

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Inquiry into youth justice centres in Victoria

Melbourne — 17 March 2017

Members

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Witness

Professor Terry Laidler, psychologist.

The CHAIR — If you are ready, we might recommence.

Prof. LAIDLER — Yes.

The CHAIR — As you know, this is a public hearing of the legal and social issues committee. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege; therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. The proceedings are being recorded, and I would invite you to address the committee.

Prof. LAIDLER — Not a problem, and I will not do that for long because I would rather respond to questions. The guts of what I have got to say is in the diagram on the second page of what I just gave you that says the youth justice system has to be a holistic type of system, that the focus on the jail — as even my colleagues at ABC News are calling it now — is just ridiculous. What we do with very dangerous kids or kids with persistent problems or serious offending should not shape the whole system, and I think Bernie and Judge Bourke were saying that effectively too. So in my theory the prevention component, the diversion component and the supervision component should be the guts of the youth justice system, and the specific intervention of detention should have some very specific purposes.

The reason I say that is that I think what we are still doing is we are taking a failed adult justice system model — we know it has failed with adults — and we are imposing it on kids as a sort of justice-lite. Do you know what I mean? They were talking before about bail. What is the concept of bail for a 14-year-old disordered kid? Bail is what we give an adult who has not had charges proven against them yet, when there is a chance that they will not be proven or the offence is not serious, so they can get on with their life because the justice system is going to take six to 12 months to get to them. To do that with a kid — give them bail — you are sending him back to the life that actually caused the problems that got them there. So I just think concepts like remand and bail and all that have to disappear, and they have to be replaced with a much more tailored response to young people's problems, and to me that is an extensive and highly targeted supervision system. So they are the sort of two prongs of my base argument. You know, forget the adult system — it has not worked with adults and it has got less chance of working with kids — and have an overall philosophy of what you want to do with youth justice that puts a lot more emphasis on prevention, diversion and supervision.

Then what I tried to do was say, what would we need to make that system work? Because I just think that tweaking the current system is not going to do it. I think the number one thing — and these are the eight points — we have to do is establish the world's best young people's assessment and treatment service, and I really mean that. At the moment we have got a children and adolescent's mental health service that is supposed to see the kids; they never go near it.

You know, the Children's Court clinic might get to see them for an hour for an assessment. We have put huge amounts of money into the mental health system recently and into pushing back the focus of the system to the people who have the major mental health problems, and that is people around the age of 16, and yet these kids get none of that. What does Beyondblue do for these kids? So I just think that is number one. We have got to know the kids we are dealing with. We need highly skilled professionals to assess them and to recommend courses of treatment that might address the range of problems Bernie and Judge Bourke were talking about before.

A lot of it has to do with poor impulse control, for what it is worth, and we do know how to work with kids with poor impulse control. So that would be number one. That assessment and treatment service needs an assessment and treatment centre. Sometimes kids will be so out of control that they will not be able to be assessed in the community. They will actually need a cooling-down period, and that is what I would have as my biggest facility in the service system — not a 250-bed jail at Werribee. I would actually build it on the Parkville site, because Orygen is just over the road and there happens to be a bit of expertise over the road, and you might actually have a chance of pulling some expertise in if you put it in a metropolitan area that is serviced by public transport and a few other things like that. So the biggest facility I would build, if you are going to build one, would be an assessment and treatment centre. That is point two.

If you want to shift the focus to prevention and diversion, you are going to need people to do that. I think our schools are already the best place to identify the earliest signs of problems, so where is the school support service feeding into a treatment service that helps young people who principals — —

When I chaired the mental health council we had a terrific school principal on our board from Werribee. She ran a huge campus down there. She told me, 'I can tell you the kids who are going to be behaviourally disturbed in a way that brings them into contact with the law in grade 3 or 4'.

We are supposed to have a school support service. Why is it not targeting those kids? If it does not have the expertise to target those kids, why can they not draw in expertise from the children's and adolescent mental health service? Why cannot they call on the specialist forensic assessment and treatment service?

I also propose there that we are getting 4000 extra police at the moment. They are all very good for law and order; I agree with that. I agree with some of them being targeted towards the domestic violence response. Why not target some of them or train these officers specifically to deal with diversion programs for young people? Bernie was talking just before — who had met someone in the pub? No, Judge Bourke had met someone in the pub.

The CHAIR — It was Judge Bourke.

Prof. LAIDLER — We know that if you give police officers the training and the direction and the resources, they can do millions of things to engage with communities that otherwise they end up in stand-offs with. I would do that. So that is point three — specially trained police officers. I do not agree with the proposition there is enough community outreach at the moment. I just think it is not there. If it is there, it is not coordinated. If it is not coordinated, it does not feed into the system as a whole and it is not given instructions about what it must prioritise. So I would actually look at the community youth work system.

Ms SPRINGLE — Can I just ask on that, it is a volume problem?

Prof. LAIDLER — My own view is that it is.

Ms SPRINGLE — So then it needs to be better resourced, not just better coordinated. Is that what you are saying?

Prof. LAIDLER — Better resourced, yes. I am saying that myself. Then the heart of my new system that would see to diversion, supervision and even intervention is a young people's supervision service. Again I think that needs to be highly skilled. It would replace concepts like probation, bail and parole with broad and flexible community court orders, so the court would be able to make orders about how you should comport yourself in the community.

I think the idea that Corrections Victoria oversees security-type issues is not a bad one. If you look at their community corrections system, I think they know how to run one. I have no problem with Corrections Victoria running the security at facilities, because I was on the board of Thomas Embling Hospital for eight years. It was not Corrections Victoria; it was one of the private mobs. They guarded the wall. That was their job, but they had no influence on the culture within the place. The culture within the place was that of a therapeutic hospital, and that was run by clinicians. Corrections understands security, so let them oversee the security aspects. I do not have a problem with that.

I do not know that Corrections are great at running therapeutic communities or programs that are designed to reduce reoffending or anything like that, but I do know from my experience on the adult parole board that, properly resourced, they can run a good community supervision system. And part of my reason for suggesting that is precisely that it would allow you to tweak something that exists rather than happening to set something up from scratch. That will be contentious; I know that. I saw your look.

Ms SPRINGLE — Oh, no. It is more just from the perspective that — what you are saying here makes perfect sense. If it is a security issue between what is going on internally and the external world, that is one thing, but I think in the current discourse security and stability are used interchangeably, and I do not think they are the same thing.

Prof. LAIDLER — Thomas Embling Hospital is the model that you want to look at, not Barwon.

Ms SPRINGLE — Yes.

Prof. LAIDLER — And Corrections itself — I can say this, can't I, because it is privileged?

Ms SPRINGLE — That's right.

Prof. LAIDLER — Corrections is a split kingdom. There are people in Corrections who would run everything like a military boot camp and there are people in Corrections who have a really strong rehabilitative focus, and they fight one another — properly, you know, in a good way. They contend for what is the best way to manage things, but I do not have any problems — with my experience — with Corrections as a security provider. I have problems with them as the cultural manager within facilities.

The Children's Court, to me, should be blown up and reconstituted.

Ms CROZIER — Not very radical.

Prof. LAIDLER — Not for any reason to do with good people who do their job really well, but it is totally wrongly resourced I think. We have moved entirely into a legal model to look at how we should make determinations about kids who have got problems with the law.

I mean, I sat on VCAT for a while. VCAT is overseen by judges for sure — there is no problem with that — but if VCAT has got a property valuation matter, the tribunal is constituted of a legal person and somebody with some property valuation expertise. So I would actually reconstitute the Children's Court. Give it responsibility not only for the making of orders but for the final oversight of orders and bolster its composition to include professionals and community representatives who especially could take some of the workload in regard to the supervision responsibilities. I think, seriously, unless we can get a Children's Court that can respond in days, literally days, to somebody who has presented as offending — not weeks or months — then the system will not work.

One of the reasons is the *Herald Sun* and 3AW, as Bernie said earlier, have got this campaign that if we can only lock these people up, we will solve the problem. We know that detention is not the deterrent. I worked on the road safety coordinating council for years. If you want to deter people, you have got to, number one, detect them, so you have actually got to increase the probability that people will get caught., And, number two, you have got to impose the penalty almost instantaneously. That is why we went and developed the PERIN system. If you drive your car at speed along Alexandra Parade, within a week of that you will get a letter in the mail with the photograph — you have been caught, here is the penalty. Because we know that the real relationship is between detection and enforcement, not the size of the penalty. That is why I think we have gone askew there. So I would revamp the Children's Court massively.

The system needs a high-security detention facility. There is no doubt about that. There are some kids whose behaviour has been so extreme, who have committed crimes of such seriousness, whose impulse control is so poor, who cause such havoc in a more general system that they actually do need to be detained. I have no problem with that, and if the government was proposing to build a facility at Werribee for 25 to 50 kids in a sort of dual-track system to take up — —

Ms CROZIER — That was my question that I was trying to ask.

Prof. LAIDLER — I do not have a problem with that; the community has to be protected. If you do not protect the community from the worst offending kids, the community will not tolerate the proper treatment of other kids. That is my next point. I think the proper treatment of the other kids, if they have to be detained, is to put them in what we used to call training centres, not in purposeless prisons where you are punished by the length of time you spend there, but places where you can learn a trade, where you can further your education. I would have a Timbertop where they can go and learn outdoor skills and a bit of agriculture and forestry associated with it. But are you are going to build a Timbertop?

You know, these things should not be remotely like prisons. That is what I am saying. If you want Corrections to secure the perimeters of these places, I do not have any problem with that, but what happens — —

The CHAIR — Can I ask a question about this? With detention facilities one issue that has been raised with us is the age of kids and young people who are in together. Do you have a view on that? Should there be a division?

Prof. LAIDLER — Not just on age. I think on vulnerability. I think you will find some very street smart, sophisticated 13-year-olds and some really, really brain-damaged, vulnerable 17-year-olds, so I do not think you

would not just do it on age, but a proper assessment and treatment system would identify the needs of those kids. Then if you had a range of facilities, I think you would be better placed to actually put them somewhere where something productive might be done to change their life, rather than just rehousing them.

The last one is that these kids all get out at some stage, and if you have started a program of education or TAFE training or something like that, you do not just want to throw them back out into the community with no follow-up. There is a great system that you might want to look at in more detail or talk to someone like Tony Keenan from Launch Housing, where they enter into contracts with kids to live in what if you put it around Parkville would be called a university college. You know, where kids get their room and get looked after and fed and all that sort of stuff — they are called foyers — on the condition that they continue. They contract to continue with education and stuff like that.

The reason I did it is it is possible to envisage a different system. You know, we are all big on infrastructure spending at the moment, and as soon as we say ‘infrastructure’ we think of roads and railways and bridges and all that; this is infrastructure for the future of our kids. It would be expensive and it would not be built overnight and you would have to have interim measures and all that, but if you can conceive differently of what an entire system might look like — an entire system that is geared towards providing the right sorts of professional responses to kids whose needs have been identified — I think in the long run you have got the chance of saving the community a lot of money in wasted human lives but also in the cost of the conveyor belt.

They were talking about it is a funnel; I used to talk about the conveyor belt between child protection and Fulham. I remember standing in a yard at Fulham when you were allowed to smoke, and to this bloke — I used to attract a few people because I would bring smokes in — I said, ‘I won’t see you next time I’m down here’. ‘Why not?’. ‘I’ll be on holidays’. He said, ‘I’ve never had a holiday’. This is a 44-year-old bloke. ‘How come you didn’t get one?’. ‘Oh well, Mum and Dad gave me up when I was five. Then I was in foster care, and then I was in jail’. This guy in his whole life had never one. Except at Fulham, this guy had never had a holiday. But that progress — it is not deterministic and I am not trying to be naive about it either — from abuse that leads you into child protection as a child, through aberrant adolescence into antisocial adulthood is just so well-documented that, unless we can stand back and say, ‘We’re going to stop that’, we are letting our own community down. It is costing us a lot of money, and I actually think we would have a great export product. I am not joking.

All around the world people are looking for the way to do this, because there is a sense in people that just locking these kids up is not good enough, but what else do we do? Let us show them what you do. We actually do have a lot of understanding and skill and all that in our community. If we stand back, have the overview and then build the components to make it work, then we could be doing ourselves a great favour. That will do. All the rest of it is in there.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that really succinct overview of a very detailed idea. I think that is much appreciated. Ms Symes has a question.

Ms SYMES — Yes. Thank you, Professor. Coming back to your comments in relation to the appropriateness of the location of youth justice facilities and the need for services, I note that the Comrie review mentions that at Parkville you just cannot have the security required.

Prof. LAIDLER — I think that is a nonsense to be quite honest.

Ms SYMES — What I am actually a little bit more interested in is — I am a country MP — there has been a call from a lot of quarters that youth justice facilities should actually be built in regional Victoria. I am just wondering if you had a view on that.

Prof. LAIDLER — I think that would be great. I think the Outward Bound-type of facility obviously belongs in regional Victoria. I have got a bit of a sense that the assessment and treatment service might need to be central, and I think that could be built at Parkville. On the model as I see it the internal culture of that is that of an assessment and treatment service, and the perimeter is secured well by experts in security, so I do not have a problem with that. But I would have thought regional Victoria — it is an hour on the train to Ballarat. It is an hour on the train to Bendigo, to Morwell, to all those sorts of things. It is an hour on the train from Glen Waverley to the city.

Ms SYMES — So the lack of services in regional Victoria would not be a problem?

Prof. LAIDLER — It depends what you are going to put there. We have got TAFE services in regional Victoria. Why could we not put the TAFE-oriented one there?

Ms SYMES — Yes, okay. So I guess the different cohorts could be placed at different locations.

Prof. LAIDLER — We have got high schools in regional Victoria.

Ms SYMES — I think I was linking the security services and facility together, but you have unpicked that into — —

Prof. LAIDLER — I think until you unpick that — because the cheapest way to contain people is to put 250 people in the one spot, because you have only got one fence then and maybe a few partitions. What I am talking about is expensive, but it is looking at facilities that, in the main, contain in the order of 25 to 50 kids. And I am abolishing remand, remember?

Ms SPRINGLE — I think the biggest criticism I have heard of regional placement would be access for families to visit the detained children.

Prof. LAIDLER — I am not sure it is any worse for a family from Pakenham or — —

Ms CROZIER — Try to get from Dandenong to Parkville.

Prof. LAIDLER — Yes. It is an hour's trip.

Ms SPRINGLE — Dandenong is half an hour, Georgie. I live out there. I know how long it takes on the train.

Prof. LAIDLER — If you have got to get to Parkville?

Ms SPRINGLE — Yes, to Parkville. The train into the city is half an hour, 15 minutes on the tram.

Prof. LAIDLER — Okay. It is not the issue. Kids should be able to be visited by their families.

Ms SPRINGLE — Absolutely.

Prof. LAIDLER — That is obvious. I do not think regional placement precludes that. Where are you going to put it? Say you decide to go with a facility that is specifically geared towards teaching Koori kids respect for and engagement with their culture; I think regional Victoria is almost the best place to put it. Why would it not be where we have got strong, active, engaged Aboriginal communities like the Yorta Yorta people or like up around the Mildura area?

I would place the facilities in places where you can provide the internal culture that you want to well. I would have an eye on: can families get there? And remember what Bernie and Judge Bourke said: a lot of these people cannot locate families when they want to.

Ms CROZIER — Thank you again, Professor Laidler. It is terrific to see you again and giving such good practical advice, I have to say, in relation to your submission. I have got a number of questions that I want to go to about things that you made mention of. The first one is about the school support service program that you mentioned. Could you just explain to the committee how you would envisage that actually working in terms of having that support service within schools?

Prof. LAIDLER — It is there already. It is regionalised. It needs links into other mental health services when teachers and that service identify kids who are particularly at risk. I take my school principal colleague's advice: I think you see very strong signs of behaviourally disturbed kids very early.

Ms CROZIER — How effective is it now?

Prof. LAIDLER — I do not know. When we had that mental health council running we were trying to get some assessment of that and we got various reports.

Ms CROZIER — Was that from the department of education?

Prof. LAIDLER — Yes, it is run within the department of education. The CAMHS services vary, in my view, in quality with the clinical leadership they get. So some of them are excellent in a very specific clinical area. They are not all good across the board, and I personally think that they need some targeting to the areas of greatest need.

Ms CROZIER — My next question is in relation to the issue you spoke about about revamping the Children's Court, and you mentioned the example of VCAT and having an array of individuals with various professional backgrounds and degrees of experience on VCAT. Do you think that should be applied to the Youth Parole Board?

Prof. LAIDLER — If you adopt my system in the main, I think the Youth Parole Board and the Children's Court should be merged. I think the function of both making determinations and then overseeing the way those determinations are carried out belongs to the one body, and I think putting them together like that would work better. There is great expertise. Those two blokes between them have more experience of the youth justice system than just about anyone in the state. So why would you waste that?

Ms CROZIER — I am not suggesting that at all. I am just thinking in terms of the complexity. I mean, you said the different professions that sit on a VCAT board, and I am thinking in relation to the complexities of some individuals with mental health — psychologists or GPs or health professionals sitting on that Youth Parole Board that can actually assess some of those young kids' or young offenders' issues.

Prof. LAIDLER — I think that is really brilliant. The adult parole board that I was on always sat as a judicial officer, a professional and a community member.

Ms CROZIER — Yes; so it has an array of those individuals on that.

Prof. LAIDLER — To make the big determinations, but on the adult parole board there were matters we used to do off the papers. Do you know what I mean? Where we were not interviewing anybody and were just really processing them. One person, whatever their status was, would do them, and looking through Corrections reports about kids for whom there are supervision orders, where Corrections are saying basically everything is travelling well, and you notice that, you look at it, you say, 'That's good. We'll see another report in three months'. So you can spread the workload a fair bit like that.

Ms CROZIER — One more if I may. Just in relation to the diversion programs. Could you just give your view on the diversion programs? I know we have had a decrease in the engagement of diversion programs lately, and I just would like your input.

Prof. LAIDLER — In principle the best diversion programs are programs that have quite extensive community engagement. So the diversion is into community activities, be it basketball or drama or community service-type stuff. All that sort of stuff. So I would see, if you are going to divert some resources to diversion, the key players will be youth community outreach workers and police, but I would see their main task as engaging local communities to actually swallow up these kids. I knew kids in my own experience — you probably did too — in my teenage years who if it had not been for the local footy club would have ended up in a lot of trouble. Do you know what I mean? Because the community surrounded them and protected them but also said, 'Hey, wait a minute. We're not going to protect you if you keep acting like that'. I think that willingness is out there in the community.

Ms CROZIER — I do too.

Prof. LAIDLER — But you need the resources to assemble it.

Ms CROZIER — Just on that — and I think there is a lot of goodwill within the community to do that, and some areas are better at it than others — have you got an example of where you think there is a great model that is actually doing this? Because I think it is happening, but can you pick one off?

Prof. LAIDLER — I will send you one. I cannot off the top of my head, but they exist. I am on the centre for global and cultural mental health at Melbourne Uni — a lot of this is happening within ethnic communities. Whenever the newspapers and radio run wild about this it is always the African boys or the Islander boys or the

Koori boys or something like that. That may well be true in some of these instances of very disturbed kids, but those communities are also communities that I know are doing a lot of work for themselves to wrap themselves around their own kids.

Ms CROZIER — I think it would be great to have some examples.

Prof. LAIDLER — I will find some for you.

Ms SPRINGLE — I have a couple of questions. One is: what do you think the impact of the current public discourse and media coverage of youth justice is on the kids?

Prof. LAIDLER — I think it is disastrous.

Ms SPRINGLE — Because I think there is an assumption that they do not know it is going on, and I do not think that is the case at all. Do you think it has an impact on the kids that are actually involved in the youth justice system at this point?

Prof. LAIDLER — It is a guess. I do not know, but I mean, yes, for any group in the community to be portrayed with disrespect because of your ethnic origins or something like that, of course it has an effect. These kids have been stigmatised really quite routinely now for a period of about three or four years, disrespected by political parties for their own purposes, by the media for their own purposes, and I think it has to have an impact. And I know that is not everyone in every party and everyone in every media outlet and all that sort of stuff, but it has been a real problem.

Ms SPRINGLE — My second question would be just to get your reflections on what some people would call the therapeutic approach that has been used to date within the centres or the system as a whole and how effective or ineffective that has been and how thoroughly that has been implemented.

Prof. LAIDLER — The things I hear that there have been excellent responses to are the Parkville school, which I think was a very good and genuine attempt to do something in a therapeutic mould. Beyond that, honestly, I have not heard much good at all, and that is largely because staff were not trained to work in that mode — the general staff.

The juvenile justice mental health service was massively under-resourced, so the people who might have moved in and done that sort of work were not there, and the culture within the organisation over a period of time became toxic. The staff were afraid of the kids they were supposed to be looking after and a whole range of things like that. We did nothing about that influx of remandees. That really was part of the whole pressure on the system.

I know from Thomas Embling that you can do it where you run a very secure facility with a very good therapeutic process inside. It is possible; we do it for adults. Not enough adults — there are, I think, about 100 out there at the moment and there are many more still in our prisons who should have that sort of service.

Ms SPRINGLE — Are there stats? Is there data associated with the Thomas Embling operation?

Prof. LAIDLER — There would be.

Ms SPRINGLE — That we could have a look at as some sort of comparison?

Prof. LAIDLER — Yes. Give Professor Jim Ogloff a ring. I think he will track them. They are coming in, are they? Talk to them.

Ms SPRINGLE — Yes.

Prof. LAIDLER — And he has got some really good stuff on the data about the kids that the system is dealing with. I have not gone into data at all. I know it exists; I just have not got it.

Ms SPRINGLE — On that, common sense would probably dictate that if you have got something like Parkville College working in a therapeutic, trauma-informed manner and then you have other parts of the system that are not and are really working from a more punitive kind of response, that somewhat undermines what they are doing at Parkville College on the whole.

Prof. LAIDLER — And especially if you mix them all together.

Ms SPRINGLE — That is right.

Prof. LAIDLER — I understand that this system has to have an eye on community safety. I do not have any problem about that, and part of community safety is imposing a certain discipline on the way these places operate. That is what parents do, you know. If you will not set the boundaries, we will set them for you.

Ms SPRINGLE — But there is a difference between structure and stability and security necessarily, and I think we have heard enough from people saying that relationships are the key in many ways and do offer protective factors to an operation. You know because that has been my reflection on this — that you cannot have things compartmentalised and then expect it to work. So if someone is working in a trauma-informed way and no-one else is, then it is not going to work.

Prof. LAIDLER — No.

Ms SPRINGLE — So you would agree with that?

Prof. LAIDLER — I would agree totally with that. And so a part of this — and I think it has been the department's intent — is to upskill staff a lot more, but I do not know how far they have got with the process. You will have better information about that than me, but this is not one of the highly paid jobs in our community, being a — what do they even call them? A worker.

Ms SPRINGLE — Youth justice worker.

Prof. LAIDLER — Yes — a 'worker'.

Ms SPRINGLE — Just one more question.

Prof. LAIDLER — Did you see the ad in the *Herald Sun* about the time that the first blow-up came? 'Apply to be a youth justice worker' — underneath: 'no qualifications required'.

Ms SPRINGLE — Correct. Yes, that is right.

Prof. LAIDLER — You know? So you can have some non-qualified people in there, but the system has to be led by people who actually have a little bit of —

Ms SPRINGLE — Expertise.

Prof. LAIDLER — professional expertise.

Ms SPRINGLE — My last question would be around that cohort you talked about, you know, having a unit that was going to cater to the serious violent offenders. In your view would that also be trauma-informed therapeutic approaches?

Prof. LAIDLER — It should still be that, but you have got to have a unit whose main focus is community safety. I really do think that.

Ms SPRINGLE — But it should have a rehab focus as well?

Prof. LAIDLER — Of course. Yes.

Ms SYMES — I just quickly want to come back to the conversation about diversion. We have not yet heard from the Children's Court, but I note that after a 12-month pilot last year every Children's Court in Victoria is going to have the statewide diversion program. We have not had the details of that yet, but did you have a view of that?

Prof. LAIDLER — Terrific. I think courts should be able to divert. They should be able to make flex work, but I think diversion starts a long way before the kid gets to court. A lot of good diversion happens at the level of community policing, where there are — —

Ms SYMES — Cautions?

Prof. LAIDLER — Cautions, or even informal intervention with families and community groups. You know, if young Fred down the street has been hanging around with a bad mob, we are either going to have to get on top of this or the next thing I can see is he is going to be doing things with them. I am no expert in it but I think diversion starts on the tail of prevention, so back at the school and all that sort of thing where you actually do not have signs that there are problems in the community because of this kid but you have signs with the kid that there are problems. So it can start that early, and it goes right up to the door of the court.

Ms CROZIER — And what of parental responsibility in that example that you just highlighted?

Prof. LAIDLER — I think most parents would appreciate some help when their kid is running a bit out of control, and there are good programs for that. We just do not provide it to parents. A mate of mine runs a thing called tough conversations with adolescents. It is a training program for parents, and he teaches parents about how to confront boundary-setting issues when things have got out of control. So the programs exist. You know if we — —

Ms CROZIER — Just on that, whose responsibility — I mean how do you — —

Prof. LAIDLER — Family services belong to DHHS.

Ms CROZIER — But if they have not come to family services. If we are trying to divert them before they even get to that point to get them back on track, so that they do not end up in the system so to speak — with family services and then escalating to the next stage that you just described — in terms of the parent then knowing how to access — —

Prof. LAIDLER — School is the non-stigmatised gateway, isn't it? If the school offers you help to deal with your child, that is a very different thing from, 'You have to take the kid to see the child psychiatrist'.

Ms CROZIER — So back to those school support service programs and then the — —

Prof. LAIDLER — I reckon, linked into broader things. The last point I make is a lot of community agencies are working in this space very, very well already. It tends to be a matter of luck — and it is historical luck — whether you have an agency in your area with skills in the area you need. So I do think it needs some central coordination, but DHHS through its family services division should, in my view, have a range of resources available mainly through agencies. That is how they supply their family services in Victoria, where parents can go and get help. The best people to look after kids are their parents. What you are dealing with often in the juvenile justice system are kids for whom that best system has broken or disappeared, and I think Michael Bourke and Bernie said that over and over again. Sometimes it is just because the kids are too difficult, sometimes because the parents have their own particular problems, but I am the great defender of not only parental responsibility but parental capacity and supporting that.

The CHAIR — Any further questions? If not, on behalf of the committee, thank you, Professor Laidler, for your constructive contribution. It has been great to talk to you.

Prof. LAIDLER — And I promised I would send you examples of community — —

Ms CROZIER — Diversion programs.

Prof. LAIDLER — I will.

Ms CROZIER — Thank you very much. That would be appreciated.

Prof. LAIDLER — Thank you for having me.

The CHAIR — We will send you a transcript within a few weeks for you to review.

Committee adjourned.