknowledgement to take into account all of those people who are participating today. Obviously we have the members here. Thank you for catching us earlier out there, John. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: No worries.

Mr LILLYST: Gary, I acknowledge you and your work as well. Julianna, thank you very much. Sarah Connolly, thank you. And also the special guys down there typing; you are important too. You are telling the story—part of the story. Thank you, Kat from Northcote—I am an old Darebin boy.

Ms THEOPHANOUS: Are you? Fantastic.

Mr LILLYST: Yes, I went to St Joseph's in Northcote just down the road.

Ms THEOPHANOUS: Did you?

The CHAIR: There you go.

Mr LILLYST: Yes, so good to see some familiar names. Thank you very much to the research mob too, Committee women Kerry and Marianna. Thank you very much. I pay my respects to where you are from as well and to all of those people who have assisted you in getting here in their various capacities through education and through love and support, which is just as important to facilitate that. In acknowledging all the other people who are participating here, they deserve acknowledgement in terms of what they are presenting from their various spheres of work: Highlands LLEN and Ballarat Veterans Assistance Centre, which is very important and is looking after a lot of our people who have not only served but are probably still struggling in very misunderstood circumstances. I pay my respects to Centacare, who do a lot of work in various capacities, but in particular for what they are addressing here today; Ballarat Trades Hall, I have a friend who works with Melbourne Trades Hall quite a bit, so I also acknowledge their work. I also acknowledge our place, BADAC, and Jon Kanoa, who sends his apologies that he cannot be here today; Alec, who has facilitated for me to be able to come up and speak with you; and Brad, who has just joined us as well—thanks again for that, mate. I acknowledge Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre, McAuley Community Services for Women, Centre for Multicultural Youth representatives and the Ai Group—Ballarat and Wimmera Region. We pay our respects and acknowledge them and all their input into this Inquiry too, because it is understanding the full story which is probably going to assist you guys better in the work you take away with you. I really wanted to take the time to acknowledge that, because the holistic work we do here in Ballarat is what is really going to give the best message and give you guys the biggest scope to then put your knowledge to the test and to put it into practice. So thank you very much for that.

The CHAIR: Can I just start with assisting young jobseekers. We have heard a lot of evidence in relation to the struggles of the younger population who are finding it really difficult to find sustainable employment, particularly within Aboriginal communities. How can the State Government better provide a service that will see young Aboriginal people getting into sustainable jobs going forward?

Mr LILLYST: I reckon the paramount thing to that would be starting the cultural safe places. Now, culturally safe can be many different ways. It could be land acknowledgements at the front. It could be as simple as when a jobseeker comes in who might have fairer skin—which is a misconception with Aboriginal people—and they say, ‘Listen, I’m Aboriginal’, not getting those kinds of looks. If I am in here from a referral service, it is not getting the assumption—‘Are you on the wrong side of that referral service?’—and things like that. It is just getting understood and taken in as a person.

I think that is where I guess my experiences have been quite positive—up here, definitely. There might be a bit where my story might be quite relevant and give you a bit of an eye-opener into what at least from my perspective in various capacities, as someone looking for work, someone who is working for the community and someone who has been a jobseeker, would be of possible assistance to you as well—as well as some of the other people I have talked and know, whether that is family members who have looked for work as well or other people we have found in the community that have either had struggles or positives and what has caused those either positive or negative things.

Mr CARSON: If I can make just a couple of comments, I think a real key is something that we are working on at the moment. I think it is a lot about partnerships; I think really education is where this will start. I am actually looking at starting in primary schools—I think a lot of the language, learning and literacy issues that we have there, if they can be addressed very early. And it is a total partnership, I think, between schools, the Aboriginal community, employer organisations and the job network.

We are very blessed here at the moment. We are having some conversations with FedUni about promoting some programs that integrate elements of culture with language, learning and literacy. It is not just everybody working in isolation. It is about everybody working together in a very whole partnership that we are really looking at there. I think one of the things for me—as a non-Aboriginal person working in an organisation with Jaiden—is that it is about just increasing the awareness and the sensitivity. I think you constantly refer to that cultural safety. When we are talking about that, it is just simple little signs—like the flag is displayed or there is some artwork or something that actually makes them feel a little bit better.

We have a range of accreditation programs at the moment, like the LGBTQI+, and I think it would be fantastic if we could have an accreditation that perhaps looks at Aboriginal-friendly employers and stuff like that, so we can actually get some real opportunity. And the reason I think that that opportunity is really important: I am 62. I started off on a family farm and the opportunity I was given was from the Whitlam Government, with free tertiary education. So in two generations I have gone from a cocky’s kid to my daughter, who is now the director of Sportbet International. So opportunity—opportunity.

Ms ADDISON: Jaiden, could you tell us about your program, Burron Guli—is that how you pronounce it?

Mr LILLYST: Yes, Burron Guli.

Ms ADDISON: Being a local I have heard of it, but what does the Boy to Man program seek to address and how is that important in terms of making sure that people are job ready? Obviously if you have got issues of family violence or alcohol and other drug issues going on in your life, turning up for work becomes more challenging. How is your program helping people holistically get job ready or even be in a better position to contribute at work and turn up to work?

Mr LILLYST: I guess in terms of holistically we unfortunately have parameters, but I guess what we do look to do is at least start the conversations—conversations particularly these boys will start to become part of. Boy to Man, which is what Burron Guli stands for in Wathaurong language, is a process which can go from infancy, 0, all the way up to me currently at 36. I am still going through men’s business. There are still things I will need to learn.

With this program we get a scope of three months with the school, so it is at least starting those conversations and instilling what we see as the important basics, which is a good law to guide them. Obviously there is L-A-W law, which guides a lot of us on the roads and in various capacities there, but in terms of what guides us as people we are talking L-O-R-E lore. These things that we try to instil in these boys are understandings of love, respect, safety and responsibility—love being paramount because that will actually affect the other three—and also good conversation in terms of what makes a warrior. It also tries to take in understandings of not necessarily new concepts of, say, father, housewives and full working mothers and things like that, but in terms of understanding that men's business and women's business is still there but that does not mean that lifestyles or anything should not affect that man's business or woman's business relative to that person. Giving them a good basis, I guess, is what our start is in terms of that idea of good people. But, yes, employability I guess is what we are looking through. We are still starting at a very young stage, so we have kind of had to go: at age 18 or 16 this is what we are hoping this kid will look like, but we have got them at grades 3, 4, 5, 6. And yes, it is just kind of carrying on from there.

Mr CARSON: My role is the token numbers cruncher in the organisation. Jaiden looks after the feeling and the heart stuff. I am the numbers cruncher. A lot of those figures when you go back—and you would be more than aware of them—the retention rates, especially with young male Aboriginals in secondary school, are horrific when you compare them to the non-Aboriginal community. A result of that is probably the difficulties they face when they come into schools with, as I said before, the language and literacy problems. You are basically walking into a secondary school with a target on your back.

I think there are a lot of issues around that education. It is getting more Aboriginal people through completing Year 12 and greater participation in tertiary education. I think that is the thing. If you actually get that greater participation in education, it will eventually lead to greater employment outcomes. Again, that word we are all looking at: that gives you more control over your life. That aspect of self-determination is helping you make better decisions in your life, which is avoiding a lot of the issues that we are spending so much money on now addressing in a reactive way rather than probably looking at the preventative stuff, which I think very much goes back to your Boy to Man. It is actually starting at the youngest age possible that you can.

It will not just have implications for the Aboriginal community either. I think the same sort of methodology can apply to any number of the disadvantaged groups that you are talking about. That confidence from an early age and your ability to be able to read as a youngster and to participate more actively in primary education, to get the best out of your secondary education and to be given the opportunities for either vocational or further ed, to me, is really the key of what we are looking at.

Mr BLACKWOOD: Can I just take you to government employment services and ask: how well do you think they currently are meeting the needs of Aboriginal jobseekers? How could they be improved?

Mr LILLYST: I am coming as someone who also a couple of years ago worked at a job services agency as well, so I understand the idea of getting your KPIs to maintain funding to maintain the service to then keep it rolling. I guess on the flip side, because this time around I was hit with a lot of hard things last year, I was not quite the employable person I was. I think in terms of culturally finding myself and getting myself back on that foot, with one instance it was having someone at a job agency that was familiar in terms of community. That is definitely very helpful, so perhaps the idea of employing someone who is local and relative. Even in the case of Alec here, he may not be Aboriginal but he is definitely advocating for us. That is just as important where we do not have the means to sort it out for ourselves at this point.

The other one, going onto that, is the advocates. Another time I had a non-Indigenous person. She was not really knowledgeable of the ins or outs, and the place was not, I guess, what you would call necessarily culturally safe. But at the same time she was not at any point culturally unsafe and very open about understanding what I was trying to handle at that stage to try and get back on track to make myself employable and what was within my means.

And like I said, it is just that judgement of coming in. For example, I had gone into a disability employment workplace, and they were more not seeing the inability that I do have. Working with strengths was a really good one as well. Because my previous work had been in education and with kids programs, that is what we

were looking for. I was not being bogged down with looking for the KPI jobs in the local places that have got parcel-sorting centres or night shift work or things like that. I guess to my credit, I did attempt that as well.

But understanding that even though that workplace failed it was not through so much a set-up to fail; it was a 'Let's see if you succeed'. That was the understanding she gave me and proved it after the fact as well, which I guess kept me going for the next job. It was not so much, 'I didn't get this one. I didn't do this right. Nah, this is done; I'm going back to what I used to do'. It was, 'No, you know what? You did what you could within your means. Let's keep looking at what we were doing. We tried this; let's keep going with that'.

Mr BLACKWOOD: So it comes down to post-placement support?

Mr LILLYST: I think that is also another very important thing. I think it is sometimes not really identified because especially a lot of times in Aboriginal communities that is informally done. At a place like BADAC there are a lot of people I am familiar with, which informally gives me that post-placement support, but at the same time probably having something in place which has that same nurturing effect or maybe even advocates to another person locally who could assist with that, because that is quite important. Even another young jobseeker we were working with who has recently acquired work here, his situation is he was a Queensland man, so he was not even familiar with a lot of the Aboriginal mob down here. But even just finally seeing a couple of people and knowing a couple of people and then branching his network out there, that has really become his post-placement support.

Mr CARSON: We are working with or starting to negotiate now a couple of the partnership models that we are talking about, so with WDEA Works and with MatchWorks, I think WDEA was really good. We have been talking to young Ryan Guareschi, the office manager there. They had actually asked—because being next door in Mair Street—to actually have some of the, 'Well, what does it take to engage?'. They had actually asked us to go over and provide some cultural training for them, which will be happening in the next little bit, which is really good. Locally in MatchWorks we have got Peter Clarke, who is a Gunditjmara man, but I think we were having the conversation that it was really about using the network of elders. This thing of respecting the community is really important—actually using the network of elders to be able to bring the Aboriginal people in a trusting and acknowledging way into the job network agency. So it is probably a little bit about engagement in the agencies as well, and that can be facilitated by having more Aboriginal placement consultants and using the elders to make that place feel safe. It is that sort of transitional part of the relationship that you want where it is not just walking in off the street to another job network; it is somewhere where you know that you are culturally safe. I think that is what we were talking about, wasn't it?

Mr LILLYST: Yes, and sometimes even unlocking that as well. Elders are extremely important, but not everyone who assists the young person is also going to be an elder. Knowing the importance of language and endorsing mentors as well: eldership is more like a doctor or OAM kind of level of things for us, whereas you can still have someone who is quite valid to help and assist those advocates and those mentors—so making sure that that language is clearer for you guys as well.

Ms THEOPHANOUS: I might ask some questions. We are fortunate in Northcote to be home to the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association, and I was having a chat to them just a couple of weeks ago about the work they are doing around Learn Locals and this idea of pre-accreditation training for Aboriginal people in particular. They have been doing some scoping work about what the desire is and what the needs are for particular courses. I am interested in gaining your view, because one of the things that they expressed was that for many Aboriginal kids, particularly those experiencing other forms of disadvantage, the idea of going into a free TAFE course or even a Cert IV or something like that is itself quite daunting. Quite a few will sign up but then drop out of that, therefore forfeiting, in a sense, their chance to get that paid for or subsidised—because you only get one shot at it, I think. So the importance of this pre-accreditation training, delivered through Learn Locals, and to prepare them essentially for further training, do you have any experience in that? Or would the people that you work with? Ways that we can perhaps bolster that pre-accreditation training element in particular for Aboriginal communities having courses delivered by Aboriginal people for them? Also—sorry, this is a long question—

Mr LILLYST: No, that is fine.

Ms THEOPHANOUS: the importance of that as a touchpoint in itself to delivering other forms of support to those particularly young people, I guess?

Mr CARSON: Are you happy for me to pick up on that one?

Mr LILLYST: Go for it.

Mr CARSON: So my role at BADAC is the Workforce Development Coordinator. We have been lucky: we have had some State Government funding through DHHS for the Aboriginal workforce development initiative. Your point is a very good one. Jaiden and I have been talking about it, and you can help me out with my pronunciation here. There is a Cert I, Cert II and Cert III in—

Mr LILLYST: Mumgu-dhal tyama-tiyt.

Mr CARSON: It combines elements of Aboriginal culture with employability skills. We are actually engaged now in talking with FedUni to hopefully organise some funds through the RSTF funding—the regional training fund. So whoever is on those committees, please, you will be having something from us in the near future.

So we are really looking at that. And part of the program that Jaiden is involved in is with young Jackson Kanoa, who was going to be here today; he is one of the youth group facilitators. So it is actually secondary school kids, where you would probably be looking at 12 to 17, and it is actually providing some educational support, where you pick up elements of culture and you pick up elements of employability skills, like your résumé writing and the basic stuff like that. So we are really keen to be able to develop exactly that sort of thing that you are talking about. It can be non-formal. Whilst it is accredited—you have actually got the model there—you do not actually have to go through and do the assessments necessarily. The main thing here is the knowledge transfer, rather than the actual qualification. We are actively working with the local VAEAI—the local Victorian Aboriginal education unit—through Peter Lovett there. So there is a lot of that sort of stuff.

We are having a bit of a conversation about how even the expansion of Jaiden's role can be involved, using his skills and that to be able to do something. Your point is very important. Where this works is, it is Aboriginal training designed by Aboriginals for Aboriginals, and this is what will work. It is the stuff where you know that you have got that 40,000 years of relationship prior that will actually give you the confidence and that to go in and participate in those programs.

Mr LILLYST: To sum up where he was going with that, and also knowing a lot of the programs that are coming out of Northcote—before coming up to Ballarat, Catholic Education Melbourne was pretty much where I was working, so I am very familiar with a lot of the people working out there too—it goes back to understanding the title of employability. When people are not employable, it is not necessarily just having the accreditation with Aboriginal units. I am sure anyone who has worked in education in terms of Indigenous education will have seen that, for some reason, culture heals. Culture does assist things, whether that is special needs in the classroom. It can sometimes be the centring device for them a lot. Whether it is disadvantage—you know, things are not going right at home—culture gives them those wins at school. And it is more thinking of those units relative to culture as healing, which is assisting them in getting them back to employability as well, and really taking on board that they are not just units that are Aboriginal so Aboriginals should do them; culture is quite healing. That is what has helped me on this path as well, being able to end up somewhere like BADAC has helped me to continue that. The work I am doing helps me to continue that. I am not out necessarily of the woods, but it is helping me every day.

It is just understanding that it comes back to that cultural safety. There is a safety around programs like this because they are surrounded by culture while they are working, while they are making themselves employable, while they are getting ready to go back into the workforce. Culture is right there beside them.

The CHAIR: Can I go to the next level? Instead of actually being employed, what about being self-employed through a small business, for example? Being the former Minister for Tourism I know the value of tourism, for example. You have got a history of 50,000 years in this area, and the State Government and the national Government can benefit tremendously out of the knowledge of the local Aboriginal community. It is untapped. I mean, Northern Territory do this really well in terms of Aboriginal tourism. There is a huge demand

for it, and it is growing. So what can State Government do to assist start-ups to set up a small business for Aboriginal communities?

Mr LILLYST: I guess for me, who has worked as a sole trader and still does, that is one area that probably does not get as much attention but probably has a lot of importance for us. I will reference a lot of Northcote as well and that northern area of Melbourne. Obviously with small business there is probably a bit more understanding around establishing, say, your own cleaning service and getting funds and acquiring for that. But then—and you would probably be familiar with this—you have got schools who want activities done, you will have a didge player come out or you will have someone come out and sing. You have got an art project and you will endorse an artist to come out and work for that. In that capacity it is seeing: how is that person getting paid for their work? Sorry, that is the first part. What do they need to understand? Is that quite a BAS statement kind of level, or is this just declared? It is actually just having a general understanding of: how will they do their tax? There is probably not enough knowledge around a sole trader, which is probably what a lot of our people will exist as, being musicians, being artists, being performing artists as well—people who are doing a lot of projects in the arts realm as well.

Mr CARSON: A really interesting one there. I had previously been involved in the Job Network a little bit as a trainer that did small business and took a lot of people through. I think it is the same conversation we were having there. I think one very specifically we mentioned, which is a great crown on the previous council out at Pyrenees, are the wine trails and things that you have got. A cultural trail or a heritage trail or something would be a fantastic way of actually getting the sharing and partnerships up again. But in terms of the actual business, it is exactly the same model that we were talking about before—it is Aboriginal for teaching Aboriginal people. I think it is actually getting those trainers in there and actually getting something up that can work. And again, when we get onto that, it is the businesses that will be set up—you have lots of people with the skills in making the traditional Aboriginal cultural things that you do, but again it is the selling, and it is the coordination probably of individual one-off sole traders into something where you can actually leverage off that with a bit of management expertise at a top level to actually help with the marketing and stuff. But again I think it is actually somebody from within the Aboriginal community that has made a success of a business that can tell the stories as well as deliver the training. I think those are the two pointers—the knowledge is exchanged through the storytelling, and it is actually growing those skills, but success stories will do it. But again, I think working that together, what we are really looking at doing is a bit of a network between—

The CHAIR: Like, for example, eco-accommodation in certain sections of our state providing Aboriginal cuisine and providing accommodation—this is just untapped. There is so much opportunity.

Mr CARSON: Yes.

The CHAIR: I am just hoping that the Aboriginal communities in Victoria can unite and come up with a proposal to Government which will benefit everybody.

Mr CARSON: Your big word there is ‘unite’, and I think what you will find is historically it is the same small business thing that happens everywhere; a small business will start and within a couple of years it will fall over. The big thing here is actually getting those small businesses working together. That will be under a marketing arm or something like that that we can do that. That is an incredible opportunity.

Mr LILLYST: And it might even be understanding what it is that they will need to be sustainable whether they are a sole trader or whether they are a small business. At the moment even if you think of, say, Aboriginal art, that is sometimes getting abused because you will have a lot of people painting but the ‘advocates’ are probably taking hold of that a little bit too much. So in terms of going back to the ideals of self-determination, you tell us how to fish and we will go fish for ourselves.

Mr CARSON: There is an incredible desire to do well, but it is how we go about it, I think, that is the important thing.

The CHAIR: Is there anything further you wanted to add or anything you wanted to say to the Committee?

Mr LILLYST: Yes, I think that is really important. So with my role in the workforce development initiative I think one of the things at the moment is that in Victoria we are really fortunate. We have probably got the

opportunity now, with a good consistent policy direction, to be able to see it through—to initiate and deliver a few programs on an ongoing basis. But at the moment a lot of Aboriginal organisations are funded through, ‘Yes, here’s a packet of money, and it will be given if you deliver this service’. I think one of the things I would really like to encourage is going back out, getting closer to community and finding out what the community need is and actually being market makers rather than market takers in a lot of ways. Rather than, ‘Okay, here’s the budget. You get x for family violence; you get y for family-led decision-making and so on’, it is actually coming up with a couple of projects that are initiated on a specific regional needs basis that we can then apply for, and then if that gets through your finance committees and stuff, you have got something that could be really done at a local level. And if it can be done once and it works well, it can be replicated somewhere else.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Thank you so much. Thanks for coming in.

Witnesses withdrew.