

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road Users

Shepparton—Wednesday 13 September 2023

MEMBERS

Alison Marchant—Chair

Kim O’Keeffe—Deputy Chair

Anthony Cianflone

Wayne Farnham

John Mullahy

Dylan Wight

Jess Wilson

WITNESSES

Sue Caines, Team Leader, Child, Family and Disability Services, and

Amanda Perry, Team Leader, Disability Services, Goulburn Valley FamilyCare.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into the impacts of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. While all evidence taken by the Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside this hearing, including on social media, may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts and other documents provided to the Committee during the hearing will be published on the Committee's website.

Thank you for your time. We really appreciate you coming and us asking you a few questions. I might introduce the Committee, firstly, and then hand to you. You might have an opening statement or something you would like to talk about first about your organisation.

Sue CAINES: I can do.

The CHAIR: Otherwise we will jump straight into questions, and we can do it like that, just like an informal chat. I am Alison. I am the Member for Bellarine.

Kim O'KEEFFE: I am Kim, local Member. I think I know your face, Sue. I think I might have met you before.

Sue CAINES: I think so, Kim.

Kim O'KEEFFE: It is lovely to have you here as well, Amanda.

Amanda PERRY: Thank you.

John MULLAHY: John, the Member for Glen Waverley.

Anthony CIANFLONE: I am Anthony Cianflone, Member for Pascoe Vale.

Jess WILSON: Jess Wilson, Member for Kew.

Sue CAINES: Nice to meet you all.

The CHAIR: I might hand to you if you would like to introduce yourselves.

Sue CAINES: Yes. I am Sue Caines, Team Leader at Goulburn Valley FamilyCare. We can tell you who FamilyCare are if you are unsure.

The CHAIR: Yes, that would be good.

Sue CAINES: So we provide services in five shires, Mitchell, Murrindindi, Moira, Strathbogie and here in the City of Greater Shepp, and the programs that we run range from family services through to disability, IntoRec, parent-child programs. We are just across the board. We do a lot –

Amanda PERRY: Carers support coordination.

Sue CAINES: carers support, yes, support coordination, a lot of the NDIS delivery. Coming here today we asked people whether they would like to come along. And I will apologise—Janet was going to come with us today, but she is having a tough day, so we will speak for her.

The CHAIR: All good.

Sue CAINES: Thank you. Amanda.

Amanda PERRY: I am Amanda Perry, Team Leader for IntoRec, which is disability support services at FamilyCare. I have had quite a few years working directly with people with disability out in this local

community and even down in the city. We travel a fair bit, so we come across lots of different things that we find difficult.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We might just ask you a few questions and get some local knowledge and your advice on some of these issues.

Amanda PERRY: All right.

The CHAIR: We have had a really great range of panels and witnesses today that have talked about this, about improving our road safety, so we might just ask you for your expertise. Kim, I might let you have the first question.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Lovely to have you here, and it is so great to have obviously this in Shepparton and to hear grassroots issues. I do know FamilyCare very well. Goulburn Valley FamilyCare would often reach out in my former life as mayor and now do in my new position constantly, so thank you so much for the work you do. Probably my perception is, one, do you have the resources that you need to keep doing what you do? And the other thing is, when you are—

Amanda PERRY: That is a big question.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Yes, how long is a piece of string? 'Are there priority gaps?' is probably a better question. Are there priority things that you are not being able to meet due to funding or whatever reasons? And the other question is—obviously you represent families, so you are actually supporting families. And because we are talking about road safety matters, are there connections to families that you actually support, whether it is kids getting their licences or families needing vehicles sometimes? I mean, it is so broad, but when we talk about road safety and the work that you do—or road support, whatever it might look like—what do you do to provide that?

Sue CAINES: Two massive questions.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Sorry. Big ones.

Amanda PERRY: I am pretty sure that was three questions in there.

Sue CAINES: No, it is good. That is okay. Do you want me to start and you to jump in?

Amanda PERRY: Yes, I will be butting in.

Sue CAINES: All right. So with regard to funding, no, but I think anybody would answer that way. We would like to be doing more, and to do more you need the funding to staff it and to run the programs. I think Amanda said in the beginning she has been doing disability for a while. I have been in disability for I suppose nearly 20 years—I do not know—a long time. And with the NDIS coming in, it is a good thing, okay. It is a good thing. A lot of people have got access to funding that they never had before with the block funding being removed, but the block funding is all gone. So there is nothing that is community-based now that allows for some of the things that we used to do. I know Amanda is going to talk to the Careful Cobber program.

Amanda PERRY: The guys from Melbourne Poly or outside if you do not know anything about it.

Sue CAINES: We had a road set up that the kids could get on, so kids with a disability, primary school-aged kids, anybody. We could take the adults with a disability.

Kim O'KEEFFE: And I heard about DECA today.

Amanda PERRY: Did you?

Sue CAINES: Yes, at DECA. So taking them down and letting them learn how to cross roads, how to ride their bikes safely, how to stay out of the way of traffic, what it looks like, how to stop at a road—those kinds of things.

Amanda PERRY: From the families that I work with, one of the things we get asked constantly is: do you do any sort of bike ed stuff? We try, but if you are riding out in the community, it really needs to be a one-on-

one worker and child situation. A lot of the children's packages do not necessarily allow for that, because they are not at that stage yet. One of the things I have been kind of throwing around for a while now is I really want to get a bike program going not just for the kids, but for anyone really within the community. I believe there was education through the schools, but if I remember correctly, that is once a year, and that sort of stuff does not work for our guys.

Sue CAINES: It is not in every school, though, either.

Amanda PERRY: No, it is not now. It needs to be an environment where people start off practising on maybe the Careful Cobber tracks, where there is not any major risk, but they can learn the basic rules first: learning to identify the signs and following the roads and things like that. We get so many requests –

Sue CAINES: Yes, we do.

Amanda PERRY: for bikes, scooters, a skate park; all of it is getting out into the community.

Sue CAINES: Yes. So the second part of your question—I might need reminding of what the last part was—we used to work with preschool aged. We work with school-aged prep through to age 25—well, it is more now since NDIS.

Amanda PERRY: Our oldest is 60 through now.

Sue CAINES: Yes, right through to adults. So we have kids that hit those teenage years, and mum and dad do not have the funds or the capacity to—

Kim O'KEEFFE: That is right, it is the funding too.

Sue CAINES: Yes, and sometimes even the patience. They are with these kids all day. Sometimes you are not being heard, and you are a lot more stressed and overwhelmed than maybe the average parent. And to get in the car –

Amanda PERRY: Sorry, and some of our parents have disabilities as well.

Sue CAINES: One hundred% they do. We have got a worker in our team at the moment who is asking if he can go learn the L2P program so that he can borrow one of their cars to take the teenagers out. But that program is limited in when you can use the cars and what you can do as well. It is, again, back to funding, isn't it, and being able to find the staff members to do the training, or being able to fund the program that is already there and expand it—whichever way it goes. We could support them. But no, there is not enough out there for that either. When you think about how you are putting someone with a disability into a car, and saying you have got to have—what is it now—240 hours or something.

Amanda PERRY: To be honest, I cannot keep up with the rules.

Sue CAINES: No, it has changed again. Whatever it is—further hours. You are talking about being on back country roads a lot of the time at 100 kilometres an hour. If you are going out at night and you have got someone with a disability who is not particularly experienced, everybody is a bit scared.

Amanda PERRY: You want to get as much time really, don't you?

Sue CAINES: Yes, you do. You want to get all that learning in first. So yes, you are right. That is an interesting space, and we are not filling it properly.

The CHAIR: Interesting. Thank you. John.

John MULLAHY: Thank you, both, for attending today, and for the services that you provide the community here. It just sounds amazing. Just from that experience, from all the different cohorts that you do deal with, have you noticed how people have used the road differently since COVID or during COVID?

Sue CAINES: I heard you ask that question before, and I was thinking, 'I don't know.' I know Janet was a bike rider and had an accident. That was a scooter wheelchair, and now she is on crutches. She has gone through the progression of healing and she has just gotten back onto a bike. She was saying more recently that

she has had people being really angry and aggressive with her. She talked about things like—I was a bit horrified actually—people throwing stuff at her out of cars and them moving over into the lane she is in. Even though they are turning right, they are coming across into the left lane and trying to push her into a gutter. On the back roads with the ditches and gutters—you know, you are talking about someone whose leg was injured. She struggles with her mobility now. To stop and put both feet on the ground and to have that balance straightaway would be an issue for her. I think she was finding the aggression and the anger out there a lot more intense than what it used to be, based on what we were hearing from her.

Amanda PERRY: I just think everybody has seemed a lot more stressed and a lot more distracted since COVID. I do not think it is just with the roads, I think it is across the board. Everyone has had a lot of pressure, and everyone is really, I guess, still kind of recovering and has very limited patience.

Sue CAINES: It is re-engaging, isn't it? People are trying to re-engage with society. That is different; there is a lot of difference now.

The CHAIR: That is what this Inquiry is really trying to unpick: how has that affected our behaviours, and are we seeing something different now?

Sue CAINES: You see it in relationships just in general. I know I am taking us off track—I apologise—but in relationships in general people have forgotten how to socialise and how to get along and how to communicate in a group or to be part of something. It is along those lines, isn't it.

Amanda PERRY: I have seen that the kids that finished high school during COVID lack a lot of good communication and decision-making skills—all that sort of stuff—because they did not get to do as much as what they would have done when they were coming into adulthood. They were very restricted. Even getting hours up during COVID for your licence was very difficult. A lot of people I know—families—were worried about taking the kids out for driving, even though they were at home a lot. Were they allowed? Were they not allowed? There were a lot of missed opportunities in those two years for these young adults that developed.

Sue CAINES: To learn, yes. And transitions are something that are really important when you are dealing with people with a disability. Those transitions are really, really important.

The CHAIR: They are magnified almost.

Sue CAINES: It makes the difference, yes.

The CHAIR: Jess.

Jess WILSON: Thank you. We heard from Karen before—the perspective from the wheelchair user. I am interested to get your thoughts on how infrastructure could be improved and how educational programs could assist those using a wheelchair to more easily get around. Obviously there are some concerns in that space, but I am keen to get a perspective from you as well.

Sue CAINES: We actually spoke to a few people about this. We had a couple of phone calls. We had one from a lady down at—is it Haven home, the retirement village?

Kim O'KEEFFE: Yes, Haven.

Sue CAINES: Yes. We had Janet and we had another parent who has a child in a chair. They were all saying the same thing. Outside of shops you have got the lean on the footpaths to try and make the water run into the gutters. It makes sense. It was actually said to me—you know how you are pushing a full trolley and you keep fighting it?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Sue CAINES: That is what they have to do with their chair if it is a manual chair, trying to get along. I thought that was a really good example because we have all had that. We know what that means to be battling that as you are trying to get along.

Amanda PERRY: Even from a worker's perspective, for them manually pushing it. I have been places where it has been that steep that I have had to say to another worker, 'Hold the arm while I push it along so it doesn't really roll over.'

Sue CAINES: And with the dips and stuff on the roads, the lady from the Haven was saying that she nearly tipped her husband out of the chair at one point because it hit so hard. So he is a bit fearful as they come up to gutters and things now. They were talking about near the marketplace, how there is only one hotel down that way. So the residents who want to walk and go have a meal out can go across to there, but there is no safe crossing place. So what they have to do is come out down through a Woolworths car park, which again has no real walkway from one side to the other, and then cross at a set of lights where it is a really busy road. There is not really a stopping point in the middle for you, and the lights do not give you long enough to get across when you are a bit older and you are trying to push a chair.

Amanda PERRY: That particular part of the road, until recently, has been repaired a little bit but it is still not very flat and even, and it is quite hard to navigate.

Sue CAINES: I do not think we are saying anything new. We were sitting here listening to them, and we were both grinning going, 'That's exactly what we were going to say.' Getting people out of the car on the road—that was Janet actually. She said that when she is in her chair they get her out, walk her the full length of the car on the road, and then sometimes have to go around another car to get her up onto the footpath because of the gutters. You are sitting there thinking: the way people are driving, that is not always a great thing. The feeling of safety is not there—and it is not.

Amanda PERRY: And from an actual driver's perspective—I drive a bus that accommodates wheelchairs—one of the things is when you are driving, you feel safe and secure. You have got your seatbelt, you have got something to hold on to, so if you hit a pothole or something like that you can actually brace. For a person with a disability, who may not be able to hold their head up or have that core strength, you hit a pothole and they bounce. And it is a lot, so it is even roads and things like that. We tell all our staff, 'Think about how you feel. It's not the same in the back of the bus. Slow right down to go round those corners, because they do not have the muscle tone to hold themselves, so they are really getting pushed around.' So any uneven roads, things like that—and allowing enough room when you are unloading a person from the back of the bus; our hoist is on the side, so you unload onto the footpath, but if it is not even there either you will get half of your ramp sitting off the ground a bit. So it is really important to have a very flush, even surface next to a disability park.

The CHAIR: Not always the case.

Amanda PERRY: No.

The CHAIR: Anthony.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thank you, and thanks for all your work as well outside of this forum with all the people you work with. It is fantastic. Just picking up on what Jess was asking, you heard earlier that we heard from ConnectGV clients, which was really interesting. But for me, just picking up on the wheelchair use feedback, I am keen to hear more about your views around how we can make the road space better for road users with learning or intellectual disabilities. What challenges do you see that people either with dyslexia or intellectual disabilities face on the road? Whether it is the audio stimulation of being transported or the visual stimulation, how does that impact commuting with those conditions? What can we do to better recognise their experience and make it a safer experience?

Sue CAINES: Absolutely. We are smiling because this is –

Amanda PERRY: I have got dyslexia and I do process things a little bit slower than most, and one of the things that really gets me is the amount of signage around. Even driving in today I was looking and thinking to myself, 'There's a sign with another sign in front of it and I can only half see that sign,' but for someone who is trying to process that, I am going, 'Okay, I'm trying to read this, now I'm trying to read that,' and then all of a sudden you are distracted by what is around you. So it is your positioning of your signs, it is the quality of your signs—how clear they are, the colours that you use on them. And I know it is difficult, because every person with dyslexia is slightly different and every person with an intellectual disability is different, but what I think

we really need to try and counteract that is—it goes back to that early education. People with slower processing just need to be able to get to a point where they recognise it. They do not need to necessarily read it; they just need to recognise it. When you go for your licence you get given a book, and there is not an emphasis on getting to know your road signs and getting to know what that means out on the road. For somebody who cannot read, seeing a yellow sign with squiggles on it might not mean anything to them if they have not been taught that. So it comes back to early education, and when I say ‘early education’ I mean like primary school, because sometimes people need many years to actually take this stuff on and put it into the memory bank. So from a dyslexic ID point of view, for CALD background and even the elderly—anything we do would benefit the elderly as well, as their processing slows down: not all, but some. I think it is really about making it more familiar to people so that when they are going along or they are out, they just can go ‘Yeah, I recognise that, I recognise that,’ not ‘What is that? What does that mean?’

Sue CAINES: And speed limits on the road.

Amanda PERRY: Yes.

Sue CAINES: It is one that got raised and that we had spoken about as well, thinking that is something that really stands out for people, having that.

Amanda PERRY: I notice those more when I am driving than I do a sign, the markings on the roads, and even around school zones—I think I said it to you, didn’t I? In a school zone, I know there are 40-k signs, but if you have seen a giant yellow cross in the middle of the road, that would get your attention before the road sign. It is just different techniques. It would be interesting for someone to do some research into it and see what—you know, we have got easy-read documents everywhere, so what is our signage? Has something like that ever been done –

Sue CAINES: To make it easier, yes.

Anthony CIANFLONE: That is exactly why I asked, because I think there is an opportunity to look into that a bit more with the work we are doing.

Amanda PERRY: Definitely. Again, like I said, it comes back to that early education, and that is why there is Careful Cobbers and all that sort of stuff.

Sue CAINES: It is so important.

Amanda PERRY: And it gives people the chance in those sorts of settings to make mistakes and not die from it—you know I mean? It gives you an opportunity to run a red light when you are doing this program—a fake red light—and bang into someone on a bike and go, ‘Ooh, that really scared me and that really hurt me.’ It gives them that sense of awareness.

The CHAIR: I am so sorry, we have run out of time.

Amanda PERRY: No, you are fine.

Sue CAINES: We probably could have chatted all afternoon.

The CHAIR: We appreciate you coming today and taking our questions and really adding to this conversation about road safety, so thank you. We do really appreciate it.

Committee adjourned.