

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Wangaratta—Thursday, 12 March 2020

#### MEMBERS

Ms Fiona Patten—Chair

Dr Tien Kieu—Deputy Chair

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Ms Melina Bath

Mr Rodney Barton

Ms Georgie Crozier

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Enver Erdogan

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Edward O'Donohue

Mr Tim Quilty

**WITNESSES**

Ms Leah Waring, CEO,

Ms Claire Anderson, Community Services Manager, and

Ms Georgie Gray, Youth and Family Services Manager, North East Support and Action for Youth Incorporated (NESAY).

**The CHAIR:** Hello. Thank you so much for coming today. It was a really interesting submission. Thank you. We are looking to hearing more about it. Before we start, I just need to give you some formal words.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege, and that is provided by our *Constitution Act* and the standing orders of our Legislative Council. This means that any information that you provide today is protected by law. However, if you were to repeat comments outside this place, they may not be protected. And any false evidence or misleading of the Committee could be considered a contempt of Parliament.

As you can see, Hansard is recording today, which is great. So you will get a transcript of today's hearing, and we encourage you to have a look through it and make sure that there are no inaccuracies in that. Ultimately, it will go up on our website and form part of our inquiry process and, I suspect, maybe some of our recommendations. If you would like to give us some opening comments and a bit of information, then we will open it up for discussion. All of you can speak or just one of you.

**Ms WARING:** All of us can speak to it. So thank you for having us here today and giving us the opportunity to talk about youth homelessness in central Hume, which is where we provide services. We are a youth specialist organisation. We provide homelessness services in central Hume but also youth and family programs across the Ovens Murray region.

We started in Wang and have been going for 35 years. We are well invested in our community. We will spread it around so you do not get sick of hearing my voice.

**The CHAIR:** Lovely, I like that.

**Ms ANDERSON:** So our plan for today is we are going to discuss the challenges of the current service system, and so essentially we are wanting to talk about: the fragmentation of the services—and that includes the housing advocacy and the PRAP program, the private rental assistance program; that youth services are not recognised as a specialist service—if you talk about mental health services, they do have a specialised-type service, and Centre Against Violence have a specialist service and youth services, we think, should; that we are funded for outputs and not outcomes—so the number of targets rather than the outcome of the young people we are working with; and that the system is actually metro-focused rather than being a regional service delivery that practises place-based service delivery.

**Ms WARING:** So what we mean by that is that we operate with a place-based approach. We operate using ethical decision-making, which at times will have challenges because we are a small organisation, but we do not—

**The CHAIR:** In a small—

**Ms WARING:** In a small community, which is typically not a community that attracts extra funding when extra funding comes through.

So what that means is if a young person lives in Bright and is experiencing homelessness, our case pracs hop in the car and go to see that person. We have no expectation that person will come to us. By the sheer nature—they are experiencing homelessness—you can make an assumption that the resources for them would be incredibly difficult. But we are not funded for that kind of approach. We do it because we believe we should be doing it. And in regional communities you need to have the trust of that community for those people to engage with you. You cannot just drive in and say, 'We're here, where are you?', which becomes a self-fulfilling

prophecy because no one comes to the service and you go, 'Well, the service isn't needed, we don't need to go back up there again. We can stay in our service centre'.

So that is what we mean by the place-based approach. That for us is a significant investment of our small amount of resources, but we believe that without doing that you do not actually get outcomes. If you do not support and resource the community, then all you are doing is changing for one person, not actually creating a change ongoing.

**Ms ANDERSON:** We also wanted to speak about entry points and that they are designed for adults accessing the service. So at the moment our young people need to go to another service to have a referral through to us, to NESAY. And we try and make our agency as youth friendly as possible, but not all other services have that same focus, because they are not just based on youth. That also means that we are not able to influence our targets. We get funding on the key targets for the year. If we receive our referrals from another service, we are not able to make any change on how many targets or we are not able to influence, promote the service at all.

**Ms LOVELL:** It is throughput again.

**Ms ANDERSON:** Yes. And then we go to the not-place-based design, with entry points that are located in large regional areas. So as Leah suggested, we do not have an entry point in Bright. If a young person is homeless in Bright, how do they get to an entry point to receive a referral through to our service so that we would then go and see them?

**Ms WARING:** And following on from that, there are areas in our catchment area that actually are not funded for homelessness, like Mansfield for instance. There are no homelessness services funded in Mansfield, which I still do not understand. I am assuming it is a part of when LGAs divided that service agreements did not get updated to reflect that. But there is a hidden need in Mansfield because there are not actually any services there. We cobble together other programs we have got because the rest are just guidelines and we try to find a way, because the person comes first and the rest of it is our problem to sort, not their problem to sort. But you know—

**Ms LOVELL:** So just for the rest of the Committee, Benalla and Mansfield used to be one shire—it was Delatite—and they separated.

**Ms WARING:** So that is a challenge. And because there are no services being advertised down there, people are not necessarily going to reach out. The programs we get reached out to for are typically the ones that George manages, which are the early intervention and the under-18 family programs. And we then will support using Claire's team, which is the homelessness team, in terms of how we actually support that young person and family moving forward.

So it is a real challenge for that. But then we have no control when they turn 25—how we actually support them—or turn 18, if they are under 18. So there are some real system flaws in the way that it is currently structured in regional centres.

**Ms ANDERSON:** The next point is about the case management model. We are currently funded for a 13-week case management period with the young people that we work with. Often we are providing services for multiple support periods—so 13, 26 and then my maths does not follow through but they go for a lot longer than 13 weeks. So that 13 weeks does not allow for complex needs. In that 13 weeks you will have a young person; you might start to begin to engage with them really well in the first month, and then you start to address the needs. And then how can we solve all of the issues of a complex young person in that time? It does not allow.

And we are also working with an engaging group of 15- to 17-year-olds who are experiencing homelessness, and there are very limited pathways for them. They are far too young to rent a home on their own with very limited income—other few resources.

And waiting lists? We find they do not work. We had a young person walk once from Yarrawonga to Wangaratta so that we could work with them. So they needed a service then and there; they were not able to

wait for us to be able to take them on. So we do not use waiting lists, but that creates its own difficulties in that you have again the long case management periods that go over the 13 weeks.

**Ms WARING:** So again, with my CEO hat on, for a small organisation there will come a time when the board say to me, 'We can't manage to do that. You can't manage to provide support for someone up to two years and get paid for 13 weeks of that period of time. And you can't afford to be driving to Bright to see that person when you're funded to deliver it from Wangaratta'.

At the moment we have capacity to be able to do that—and we do that because, like I said before, the person comes first and these are our problems, not theirs—but there will come a point when the board say, 'We just can't afford to do that without any extra income coming in to manage that'.

The other bit for us is we are looking at how we set an office up in Benalla, because we know through the socio-economic data and through Georgie's team that there are needs in Benalla around homelessness and supports but we do not see it coming through the entry point and therefore through to us. So we know there is unmet need and so what we are doing—and as the smallest agency in this area—is we are actually looking at how we set an office up in Benalla and create space for everyone else to come and live with us there, which just seems to be the wrong way around.

**The CHAIR:** Crazy.

**Ms WARING:** Yes. But we do live by the motto, 'If you're not prepared to be part of the solution, you forfeit your right to complain about it'. So we cannot keep talking about it if we do not put our hand up and go, 'All right, we'll do something'.

But again, these are all the extra things that we try to do to create that space. I do not know if you heard, but one of the things we do is that we do not actually use the word 'client' and we do not use the words 'case manager' or 'agency'; we use the words 'young person' or 'person'—because heaven forbid they be a person. It is a NESAY home that they come to. We have a NESAY family that everyone belongs to, because we know with our young people you need to create a space where they feel safe, where they feel welcome and where they feel respected. And once you start using language like, 'You're a client, that's the waiting room; sit there in a chair, and we'll come to you', or, 'We have a waiting list because we're super important', they are going to go.

So we do all these different things to just create space so that a young person feels respected and valued, because we should be doing 150 per cent of the work, because at the end of the day, homelessness is created because a family has broken down or there is family violence and that person cannot live there anymore.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, they are without a family.

**Ms WARING:** We have failed them, so why should they have to work hard to engage with us? We should be working hard. Sorry, Claire, I jumped in on you.

**Ms ANDERSON:** That is all right.

**Ms WARING:** I do that. That is why she went, 'Ergh'. Is there anything else you want to add on that? Georgie is going to come up with all the solutions. She is our solutions person.

**The CHAIR:** Great.

**Ms GRAY:** Yes. I am the solution person. I have lots of ideas.

**Ms WARING:** I think part of the challenge is what Claire said earlier on, the fragmentation of services and the fact that—and it might be a perception; it might not be a reality—for us it feels like youth is not seen as a specialty service, so anyone can do it. So what we are seeing in terms of when services come through is they have been delivered by health organisations or housing organisations or family organisations which do not have a focus on engaging young people; they do not have staff who are trained and skilled. They are people who are committed and passionate, absolutely, but their whole workforce and workplace is not designed around that group. So we have fragmentation and we do not get that alignment of programs.

Georgie's team works with families who are at risk of entering child protection or who have significant challenges—school disengagement, relationship and family violence. We have those programs which work beautifully with Claire's because typically that is a pathway, unfortunately. But then we have other programs like housing advocacy or, like Claire mentioned, earlier the PRAP program or it might be Cradle to Kinder that are all located in different organisations.

So for a young person who is 17, who is disengaged and who does not have family support—they come to us for housing; they might go to Gateway for Cradle to Kinder if they have got a child. It might be Upper Murray if Child First is involved. And they still may or may not be at school, and you have got the education system or Navigator contacting them—and they are 17. I know my kids, when they were 17, did not have the capacity to ring up and order a pizza, let alone do any of that stuff. So how do we actually make the system easier, because at the end of the day we cut the path off to homelessness; we should not be making it prettier.

So some of the things we brought in today—and I am not sure whether you have already got the case management model which Claire talked about, but one of the things we have just started is a Friends of NESAY program. So Friends of NESAY was launched on Valentine's Day, because everyone loves NESAY. We need to support them to understand that they love NESAY.

So the idea of Friends of NESAY is we actually need to—historically NESAY, and I think many other organisations, have done the, 'We're the specialist organisation. We've have got this. You can step back. We'll take care of this person', which is egotistical at least and at worst it actually disempowers that community to care for their person. So Friends of NESAY is actually—we cannot expect the community to care for their own members if we do not actually resource them to be able to do that. So what we know in our community in Wangaratta is that a lot of the people care about young people and they want to do something, but they actually do not know how to do something and they actually do not understand what homelessness looks like, because it looks different here. They go to Melbourne and it is quite confronting. Homelessness here is still here; it is just that it is hidden in cars and on couches and floors. So with Friends of NESAY we work with the businesses and community groups, and they become a friend. What that means, being a friend, is that they advocate and support all young people, particularly young people experiencing homelessness in their area. And through that program we have the No Swag Jar, which is the flyer you have got there, because we actually want to end homelessness, not create more funding to support homelessness. We actually want to prevent it.

We have 35 businesses so far in Wangaratta who have signed up to be a friend, including one over in Yarrawonga who said, 'I know we're not a part of it, but we just want to have a jar there and we'll put the money in your account each month if we get anything'. So we have—it is not fortnightly; that would be crazy—bimonthly gatherings where we bring all the friends together and we talk about a particular social issue that is impacting young people. So if they have a young person come in—they might be at the dentist or it might be a builder; we have got quite a range of services—and they hear a young person talking about something, they can give earlier information so that we are not waiting until the person gets to that critical point. Our goal is to have everyone in town equipped so they can do the early identification and do the, 'Give NESAY a call', or, 'Ring BeyondHousing and get a referral to NESAY'.

**Ms GRAY:** And to change community perception of young people in the same process.

**Ms WARING:** So that is one of the new initiatives that we have done, just around how to actually resource that community to be able to create change. And our hope is that we can embed that and then start extending that to our other towns that we work in so that we can create those conversations. One of the other things that we did was the case management pilot. Do you want to talk about that?

**Ms ANDERSON:** Sure, I will talk about that. We created a pilot to work with our young people. It was based on the idea that some young people are coming in and they are ready for private rental; other young people that we have been working with for a while have had most of their complex needs addressed, and they are ready for private rental. That was a very quick overview of it, sorry.

It was based on an assessment that the case practitioners were not having a lot of time when they were working with young people with complex needs to actually find alternative forms of housing. If they had a young person in transitional housing, they were focused on working with that young person and addressing the needs that were there, and that took up a lot of their time with young people with complex needs. So to actually go out and

proactively find private rentals—the time and capacity to do that was lacking. So we thought what we would do was get someone in for whom that is their primary job—to work with young people to find private rentals.

This person came along, and they did a great job. The young people that we identified had been working with us for a while, and they swapped case managers to go to this—we call it stream 1—or they came in and were identified on intake. They did not have a lot of issues. They really just needed support and advocacy to get private rental. So they started off working primarily with that case practitioner. That case practitioner's job was to go to real estate agents and get the lists. There were onto whatever private rental properties were becoming available that week. They met with the young people, filled in the forms that private rental real estate agents required and showed them how to fill in the form properly.

We learned, or the young people learned, that real estate agents still want a paper form; they do not want it filled out over the internet, which is what young people like to do. So you still need to fill in that form and go and hand it in and say, 'Hi, this is who I am'—all the process of getting a private rental, which includes getting referee checks—from whom, whether they are working or supporting someone. And our young people did not always know who to get their references from. Make themselves known, go in there every day and have that advocacy and then that real and full support to get picked up, go and look at the private rental that is available and then fill in the application form. You dress properly, look great, brush your hair and put some shoes on. The worker we had doing that was able to do all that role modelling, pick them up and be very responsive, and the outcomes that we had were startling in that we had young people who had been in transitional housing for a while and who were not having any luck in trying to find a private rental—not for any barriers that we could identify other than that they did not know how to work the system; they did not know how to get in and do what they needed to do. So within a very short time frame, they were able to find themselves a private rental. Other young people came through and never—we know that a quick intervention with first-time homelessness will often stop long-term homelessness. So they came in, they saw us for the first time, we worked with them and they got themselves a private rental very quickly with that support.

**Ms WARING:** So through that, I think it was the year before—numbers do not stay in my head naturally, so it is in the report, what they are. I think there were something like 12 young people we had supported in private rental the year before, and in that six months it was something like 24.

**The CHAIR:** Twenty-two, yes, it was.

**Ms WARING:** Yes. So it was a really significant change, and so we not only supported those young people but it freed up the case pracs who were working with young people that had complex needs to just focus solely on those young people without trying to switch between the—

**Ms ANDERSON:** Dealing with someone who is suicidal versus dealing with someone who needs to go and—

**Ms WARING:** Who needs someone to walk beside them to talk to an agent.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, needs to know how to talk to an agent.

**Ms ANDERSON:** And just off the top of my head, I do not believe we have seen any of those young people come back experiencing homelessness again.

**The CHAIR:** Fantastic.

**Ms ANDERSON:** That is anecdotal. I am not going to—

**The CHAIR:** Yes. And that is what you really want to hear.

**Ms ANDERSON:** Absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** That you have actually been able to get them properly out of the nest.

**Ms WARING:** So I think one of things that I am proud of with NESAY is that we are innovative. If we see that there is a gap, we will create a solution. And some of that is that young people who we have been

supporting to move into independent living have not had the skills to actually manage that independence. So it is all good and well, potentially, to find a house, but if you do not have the skills to manage it—

**Mr BARTON:** You have got to wrap them up.

**Ms WARING:** Exactly.

**The CHAIR:** That is exactly right.

**Ms WARING:** So HEAL was a program, which is Healthy Eating & Living, that we created about 10–15 years ago, and it runs now three programs a year and then we do an individual iHEAL, because we are cool. We do iHEAL, where we work with the young person on their own in their own place and actually show them how to cook a meal, how to plan the meal, how to keep their house clean and all that sort of stuff. So we are having more success in their housing.

**The CHAIR:** Are you doing that in schools as well? Sorry, I will wait. Be patient.

**Ms GRAY:** We have. It is funny you ask that. Through School Focused Youth Service we have managed to implement a program, and that was last year, in a primary school. So it was grade 5/6, and it was called primary HEAL. So it was age appropriate to the group that we were working with, but it was also inclusive of the parents. I am a believer that things do not change if you do not have the whole unit. We cannot work with individuals, we have to work with the families, because at the end of the day the young person goes back to that environment. So that is why we had the parents heavily involved, and that was a core component of the outcomes of that program. And the young people—they looked at their sleep, nutrition, diet—

**Ms WARING:** Exercise.

**Ms GRAY:** Exercise—

**Ms WARING:** Cyber safety.

**Ms GRAY:** Yes. They cooked a meal every session that they would then go home and share with their parents. And the parents would be updated at the end of the session with what happened in that session.

**Ms WARING:** And it had 100 per cent parent engagement, which is amazing.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, fantastic.

**Ms WARING:** And the kids did not want it to end. They were coming up and—Sue did it, one of our workers—‘Let’s just shake on it Sue, and we’ll see you next week’. ‘It doesn’t work that way, mate. It’s finished’.

**Ms GRAY:** They said, ‘Don’t worry about what your bosses say, you just come back’.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, right.

**Ms WARING:** It is about building those skills.

**Ms GRAY:** And I think early intervention is the key. My programs are called early intervention. They are not early intervention; young people are already at crisis point. Family has broken down and they are at risk of homelessness. We need true early intervention. We need to start when they are younger. We need to be in with families and doing the work there, in my program area, to prevent going to Claire’s program area.

**The CHAIR:** That is right.

**Ms GRAY:** School focused is grade 5 to year 12—still not early enough.

**Ms LOVELL:** It is maternal and child health. That is where it needs to start.

**Ms GRAY:** Yes. We have got grade-threes that are displaying suicidal thoughts and self-harming, but we cannot work with them and no-one else will pick that up. So in a school setting is a very difficult space.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. And the solution?

**Ms WARING:** Well, part of it, I think, is that realignment of services together, because you not only have that it is easier for the person, but it is also about that you get better use of the services you have got, because they can have warm handovers. You get better use of the program dollars because you are actually able to make better use of them, rather than each person managing their own component.

So I think the first part would be a realignment and a recognition that, as George said, child, youth and families goes to six, and then we start at 10. No-one is funded for the six to 10s—other than the education system—that I am aware of. I would love to be wrong, but I am not aware of anyone doing it. So we get referrals when they are in grade 6 going into year 7, typically, and by then we are already seeing signs of school disengagement and there is family work that needs to be done.

Years ago we ran a program called the school engagement program, which again was not early intervention, in that people already had to have identified needs to be eligible for the program, but it worked intensively as a family system to provide case management for everyone in that family, not just the young person. So mum would be picked up and taken to the doctor for her doctor's appointment. The worker would be there, picking the young person up and getting them to school each day, or supporting the youngest child to get into child care, that sort of stuff. If we do not create change in that family system, youth homelessness will continue. We know the data has not changed in 10 years, and it is not likely to because we keep doing the same thing.

**The CHAIR:** Absolutely. Thank you. The program, the pilot program that you talked about, seems to have had phenomenal success in almost doubling the responses. I was just interested in why—how do we make it so it is simpler for a child or a young person, because if they are coming to you because a builder has said to their apprentice, 'Mate, you should contact NESAY', and then they contact NESAY and then you say, 'No, you've got to go to BeyondHousing'—is there something that we can do to change that, because that just seems crazy?

**Ms WARING:** It is ludicrous. And so what happens is we will then ring BeyondHousing and say, 'Billy Bobs is here and we're going to do the intake'. But then you cannot guarantee the data they are getting is then representative of the whole lit. Because we might not necessarily have had that contact—or they have not had that contact—directly with them, we will do an intake if we can, because not every young person will go back to BeyondHousing.

**Ms LOVELL:** So is BeyondHousing the front door?

**Ms WARING:** They are the entry point.

**Ms LOVELL:** They are the front door.

**Ms WARING:** For all of Ovens Murray Goulburn. Junction also provide an entry point for Wodonga, but we do not; it is an unfunded role. We used to do it and we handed it back five years ago, I think, because it is unfunded and there was a requirement we would be in each town.

**Ms LOVELL:** Because there should be no wrong doors.

**The CHAIR:** That is right.

**Ms LOVELL:** Even though there is a front door, there should be no wrong doors.

**Ms WARING:** So it is a real challenge when we cannot actually—we are not meant to—support people coming directly to us. They are meant to go through BeyondHousing first.

**Ms MAXWELL:** But then you have that other layer where BeyondHousing are not there for the day and you guys become that entry point.

**Ms WARING:** We are today. Funny you say that—we are today because BeyondHousing have a training day.

**The CHAIR:** Right. So we heard from Ask Izzy, the info exchange program. Is that a program that your service uses? It is an app.

**Ms WARING:** Yes. Not typically. For some reason we were not even on the list until we went to the homelessness conference and said, 'Where are we?'. So I do not think it is overly subscribed to around here.

**The CHAIR:** Right. When we heard about it at one of our Melbourne hearings, it did seem like a fantastic resource, and also the back end of it seemed to be a really good resource for maintaining those connections and maintaining the information of that person as they navigated through this incredibly complicated system.

**Ms MAXWELL:** Thank you, ladies, for coming. I forgot about the [inaudible] program. Given that as an organisation you do so much outreach, which plays an enormously beneficial role for those young people who otherwise ultimately probably would not have any kind of support, what do you think is needed to assist you to be able to continue to navigate that and support people? Do you think there needs to be council involvement, extended funding? What do you see as the main components to help you continue in that role?

**Ms WARING:** While the other two are thinking, and they might add on, for me it would be—and I heard Darran talking about it before—at the moment we are funded for outputs and not outcomes. And to get an outcome costs more than to get an output. So I think if the funding model was around outcomes, then that would help, because if a person is not living in Wangaratta, you could never achieve an outcome unless you actually went to them. So I think that would actually, for me, address that.

**Mr BARTON:** I will just go back to the success you have had with getting young people into private rental. What you have just told us is contrary to what we have been hearing. And there is pushback from the agents: 'We don't want kids coming in here, you know? They may not pay the rent, and they're going to have all their mates living there'—and all that sort of stuff. You must have had some issues around that.

**Ms ANDERSON:** Yes.

**Mr BARTON:** So you work with the agents?

**Ms ANDERSON:** We work with the agents and we try and do the best we can to develop relationships and have the agent develop their own relationship with the young person. That is what it is about: the young person going in and developing good rapport with the agent so that they know how to get on—and also saying that we are still going to be there, 'If there are any issues that arise in the future, please get in touch. And do that proactively so that we can get back involved and try and smooth it over'. And let them know that we have been working with the young person. It is a lot of stigma that a young person—

**Mr BARTON:** We have got to get rid of all that.

**Ms ANDERSON:** You have got to get rid of the stigma. And that is also what the Friends of NESAY is about. So we absolutely have real estate agents as Friends of NESAY. It is to try and change that perception. There is no reason that the young person will not be as good a tenant, if not even better because they are still learning and they still want to know and get—

**Mr BARTON:** They have got a chance as long as they have got that wraparound service just to prop them up as they need it.

**Ms ANDERSON:** Absolutely.

**Ms WARING:** Exactly.

**Mr BARTON:** Yes. One of the things we spoke about—yesterday, in fact—was when people get into trouble, say, in terms of 'I'm a month behind on my rent, two months behind on my rent'; will these agents come to you and say, 'Hey, they haven't paid their rent'? How do you deal with all that sort of stuff?

**Ms ANDERSON:** There is a particular program that we have, which is the Sustaining Tenancies At Risk program—

**The CHAIR:** STAR.

**Ms ANDERSON:** STAR, yes—and that is exactly for that. So we have that and we have a worker who does that, and that is meant to be for young people—but we do cover all ages—in particular. I would hope that the

real estate agents would do so, and I would absolutely hope the young people would come to us—and we have had evidence of—

**Mr BARTON:** ‘I’m in a little bit of trouble here. What do I do with this?’.

**Ms ANDERSON:** Yes, absolutely, and then we can work it out.

**Ms LOVELL:** So a lot of the things that we have been hearing from you are the things that are coming through all the time: the frustrations of the episodes of support, the 13 weeks and the revolving door that that creates with people coming in, going out the back door and coming back in the front door for the second and third episodes of support; the funding for throughput, or targets as you referred to it, rather than funding for outcomes; and the silos and things that prevent that collaborative approach that actually produces an outcome for young people. One of the ways that that could be addressed is a recommissioning of services that funds for outcomes and for collaboration between providers. I am just wondering if you would support a recommendation around recommissioning so that we get a more holistic focus on the client rather than the focus on the individual services.

**Ms WARING:** I think the sooner we take ego away, the better outcomes we are going to get, yes.

**Ms LOVELL:** Thank you. Would you be in favour of having a youth foyer here in Wangaratta?

**Ms GRAY:** You can speak to this one, Leah.

**Ms WARING:** The answer would be yes and the answer would be no. And the reason why it is yes, of course, is that any housing accommodation for young people is absolutely needed because there is none. As you are aware, there is no refuge emergency accommodation; none of those are in our catchment area at all. So the foyer would certainly help with that.

The challenge we have is that we support, I am going to say, 170-ish young people a year in our homelessness programs; we have not had any success whatsoever with getting anyone into the foyers. It is not for a lack of trying, but it is because a criterion of the foyer is that the young person needs to be ready for education. They essentially need to have minimal barriers to education, and a lot of the young people we support are not in that position. They need to get their housing sorted so they can get the other stuff sorted so they can do the education they want to do, because it is not for a lack of aspiration; it is just there are so many other things they need to sort before they can get to that point. So the foyer does not actually help them in that model. So that is why the answer would be yes and no.

**Ms GRAY:** Correct.

**Ms LOVELL:** So you need other supports as well as the foyers so that you can get them foyer ready.

**Ms WARING:** Yes. And look, maybe theoretically if the foyer was there it would free up other housing options for young people which might have a trickle effect. So potentially it would create that, but housing on its own is not the solution to homelessness. And I think that is the concern, because we know that with THM—they are only meant to be in THM for, well, three months, six months—our young people are in there for 12 months, 24 months.

**The CHAIR:** Of course.

**Ms LOVELL:** Yes, and that is what I was just saying before.

**Ms WARING:** And we are funded for 13 weeks, again, to support them, because we do not close; we just remain open.

**The CHAIR:** But they cannot be in transitional housing without support.

**Ms GRAY:** Correct.

**Ms WARING:** So we remain involved. So if they were coming to see us today, they might not get housing for six months—

**Ms LOVELL:** It is a vicious circle, that one.

**Ms WARING:** and then they are involved in THM for two years or however long. So theoretically we are funded for 13 weeks and we provide two years of support, because we do not open and close. We do not do the revolving door. Once you are in the NESAY family, you are in the NESAY family till you decide you do not want to be there anymore. So that makes it really difficult.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Thanks, ladies. Do you have a breakdown of the background of the cohort that you work with? How many are from out-of-home care, how many in the justice system, unemployed and how many early school leavers?

**Ms WARING:** In the homelessness program I am going to stare at Claire until she answers you.

**Ms ANDERSON:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

**The CHAIR:** No pressure, Claire. Should we all stare at you?

**Ms ANDERSON:** Absolutely.

**Ms MAXWELL:** And Georgie is going, 'Phew'.

**Ms ANDERSON:** Can you repeat the question? I am going to answer that by—when you mentioned leaving care, there is a new model that the Department of Health and Human Services have brought in, which is Better Futures, so in theory now we should not have any young people who come into leaving care through the Transitional Assistance Program; they should all be Better Futures. The unemployment—I do not have a breakdown, so that is going to be anecdotal. A lot of our young people have casual work. I would say about 75 per cent have casual, and the rest would be dependent solely on some form of government support. What were the other aspects?

**Ms VAGHELA:** Justice system?

**Ms ANDERSON:** Minimal. When we work with young people who are in the justice system they will be the minority. I can name maybe five at the moment.

**Ms GRAY:** And I think that is representative of the programs we have, because in my program area we do have justice system; we do have young people that are in out-of-home care. One of our main referral sources is the department of justice. I think because mine is probably earlier, 12 to 16–17—that is where we are sitting—and by the time they come to Claire—

**Ms ANDERSON:** Yes, they are not so much involved—not in the youth justice, at any rate.

**Ms VAGHELA:** So I was going to come to you for the next question.

**Ms GRAY:** Beautiful.

**Ms VAGHELA:** You mentioned the program that you run in the school. Is that on an ongoing basis? How frequently does that happen?

**Ms GRAY:** It is a fee-for-service program that NESAY—

**Ms WARING:** It that the primary HEAL?

**Ms GRAY:** Primary HEAL?

**Ms VAGHELA:** No, you know the one from grade 6 onwards, where the parents came?

**Ms GRAY:** School Focus; we are funded to the end of the year at this stage through the department of education.

**Ms WARING:** And the primary HEAL one, which is the one that was done for grades 5 and 6 was fee for service. So that was funded—

**Ms VAGHELA:** So is it like once a week it happens or what—

**Ms GRAY:** So School Focus Youth Service is a coordination position, so there is a worker that liaises with all the schools, and it is to work with the top 10 cohort of young people that are at risk of disengaging from education. So there are certain criteria that have to be met. Then there is discussion with principals and wellbeing workers about the needs that are presenting, and programs are sourced and then implemented into the schools to support that cohort of young people.

**Ms MAXWELL:** Georgie, can you just go through some of the other programs, because these are all interventions and preventative strategies to address homelessness—as Georgie said—before they do actually get to Claire.

**Ms GRAY:** So my programs?

**Ms MAXWELL:** Yes.

**Ms GRAY:** Yes, so the Reconnect program, that is DSS funded—Department of Social Services—12 to 17 inclusive. We are funded to work with the young person, but for Reconnect to work, we work with the whole family, which is time intensive. We have 1.8 workers across five LGAs, and there is a lot of stretch in the workers.

**The CHAIR:** A lot of driving too, I imagine.

**Ms GRAY:** Mansfield is one of our hotspots at the moment. So we are in Mansfield, Yarrawonga, Alpine, Wangaratta and Benalla. So the coverage there is quite thin. I was speaking to someone from Mansfield Family Services. Last year we provided, through the Reconnect program, a worker to sit in the Mansfield Secondary College to work with young people because it was identified there were no youth services available for young people. We had to withdraw that because we could not sustain it ongoing. We still do have the workers go in. The worker at family services said, 'Please don't leave Mansfield, because there are no other services that visit Mansfield'. And I just went, 'Oh, well, I've just withdrawn'. We are still there, but we are—yes.

**Ms MAXWELL:** ASP?

**Ms GRAY:** The Adolescent Support Program is funded through the Department of Health and Human Services. So that is for young people that are known to child protection—they have had child protection orders in place—and we can be an exit point from child protection, or they could still be involved but working in the background, not doing so much.

Finding Solutions is funded by the Department of Health and Human Services as well. We have 11 targets for that program in a year. So that is intensive work with young people before they become part of the statutory system, to try and prevent them from progressing into that.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, what do you mean by that?

**Ms GRAY:** Into child protection—so there may be reports, but child protection do not want to take further steps. So they would like community organisations to try and put in the work to prevent them going into that system.

**The CHAIR:** Into out-of-home care.

**Ms GRAY:** Yes.

**Ms MAXWELL:** And this is all part of—if we are going to address homelessness. There is so much to consider because of the complexity of the drivers that contribute to homelessness. It is not just sitting here listening to, 'We need more housing and things', as so many people have articulated. These are enormous considerations that we as a Committee, I think, have to certainly take on board.

So from that, Leah, I am just going to ask you—we know that we have had the bushfires. We know that that has had an enormous impact and an effect on people. For some it is not the first bushfire that they have been through in the area that you cover, and I imagine that counselling is something that will be a preventative part

for some who will have been exposed to trauma through that and who could end up walking through your doors, ultimately, as somebody at risk of homelessness. How do you see that as an early intervention in regard to your organisation and trying to support those people?

**Ms WARING:** So historically we have had one of the programs Georgie did not mention, because it has just finished. It is the school-based counselling program which we were doing up in Alpine. That finished in June last year, because we were receiving philanthropic funding which ended, and we have been advocating very hard since that point to get funding. The challenge is that we have not been able to get extra funding, so that program sits idle. The advantage of that is that it absolutely was an early intervention program.

Georgie will know more of the detail than I do, but young people in the three secondary schools in Myrtleford and Bright—we had a worker there one day a week at each of the schools. And they would make a time to go and talk to about, ‘I’ve had a fight with my best friend’, which through the conversation with Kasey unpacks other things that can be talked through and resolved. And because it was a program we created, we were not constricted to, ‘You can only see me five times and that’s all’, or, ‘It costs you this money’, or, ‘You need to drive here’. Because it was all delivered at the school, it was all delivered free and it was all delivered at what that young person needed. So it actually was a really successful program and there is amazing data around their school re-engagement, the improvement in their health and wellbeing and in their skills and their seeking further help if needed; that one was the bigger one for me, because if they need support going forward they will feel comfortable to be able to do that.

And Marian have created their own video that they have sent out. If you have not seen it, I would be surprised because I think it has gone to lots of different places; the students created that themselves because they were so passionate about the program. The school is quite anxious, because the challenge with the bushfire funding that has come through to the region is that it has come through—none of it has come through to NESAY—but none of it is actually place based. So Headspace is getting more funding, but what that will look like in schools—they typically deliver from a centre, not from a school, and they do not have relationships with those schools, so they would have to create them for the students to feel comfortable to go and talk to them in the first place. The other services, again, are from Wangaratta or Wodonga going into those spaces.

So in those communities, you are right, that is a second significant fire, and for young people who are 14, 15, it is the second significant fire in their lifetime. And we know that six months after the event is when we are likely to see things starting to happen, and my concern is that there has been nothing put in to support young people since the bushfires, that I am aware of, specifically that will actually support that. So what, are we going to wait now until the six-month mark and then start to see things starting to crack?

**Ms LOVELL:** There have been two counsellors put into Towong—into the schools.

**Ms WARING:** Yes, in Alpine.

**Ms LOVELL:** No—Alpine, nothing.

**Ms WARING:** Yes. So it is a real concern to me, to us, that we know the program works; we know the success. The kids talk about Kasey just being a part of the family. ‘I didn’t need to think about my friend anymore, because Kasey was seeing him’. That sort of stuff is huge when you are talking about acceptance and being a part of something so that people just feel safe to go and have a conversation, because young people are sometimes tricky to engage.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, absolutely. Claire, just moving back to you, in this pilot program that you ran—that you have got the different streams and there was that sort of incentive and reward that you had sort of completed a stream and you would move in—I wonder if you could just explain what that looks like to a young person or how that works. Are they doing certain courses or how do you graduate from level 2 service into level 1?

**Ms ANDERSON:** The case management, when you are working with someone with complex needs, is always focused on deficit, sadly. We are a strengths-based, advantage-based thinking model, and we work on skills, absolutely. When you have someone who is in THM, you need to address all those deficits. If you have addressed it, they are going really well and you say, ‘What are we going to do today; what’s our next plan?’, and they say, ‘I don’t know; how about we go and look at private rentals?’, that is a real goal. It is a ‘You actually don’t need me anymore; what are we going to do for you now?’. That is how it is an incentive base to

say, 'You are doing so well that you are ready'. It is pushing them out of the nest, for want of a better description. 'You're ready to go on. You don't need to be working with us anymore. So how about you go and work with Alishia'—which was the case practitioner's name—'and you work really hard with her to get a private rental?'. It is exciting. It is that independence, the growing up, the being on your own and not needing services anymore. So that was the incentive that they were working on.

**The CHAIR:** We have heard a lot in the last couple of days about giving people the capacity for private rental. And obviously this is something that you are doing—and within schools. And it sounds like there are a few different programs out there. And renters is one of them. Would you think that the Committee should be recommending something that is universal in preparing young people for that independence?

**Ms ANDERSON:** Yes would be the short answer. I am going to liken it to the L2P program, which we also run. You need to get your 120 hours up. It is so exciting when someone gets their P-plates. They have gone through all the stages. They have done everything. They are ready. They have practised and they get their P-plates. So, yes, that journey through independence, learning what you need to learn and feeling that sense of accomplishment and completion at the end of it, that is fantastic.

**Mr BARTON:** P-plates for life.

**The CHAIR:** I am not even sure I am onto Ps just yet.

**Ms ANDERSON:** But, yes, we find that a number of the young people are not ready. They do not know what they need to do to be able to live independently yet. It is hard to teach. So, yes, working in that regard is fun; it is exciting. It is something to work towards rather than working on everything that is bad in your life.

**The CHAIR:** That is right. It is proactive and positive.

**Ms ANDERSON:** Absolutely, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much—very inspiring. Yes, there is this problem of navigation, particularly for young people, and recognising that young people have very specific and unique needs is something that the Committee is really taking on board from your evidence.

**Ms WARING:** Can I just add one thing?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms WARING:** Is it too late? Sorry.

**The CHAIR:** No.

**Ms WARING:** One of the other things that we do, which I think actually works well and I think probably could be extended is that we have attendance at, like, 35 networks across our region. And the reason for that is that if we are not connected with health and education and all the other services that are happening, what we are doing is in a complete bubble of what we do. So again, it is huge because there are 20 people who work at NESAY, and we also auspice a PCP, so there are an extra six.

**Ms GRAY:** That is why we look so tuckered.

**Ms WARING:** Make-up and soft light—but we remain committed to it, because otherwise what we do is a bubble.

**The CHAIR:** When you say 'attendance'—

**Ms GRAY:** We are sitting there, around the table.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, at those networks.

**Ms WARING:** Actively.

**Ms GRAY:** Yes, and to be informed, up to date and present in the community.

**Ms WARING:** Yes. So it is a big commitment, but again we work from the outcomes of what the young people need and the families we work with, and if we do not invest in supporting and networking with others, all we are doing is getting our outputs.

**The CHAIR:** Yes; an excellent point to finish on. Thank you, Leah. That was fantastic. Thank you all and thank you for the work that you are doing.

**Mr BARTON:** Good for you, ladies.

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms WARING:** And thanks for letting us add in people late.

**The CHAIR:** The more the merrier.

**Ms MAXWELL:** Thank you, family.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, family. That is right. We all want to be your friend now.

**Witnesses withdrew.**