

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students

Melbourne — 19 September 2011

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#### Witnesses

Mr R. Potok, the Aurora Project; and  
Ms J. Harvey, Victorian State Coordinator for the Aspiration Initiative.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome to the hearing in relation to gifted and talented students. As we are taking evidence today I want to point out the process to you. We are looking at the area of gifted and talented students and programs that exist currently as well as ideas and strategies to further develop and enhance these areas for such students. As you can see, today's evidence is being recorded by Hansard, and you will have an opportunity to review the transcript once it is ready. If there are any typographical errors, you will have an opportunity to correct them. I also need to point out that today's evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege that a member of Parliament is afforded. Anything you say in the hearing will be covered by parliamentary privilege, but anything you say outside is not covered by the same privilege.

Richard and Jirra, is there anything you would like to give us by way of an initial introduction? Otherwise we will get straight into questions.

**Mr POTOK** — Yes. I am happy to go to questions. But just to introduce ourselves, I am Richard Potok. I am with the Aurora Project and also a trustee and executive director of two foundations; the Charlie Perkins Trust and the Roberta Sykes Indigenous Education Foundation. Jirra has just joined us as the state coordinator for the TAI, which is the Aspiration Initiative in Victoria. I thought it would be very useful for her to come along to maybe answer questions.

I guess at the start I would like to acknowledge the owners of the land where we are meeting and to pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for joining us. I will kick off with the first lot of questions. What are the main components of the academic enrichment program being piloted as part of the Aspiration Initiative?

**Mr POTOK** — I think it may be useful to give a little bit of history of why there is a need for these programs. May I mention that very briefly?

**The CHAIR** — Yes, sure; of course you can.

**Mr POTOK** — With the Charlie Perkins Trust we have set up scholarships for indigenous students to go to Oxford and Cambridge. With the Roberta Sykes foundation we have a scholarship to Harvard with the Harvard Club of Australia, and both of those are postgraduate scholarships. As of last week we also have a scholarship which is being supported by Lisa Fox, who is the daughter of Lindsay Fox to New York University, so there are all of these postgraduate opportunities. We have two Perkins scholars at Oxford at the moment.

We then put out two books, which I have given you. The one underneath is the postgraduate scholarship guide, which has scholarships for indigenous students to do postgraduate study both in Australia and overseas. As a result of that book, which includes at the back major overseas scholarships like the Rhodes, Monash and Fulbright scholarships. That book led to a woman called Rebecca Richards, who is based in Adelaide, applying for a Rhodes scholarship, the Monash and the Fulbright and winning all three. She was the first applicant for a Rhodes scholarship in the history of the program.

We found there were a lot of other issues like how you get more information to students who could be interested in doing undergraduate study, and that is what that undergraduate scholarship guide is about. For example, in Victoria courtesy of the department of education that guide is going to every year 10, 11 and 12 indigenous students — that is 2000 copies — and another 2000 are going to TAFEs. It not only talks about scholarships — and there are about \$43 million worth of scholarships in there — but it also has information on alternative entry schemes, bridging programs and how students can keep Abstudy when they are considering going to university. We have all these great resources, but the big problem is that the students are not coming through. Nationally, of 30 Aboriginal students in year 8 only one will be eligible to go to uni by the end. It does not mean they go; in Victoria it means they get a mark of 40 or so to get into a Victorian university. But the numbers are just not coming through. What we have been looking at is how we can set up a program that is going to get more kids through to university out of high school or at least having the choice of whether or not they go to university.

To that end we ran workshops around the country and came up with the design of a program. While we were having a meeting at the University of Melbourne, which Ian Anderson from the university was hosting, one of the participants, who is the head of one of the colleges at Sydney University, said, 'You really should look at the

gifted and talented work being done at Johns Hopkins University. They have been doing things for gifted students from minority backgrounds for years'. Out of that we ended up spending four weeks in the United States. I think we had 50 meetings in four weeks with programs in different places all around the country. We looked at programs that are supporting students from minority backgrounds who have had a disadvantaged upbringing, so African American, Native American — which were the most relevant to us — and Hispanic kids.

What we found was that there are thousands of programs. One national program which is funded by the federal government and has 700 programs attached to it is called Upward Bound. There are 700 programs, and they get \$250 million a year. There is over \$1 billion spent on programs for minority kids from disadvantaged backgrounds. Here if we are looking at indigenous kids, there is really nothing that is offered of the same type. We found that there are three things required for these programs to work. One is that they need to start early. You cannot start with a program in years 11 or 12 and expect to make a difference; you have to start in year 8. There are some programs like the Harlem Student's Zone, which start in year 1 or even before the babies are born — with Baby College. You have to start early, and you have to spend hundreds of hours with the kids to support them so that they get to uni.

The third point is that it has to be sustained; it has to be year after year. If you take the gifted and talented program at Johns Hopkins, they have a three-week program. I think they have 10 000 kids who come from around the States to do their program each year. They set up a disadvantaged stream, but that stream just was not enough; three weeks was not sufficient for kids from these backgrounds, where they do not have the cultural capital in their homes.

There is one called Jack Kent Cooke Foundation that offers scholarships from, I think, year 9. It supports students from school through to university. There is another scholarship through Johns Hopkins that does that. There are three reasons why you need additional support for indigenous Australians in this area. Firstly, the vast majority of resources for state school kids, which is what we are looking at at the moment, go to attendance and are really for the low achievers. There is really nothing for the gifted and talented end of the spectrum, certainly not in Victoria so far as we are aware, but really there is nothing across the country.

Secondly, if you come from a disadvantaged background or a background where parents have not gone to university, your chances of success are far fewer. For example, a Smith Family study in Australia just recently found there is a 65 per cent chance of you getting a degree if your father went to uni, whereas there is a mere 29 per cent chance if your father did not get past year 10. There are the same results overseas. In the United States it is something like 68 per cent and 24 per cent, and you will find similar answers in Canada, Germany and the UK.

One thing about the program is that it is very much focused at the low end for struggling students, and the second is the problem about access to university and cultural capital in homes. The third one is the crucial one, because you come across a lot of people who say, 'My parents didn't go to university', but what they can say is that when they went to high school they were with a cohort of kids for whom university was on their agenda and where everybody was going to university, or the vast majority were, whether they were at a private school or a selective state school or just a state school where lots of kids were going down that path. That is an issue. A lot of the indigenous kids that we come across are in cohorts where going to university is not part of their future.

The statistic in the US is that you are four times as likely to go to university if your friends do, and what we are trying to do is create that. I hope that was not too much information and I will come back to your question. In our camps we are looking to identify, for example, 30 kids in Victoria, 30 in New South Wales and 30 in Western Australia. The schools from which these 30 kids have been chosen is on the basis of year 7 NAPLAN results — not the kids but the schools. We started with the department of education to identify schools where kids are doing not exceptionally, but are doing average or better and are getting a 7, 8 or 9 on their NAPLAN tests. When we had that list of schools, we then went to VAEIA, the Victorian Aboriginal education peak body, and worked with them to rank those schools. We were looking at schools where perhaps there were not as many services as there are in other areas, looking at how they have gone and services that are provided and other ways to rank schools. With the support of the department and VAEIA, we then started going out and visiting those schools. We first visited the local Aboriginal education consultative groups. If they thought this was a good

idea, then we would go to the schools and meet with the principal and teachers. The schools would then have to dedicate a teacher who would look after kids who would be part of this program. From that we then would meet with the parents and students, and then with teacher support the kids would do an application form of about 11 pages of why they should be part of the program. We are identifying 30 kids within clusters of schools; we are looking at eight schools in Victoria. For example, Chaffey Secondary College in Mildura — and I think one of you is from Mildura — has set up a TAI area. They are going to have an area where these kids can work. They have hired their Teach for Australia associate, who is someone working for me on this program at the moment, who is then going on to work for Teach for Australia and is going on to work at that school. I mentioned Thornbury before; there is only one school in Melbourne. Other schools are in Warrnambool, Shepparton, Echuca, Swan Hill, Mornington Peninsula and Healesville.

The program will be at Worawa Aboriginal College, and the idea is that we will support these kids for five and a half years, so from the middle of year 8 through to the end of first-year university. We start our first program in two weeks at Worawa college. The idea behind going through to first-year university is that a lot of indigenous kids drop out of university in their first year. The idea is to try and support them. Part of it is building their identity, so components of the program are building identity, building self-confidence, providing access to information about university study, getting them excited about study, as well as going to universities to blow things up and do other experiments and things. But it is also being part of a cohort that is moving towards university and is preparing them for that. That is the basis of the program. We have six curriculum designers, and four of them are indigenous; one has written his PhD on Aboriginal pedagogies. There also are two gifted and talented private school, non-indigenous educators, who are working together to come up with a program.

The first camp is for six days in a couple of weeks time. Then we are looking at a larger and longer camp in the summer holidays. Something that is very exciting for next year in Victoria is the School for Student Leadership, or the Alpine School, which you presumably know about, where Mark Reeves has put aside 30 places for our kids. In fourth term next year, 15 will go to one site and 15 will go to another site, with 30 non-indigenous kids, or 30 other kids, in the program. That will be part of the ongoing program.

**The CHAIR** — Just on the holiday residentials as being a key component of the program, why have you selected the residential program model, and what particular benefits does it provide for indigenous students?

**Mr POTOK** — It is not necessarily an indigenous issue. A lower SES program that is not specifically for a particular group, which most of them are in the US, would have the same benefits. Through a residential you are immersing them in something, and they get away from issues at home and away from other things and they can just focus on this. America has a lot more of a camp culture than we do here, but still it is something we can start immersing them in that will have an impact. I guess the other part you just mentioned is that our program is for state school kids; all of those are state schools. We see that the benefits of a private school or boarding school is something that other people are doing, but the focus for us is on the state school kids.

**Ms MILLER** — How are students selected to participate in the academic enrichment program? Is the formal testing used and, if so, what assessment methods do you use and how do you take a student's potential as opposed to demonstrated performance into account as part of your selection process?

**Mr POTOK** — As I mentioned before, the idea is that we choose the schools on the basis of NAPLAN results, but then we work with the school and the community to identify the kids who should be part of the program. From our perspective we believe if you take 30 children who have potential and we give them this type of support, they will fly. We do not need to choose them, and we do not have the information to choose them. The thought was yes, the NAPLAN determines the schools, but then for the actual kids who are going to be part of the program we will not just look at NAPLAN results but at how their teacher and community members would have input into who they think has the capacity to be involved in a program like this.

**Ms MILLER** — Reflecting on what you have learnt from selecting these students to participate in the enrichment program, do you have any suggestions for improving the identification of high ability and high potential indigenous students in the education system generally?

**Mr POTOK** — I think it is too early for us to be able to tell. At the moment we have not run our first camp, so it is not something we have a view on.

**The CHAIR** — Just in terms of looking at the indigenous perspectives being taken into account in developing the program, how does this program differ from programs for non-indigenous students?

**Mr POTOK** — Jirra, you may chime in as well on this. I think we are also trying to build identity with the kids. A lot of indigenous kids that go to university end up struggling at the start while they kind of find their feet. A lot of them will get in under alternative entry schemes. They do not necessarily feel like they belong. They will not have a lot of the resources that many other kids from more privileged backgrounds have, so they may feel quite alienated when they start. Our program is trying to build resilience; that is a comment that has come up a lot with what we are doing. Maybe I will pass over to Jirra to talk about some of the parts of the program that are trying to do that.

**Ms HARVEY** — Sure. I guess in my experience it is about raising expectations. There are a lot of low expectations around Aboriginal performance in the education system within our communities. I think that becomes internalised by the kids. I know when I was young I would ask for harder work at school, and the teachers would comment, ‘Why bother wasting our teacher’s time, when she is just going to be pregnant at 16 and drop out like all the rest of them’. You hear those comments coming through time and time again. Certainly in my experience working within the education system, you hear comments from teachers that none of these students have university as a prospect; and we are talking about year 8 and year 9 students. I do not think you can particularly make that judgement when they are that young. I guess it is about raising those expectations by having a high achievement program.

I think the schools and teachers might stop viewing the students a little more differently, and also it is just having that 5 or 10 days where the students are told over and over again, ‘We expect you to achieve. We know that you have the ability. We expect you to be successful. We expect you to have all the choices that non-indigenous kids can have’. I think just hearing that repeatedly for the next five years will make a big difference. I think a lot of parents want their kids to have equal opportunities, but they are not 100 per cent sure about how to support them to do that. For me, I have a non-indigenous mother who went to university, and my father has worked in Aboriginal education, so I was very much raised with an expectation that I would go to university. But I know that was not the same for a lot of my cousins and a lot of my peers. When it got to VCE I was at home with parents going, ‘Okay, you need to set this amount of time away for study; you need to set up a desk in a quiet place’. That kind of support is not always available, and it is not because parents do not want to give it but just because they are not sure how.

**Mr POTOK** — I think that is a big part of our program. We will be supporting parents and families as well — that is, looking at how to support them so they can support their kids. Again and again we hear stories about students being told things like, ‘You will be a hairdresser’ or ‘You will go to TAFE’, and they are not really encouraged. We even have a great quote. As you know, you can get into university with a lower mark as an indigenous person through an alternative entry scheme. We have one student who was asked by her English teacher, ‘Why are you studying so hard? You’re going to get into university anyway through an Aboriginal special entry program’, and that student went on to win a Rhodes scholarship. But she also had a different path, because her mother was a schoolteacher. There is a difference in terms of that. It is going to be a normal distribution. There is going to be 10 per cent of kids who are gifted and talented, but they are not getting the opportunities. They are not going to end up in university.

One of the schools, which is probably the top school in Australia as far as what we have seen at the moment, is in New South Wales. Ten of its 27 kids got 7s, 8s and 9s. Three of the girls got 9s. In the rest of the state we find schools with one child getting a 9, and yet when you say, ‘How many of your kids are getting to uni?’, it will say, ‘A couple of years ago I think one of our indigenous kids went to uni’. They start with 10 in year 8, but by the end they are not there, and that is what this is trying to do.

**Ms MILLER** — In terms of the support we were just talking about with Jirra, this question kind of follows on in that your submission states that parents and other carers will be involved in the academic enrichment program. What support will be provided to the families of students in this program?

**Mr POTOK** — One thing is getting the parents involved. For example, on the fifth — it is now the sixth — day of the program the parents are coming. We are bringing the parents to the program so the kids can showcase what they have learnt and what they have done during the program. As to the second part of what we do, for example, we met recently with ASIC, the securities commission. It has an indigenous outreach program. We were talking to ASIC about how we can give support for families so it can support kids. It might be financial planning support, internet in the home, financial literacy; there are a range of different ways in which we can support parents. What we are going to need to do will depend on other things; it will be on a case-by-case basis. It has been said to us from the start that the person who ran the national congress, Kerry Arabena, commented initially, ‘You have to work out how to support the parents so they can support the kids’. We found during our consultations, including in Victoria — it was either in Echuca or Mildura — where the parents gave this sigh of relief that there were going to be people there. They know they have bright kids, but they do not know how to get them to university. That is one way in which we are supporting them.

Another way in which we want to support the kids is that we want to give them opportunities that privileged kids get. For example, if your father is the CEO of some organisation and you want to work in banking, your father picks up his phone and talks to his friend at a particular bank. We are going to have an advisory group through our funders who will be part of that, providing those opportunities. If the child is a great musician or artist or is interested in business, whatever it is, we will try to give them shadowing opportunities. With politicians, if there are people who are interested in doing that — we did in WA — then people can say, ‘We would be keen to try to assess that’. It is giving the kids the opportunity that they do not have normally. The aim of the program is really to cocoon these kids and their families and see what impact you can have over the period and see whether you can end up with 30 of these kids eligible to go to university rather than one of these kids getting through.

**The CHAIR** — In terms of the modelling you have done with this program, you mentioned that you went to the US and looked at a number of other programs. It is obviously too early for you to get to the evidence base at the end of it, but can you maybe point out to the committee some of the programs which have been working over a fair period of time targeting indigenous and — —

**Mr POTOK** — Yes. Looking at disadvantaged kids from minority backgrounds and programs in the US, as I mentioned, there is one called Upward Bound. All of these have been going for two decades and sometimes longer. Upward Bound had 700 programs across the country. The Posse Foundation is one that is based in New York. The Posse Foundation started with the idea, ‘I could not have made it to uni without my posse of friends’. The use of the word ‘posse’ is very problematic when you go from New York out west, where ‘posse’ has different connotations, but they have set up this organisation that gets — I would have to check the numbers — \$8 million or \$9 million a year, mostly from philanthropists. It has been running for almost 20 years, and it basically takes students, and they have to get into a group. The group that is chosen then goes as a group to a university, and the universities choose the kids on the basis of them being posse kids. They pick, say, 10 of those 20 and they go together to a university and they have support structures. That seems to work very well.

There is one called MS<sup>2</sup>, which is maths and science for minority students. Again, that is a program where when it started only 30 per cent of its kids were finishing the program which took three years and five weeks at Andover, which is a private school in Massachusetts. Now it has 95 per cent retention and they go to the top universities.

Another one worth looking at is called Prep for Prep. It takes disadvantaged kids in around years 5 or 6. It has a six-or-seven-week camp, from 9 to 5, five days a week, for one holiday over the summer. Then the kids have programs every Wednesday afternoon and every Saturday for a year, followed by another six-or-seven-week camp. After that they go to top, elite private schools. They do not just go to a private school without any preparation; they have 14 months of preparation — 700 hours — before they go to a private school. I can send you the chart of their successes, where there are hundreds of doctors and lawyers and PhDs coming out of that program, but it needs that extra bit to actually get them to be able to thrive at an elite private school. Those are some examples of some of the programs.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Your submission says also that indigenous students need ongoing support to achieve academic success. What support should be provided to gifted indigenous students to ensure that they fulfil their academic potential?

**Mr POTOK** — I think it has to be ongoing support in terms of mentoring and opportunities. For example, what we are looking at is that each school will have a person who looks after these kids and will be responsible for the four or five kids from their school. That person will liaise with Jirra, whose role is to ensure that these kids realise their potential and that they have the support and move forward with that. If the kids need mentoring, tutoring or other things, that is what we are there for — to do that. We will work with other programs. There is a program called AIME that does mentoring. If that is in the schools we are in, it would be something we would work with to ensure that these kids get the support they need.

It is not an indigenous issue; it is a lower SES issue. If kids are coming from environments where they do not have the cultural capital, do not have the experience and are part of groups where there are not high expectations, there needs to be additional support. That is what the example of Johns Hopkins and the Center for Talented Youth shows. They needed additional ongoing support. At the end they would look at the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation program, and they would look at what was going on as well at Johns Hopkins.

**The CHAIR** — Your submission obviously talks about year 8 and the fact that the early years focus on basic literacy and numeracy programs. Do you have any suggestions on ways of identifying and working with indigenous kids in the early years?

**Mr POTOK** — I do not; it is not my area. What I do know is that you could look at the work Graham Chaffey has done. He has been working at year 3 to identify them. I think the answer is that 7 out of the 10 kids who were strong in his testing were considered below average by their teachers. How you identify them is very difficult. We originally thought we would start in year 9, and then a lot of people told us that indigenous students, particularly boys, disengage in year 8. That is why we went back to year 8. We know that we cannot stop until the end of the first year of uni, because of dropouts at that stage. If we had the funding, we would be moving this backwards, because the earlier you start, the more chance you are going to have of a positive impact. I do not come here as an expert in this area. I could not say anything about that. All I can say is that we found there was a problem. No-one was in this area, so we at Aurora started to move backwards from postgraduate scholarships and the work we do to try to exist.

**Ms HARVEY** — I am just going back one step in terms of specific support for indigenous students. I think the more that indigenous students are achieving at a high level and, say, going to university — —

I went to the University of Melbourne myself. There is not a huge indigenous cohort. Of course numbers are always growing, but the more you succeed academically, the more you are put in positions where you are less and less around Aboriginal peers.

I think this program is really important, because we are very much going to try to ground it in local knowledge, have local elders on board and have indigenous mentors who are students who have been down this pathway before. I think there is a fear from some communities and from some parents that if students go off and achieve and go to university, they will become ostracised by or broken away from community and not bring their skills back to community. That is something that I am quite passionate about and want to focus on: making sure it is grounded in Aboriginal knowledge and having Aboriginal role models.

**Ms MILLER** — It has been suggested to the committee that indigenous communities often celebrate gifted artists, musicians and dancers but may not recognise, support and promote academic giftedness. Do you agree with this, and if so, what can be done to promote positive attitudes towards giftedness in indigenous communities?

**Mr POTOK** — Again Jirra would have more experience, but my experience so far is that we have had comments from Lionel Bamblett, who is the head of AI here in Victoria and who happens to be Jirra's father — though him working as that is a completely separate strand to getting Jirra as state coordinator, which I will say on the record that it is a terrific thing for us and our aspirations here in Victoria. The comment that came back was that 10 years ago this program would not have been possible. Ten years ago the view was that any form of

elitist program that was in some way choosing particular students and getting them opportunities would not have been considered acceptable. Now there is a belief that this is, and we have had no problems in any of the communities we have gone to. There has always been support. People want this for their kids. They realise the importance of academic achievement for their kids.

The other part of that — and then I will pass it over to Jirra — is that we are trying to move away, and so many people have told us this within the indigenous communities, from sporting role models. You talk about arts and celebrating that, but it is still sporting role models. When we did the undergraduate guide we were unable to find an indigenous AFL player or past player who had a university degree to be one of the people featured in the program. That was something the AFL wanted, but with a short amount of time they could not find someone. We are trying to move away from that, and that is why we have these role models.

Another role model is someone from Victoria, a woman called Misty Jenkins, who is from Ballarat. Misty had never really met an indigenous person who had studied at university before she went; none of her parents' friends had studied at university. When she went to university at the University of Melbourne she studied under two Nobel Prize winners, then went off and did a post-doc at Oxford and then Cambridge, and is now working at the Peter MacCallum Centre here. She is someone who is passionate about giving other indigenous students opportunities like that.

**Ms HARVEY** — From my perspective I think it is actually wider Australia that promotes the success of indigenous sporting stars, artists and people from those kind of fields. I do not particularly think that it is community. Of course we are proud of athletes, of artists and of pretty much anyone who is doing well. I feel our community stands behind them. But I studied media studies at university and focused very much on representations of Aboriginality. I found strongly that it was only in the areas of sport and art where Aboriginal people were represented as successful. I think that plays a huge part in our young people aspiring to be these models of success, because they are the only ones. Now it is a little bit different because we have a couple of films and NITV, but for me growing up the only time I ever saw Aboriginal people shown in a positive light on television or in the newspaper was through sports and arts. Personally I do not feel that is a community push. I think it is a non-indigenous push of representation of my community.

I went to school where I was the only indigenous student in the school. I was the dux of that school, and my community was so proud of me. I was awarded Miss NAIDOC, which is normally a kind of community ambassador role, not something that is awarded on academic achievement. But people were proud, and they were excited. I know the continuation of the young achiever award, which is now being named after Ricci Marks, is very much a celebration of career and academic achievement. I think the community is really pushing for acknowledgement of indigenous success in a whole lot of different fields. Certainly that is what I have experienced.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Your submission notes that support provided to enrichment program participants by the state coordinator may include mentoring. What are the benefits of mentoring for indigenous students? Are you aware of any existing successful mentoring programs for high-ability indigenous students?

**Mr POTOK** — I think the answer is that it again comes into this whole role modelling and letting them see that there are people out there who are going to university, who are successful at university, who are going on to do PhDs or who are going on to Oxford or Cambridge, being Rhodes scholars. Raising that is hugely important so that kids are thinking about those opportunities, and that is a natural process. When we think about mentoring programs, the AIME program has been successful in this regard. That ends up being a lot of non-indigenous students who are mentoring indigenous students, and I think that has had a terrific side effect in terms of reconciliation and non-indigenous students meeting indigenous students. It is raising opportunities; it is where we are giving opportunities and having potential role models. Jirra, what are your thoughts?

**Ms HARVEY** — Sorry, I did not actually hear the question.

**Mr POTOK** — The question is on mentoring programs and whether there are successful mentoring programs for indigenous kids?



**Ms HARVEY** — Yes, absolutely. I worked for AIME, and I think mentoring is incredibly important. I think within our Aboriginal communities mentoring is something that happens very naturally. Most people can name an older auntie or uncle or a peer that was a couple of years ahead of them that took them under their wing. There is a very unofficial mentoring program that naturally happens in the community. It is about boosting that up a bit with people outside of your local community — so they are Aboriginal but they are from another city or another state and are in a field that you are interested in — and, like Richard said, providing opportunities in the business world and in areas where we unfortunately do not yet have Aboriginal people working.

For me, once again, keeping it grounded in community knowledge is incredibly important and to bring mentors on board even if they are elders that did not have access to education. One of the reasons I always had a respect for education was because I was taught that I was incredibly lucky to have those opportunities. It was drilled into my mind. I had this image of the houses on the missions, like the house my family grew up in, with 14 kids, two rooms and dirt floors. The walls, like most mission houses, were made out of mud bricks and people would insulate them with newspapers. It was always drilled into my head that how most people learned how to read was that you had to sit down next to the wall and you had to read those old newspapers. That I had the opportunity to go to school was something I should be thankful for, and I should be acknowledging the work of my ancestors to get me there. To have elders on board telling the kids these stories is important, because they are getting lost little bit by little bit, And I think they are important. Teenagers always roll their eyes at having to go to school, but when you hear those stories it makes you think twice about it.

**The CHAIR** — In any program there is always an attrition rate. How are you factoring that into the model? Is there an ability to take up more students if you have some that do not complete it? The other part of my question is in terms of the funding. Do not take this in any other way than how it is meant, but it would appear to me that this would be fairly expensive to run — to provide the resources necessary to do it. How is it funded?

**Mr POTOK** — I will go back to the first question on attrition rates. That is something we know. We know, for example, that the program I mentioned, MS<sup>2</sup>, started with a 30 per cent success rate in terms of people continuing, and now it is 95 per cent. We realise that. The funders we have involved realise that they are in there for the long haul. We are still looking for funding, and I will get back to that before I leave.

Regarding the way we are going to deal with the attrition rate, there will not be just the normal attrition rate of kids who just do not want to do this; there will also be families moving, as a lot of indigenous families move to different places. That is why we have chosen schools of excellence where there are enough indigenous kids that are doing well. The idea is you will backfill — which is a term I learnt in the US — from the class. If, say, someone pulls out from Chaffey, there will be another student that will fit in there. We will keep it to the eight schools, but if that does not work, we will open it up to other schools. The aim is that we would get the KECs and KESOs, the indigenous education officers within Victoria, to hear more about what we are doing. The idea will be that if there are slots available, we will be bringing other students in. The idea is not to just start with 30 students and see how many we end up with.

On the funding side, the model we are looking at is around \$13 000 a year per student. We have been told that if children do not do this and they are, for some reason, part of the juvenile system, it can be \$70 000 or \$80 000 a year, so \$13 000 a year is not that huge an investment, and we see it as life changing. If you are looking at the whole system in Victoria, the state and the state school system is producing around about 60 students— I think it is 68 — who are eligible to go to uni. We are looking at a very small percentage, say 2 to 3 per cent of the schools, and we will be producing 50 per cent of the students coming out. The investment has to be made. Given the amount that people pay for kids to go private schools, \$13 000 a year is not exorbitant, and it is an investment that has to be made. The idea is that you are not just impacting on those kids, but that you are having a ripple effect within the school.

We mentioned evaluation. We had 11 proposals for evaluation, and we have now chosen a Melbourne-based evaluation group called Clear Horizon. They are going to be working from the start, helping us to think about how to evaluate and how to set up the mechanisms to evaluate not just the impact on those kids but more generally the ripple effect within the community, the peers and the brothers and sisters.

**The CHAIR** — In terms of that broader ramifications for the school, if you have got a child from Chaffey, is there an opportunity for that child to engage with the broader cohort of kids that, say, are not involved in the program and to share some of the learning and experience with them so that it helps some of those kids as well?

**Mr POTOK** — I think that is part of looking at how this could have an impact on how you do that. I think what you do with that is a really interesting idea. There is a foundation in New South Wales that is interested in getting involved, not to support the students on the camps but rather the indigenous Aboriginal education officers, so that they build skills by being involved in this and are able to go back to their community and do work within the school. I think part of Lionel Bamblett's idea is that we would end up with pride in the community and support for the program in the community. The idea of showcasing what the kids are learning within the community with some of their peers and also with parents is something we would be working to build as well.

**The CHAIR** — Fantastic. That has concluded our questions. Is there any concluding remark that you would like to make?

**Mr POTOK** — I just have one concluding remark which is about where we are. In Victoria we are about half of the way on funding, although we are starting in two weeks. The support has been very strong from a range of foundations in Victoria. In, for example, New South Wales, the state government has agreed to spend \$130 000 a year reviewing it. We have met with Minister Dixon and Minister Hall here, but it is still going through the process. If you think this is a good idea, your support would be gratefully appreciated, particularly if we are going to get this to occur. The aim is not to have just one program in Victoria, it is that we have 30 this year, and that next year we have another 30, so there would be 60. When they are in year 9 there would be another group in year 8. You then follow that 60 through. At the end of the day there should be 10 of these programs in the state of Victoria for indigenous students, and also lower SES students, so that you are moving away from the idea of just having 60 kids eligible to go to uni to the idea of having hundreds of kids.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. Congratulations on the work as well; it sounds like a really exciting program, and I am certainly very interested in following its success. I am sure the other committee members are too.

**Mr POTOK** — Thank you for having us.

**Witnesses withdrew.**