

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System

Melbourne—Tuesday, 21 September 2021

#### MEMBERS

Ms Fiona Patten—Chair

Dr Tien Kieu—Deputy Chair

Ms Jane Garrett

Ms Wendy Lovell

Ms Tania Maxwell

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Ms Kaushaliya Vaghela

#### PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Dr Matthew Bach

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

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Lee Tarlamis

Ms Sheena Watt

**WITNESSES** (*via videoconference*)

Aunty Linda Bamblett, Chief Executive Officer,

Ms Julie Bamblett, Homelessness Case Worker and Local Justice Team Leader, and

Ms Karin Williams, Team Manager, Bert Williams Aboriginal Youth Hostel, Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd.

**The CHAIR:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome back. We are very lucky to be joined this morning by the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association, VACSAL. We are very privileged to have with us today Aunty Linda Bamblett, who is the CEO; Julie Bamblett, who works as a Homelessness Case Worker and Local Justice Team Leader; and Karin Williams, who works with the Bert Williams Aboriginal Youth Hostel. Thank you so much for joining us.

You have met the committee, but I will just do a quick round, because we have now got Sheena Watt with us, Kaushaliya Vaghela, Matthew Bach and Tania Maxwell.

If could just let you know that all evidence today is protected by parliamentary privilege, and that is under our *Constitution Act* but also the standing orders of the Legislative Council. Therefore the information that you provide to us today is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you might say during this hearing; however, if you were to repeat that outside this hearing, you may not have the same protection. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee could be considered a contempt of Parliament.

Everything is being recorded today—we have got Hansard in the background—so you will receive a transcript of today. I would really encourage you to have a look at that when you receive it and make sure that we did not misrepresent you or mishear you.

Before we get going, I just want to just say that your submission—people can find it on our website. But India, who did the submission—a shout-out to her; it was terrific. Anyway, we will welcome some opening remarks, and then we will open it up for committee discussion.

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** Okay. So I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we meet upon today. For me it is Wurundjeri land, and I would like to pay respects to the elders past, present and emerging, with the recognition that Aboriginal people have never ceded sovereignty.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** My name is Linda Bamblett, and I am the CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd, and I would like to thank the standing committee for the opportunity to present today. VACSAL is a statewide Aboriginal community controlled organisation. We are here today to share our experience of more than 30 years of supporting our community.

Victoria's criminal justice system is not safe for Aboriginal people. Our people continue to be incarcerated and die in this colonial system and have always been grossly over-represented in every area of it. Last year 71 Aboriginal children were incarcerated. Children as young as 10 years of age can be incarcerated in this state. I understand that changes to the age of criminality are being considered at the federal level, but Victoria should not wait for the federal level to raise the age of criminal responsibility. No child should be in prison. Victoria has always led the way in innovative policy and programs and should lead the nation in legislating for the raising of the age of criminality.

We are concerned about the high level of Aboriginal women on remand due to Victoria's extremely harsh bail laws. Remand often exceeds the actual sentence. It is the community's belief that remand is used as an alternative due to lack of early intervention and preventative community-based programs. Victoria relies heavily on punishment and incarceration to address crime. There is currently a lack of resources to help and empower individuals and families at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system. At VACSAL we know from experience that early intervention and prevention is a more effective response to crime. It is restorative and healing and focuses on families working together to make change. It costs the state much less to intervene early than to pay for a lifetime of incarceration. We know from our own program's success that Aboriginal people require local community-owned services that shift away from the focus on individual toward a wraparound, whole-of-family approach. We also consider it critical to see the person and not the issue.

Our Bert Williams Aboriginal youth support services supported a young man last year who was on remand in Parkville youth training centre. He had experienced a significant amount of trauma and was a victim of family violence growing up. He had a history of mental health and alcohol and drug misuse, which contributed to his offending. VACSAL was able to connect him to a Koori youth justice support worker for case management, who supported him with everyday living, legal support and cultural reconnection and supported him to improve his health and wellbeing. Our Koori youth justice worker formed a strong relationship with him, attending court dates, having casual catch-ups, supporting him with everyday tasks, like getting a gym membership, and providing connection to community. They worked together to set clear goals for his future. He has now finished two youth supervision orders and has also completed his educational training for a cert III in civic construction. He has shown resilience, strength and determination despite his past. His experience at VACSAL was different because he was allowed to make the decisions that affected him. By using a person-centred approach the client and the Koori youth justice worker were able to maintain and build a trusting support system that developed goals that he could achieve. The young man is currently living in a stable environment at home with his family and is working towards engaging in full-time employment with the help of VACSAL and other organisations.

Our local justice worker program supports Aboriginal clients across metro Melbourne, similar to BWAYS, which is the Bert Williams Aboriginal Youth Services. We are funded for two workers, who have the capacity to support 10 clients each at any given time. We assist clients who have community correction orders to access the help they need to build a positive future and reduce their likelihood of reoffending. There is currently a waitlist for our service, and those that cannot engage with us are left without the cultural support they need to navigate their way out of the criminal justice system. Over the last two years of this program being based at VACSAL we have had 59 clients, and so far one-third have completed their orders. It is our practice to work with all clients until they have completed their orders.

Work like ours demonstrates that the ACCO sector can take responsibility for our own people, providing culturally appropriate services to break the cycle of reoffending and intergenerational incarceration. With the success of decision-making powers for children in out-of-home care being transferred to ACCOs, we believe that this success can be replicated in the criminal justice system. We should move to a system that transfers the authority and resources to ACCOs to provide culturally appropriate community responses. We need appropriate and sustainable long-term funding models and investment in our workforce and to work independently under true self-determination. Until this happens little progress will be made to reduce contact with the criminal justice system. We welcome treaty and truth telling in this state, but changes to our justice system cannot wait until this process has been completed, as we will lose more of our people to a life of crime, the cost of which we consider greater than any financial consideration.

Thank you for your time, and we welcome any questions on our submission.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much. That was a great opening statement. I will start. I think that example that you gave of that client at the Bert Williams hostel is a very poignant one, and I am going to tie it back to where I note at the first page of your report you talk about how there was \$2.8 million spent on diversion for women yet \$188 million spent on building 106 beds at Dame Phyllis. I wonder if you would like to speculate on what you might have been able to do with that \$188 million. But also, when you see a client—and I think you said one worker can see 10 clients—what is the cost per client of effectively keeping that client out of prison?

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** So we know that the cost of incarceration for a prisoner is somewhere around \$200 000 a year. It might have grown. My figures might be outdated, but I know through the Aboriginal Justice Forum that that was a figure that was given. So if you consider 10, I think that is close to \$2 million.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, okay.

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** I am not really great at maths, but—

**The CHAIR:** No, but that is right. That is how many zeroes, yes?

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** Yes. So for 10 clients to be kept out of prison means that you save \$2 million. So that equates to the cost. So can you imagine if we had the capacity? Julie, you probably should jump in on this and help me because you manage this program, but I think it is something like 270 people on community-based orders, and we can only take 20 at a time. Do you know what I mean? So if we had the capacity to work with all of those clients—and obviously there will be one-tenth that we will never be able to

divert away, but even if we could divert 200 people away from criminal justice, from being incarcerated—imagine the money that would save the state government.

**Ms BAMBLETT:** When we did a walk-through with Corrections officers through Melbourne metro there were 150 Aboriginal clients waiting for support. We were unable to pick them all up at once, so to give clients quality support through their orders we capped it—we do not have any targets, but we capped it at 10 so we made sure that they were getting quality support to complete their orders and engage with services.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. One of the others—what looks like a very successful program, and Aunty Muriel mentioned it yesterday—is the camp. I have not got a name in my notes. A resilience camp, I think it is, and you were saying that you cannot advertise it anyway because it is completely overbooked, that it is incredibly popular. Has there been any evaluation of that camp? Because it really does seem like a terrific program.

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** It is an interesting story. What VACSAL did is there was a suicide in our community that impacted on quite a lot of the young man's peers and family. There is no funding stream particularly for this type of activity, so what we did is we fundraised for the first camp and were able to get \$12 000 through fundraising, and we ran the camp, the resilience camp. We had people from Shepparton, Ballarat—young people from Shepparton, Ballarat and metro Melbourne. There were about 25 young people, and we did everything from cyberbullying to 'What does resilience mean to you?' to youth yarning circles—you know, the drug and alcohol, everything. And we intertwined this obviously with activities that young people would enjoy. From that we were able to get funding in a piecemeal approach, and we were able through Family Safety Victoria to run a number of such camps.

But as I have said, there is no funding stream. They are so successful and the kids come away feeling so good about themselves and thinking about their future and being positive, but there is no particular funding stream for this type of activity. It has to be like we have run—as I said, piecemeal, some savings from government budgets. We will apply for and get a particular amount of money, so we have been able to do that. I think the camps are absolutely wonderful. We have run dads and sons camps and we have run family camps. As a matter of fact, through Family Safety Victoria not long ago we were able to run a family camp for families that had children with disability, because that is one area where that is sort of overlooked. But whatever we can do to empower our mob and particularly our young people and to make them feel confident and connected to their culture and have that strong sense of identity—they are the keys because they are the greatest protective factors for diverting young people away from the criminal justice system.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. If I have got time, I will come back, but I will go to Kaushaliya. Thank you.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Thanks, Chair. And thanks, Aunty Bamblett, Ms Bamblett and Ms Williams, for your time today and the great work that you all do, and also thank you for the fantastic submission by India. Now, in your submission you note the need for more early intervention and prevention programs for Aboriginal women outside of prison. Can you please highlight for us some of the existing programs that Aboriginal community controlled organisations operate to address the root causes of offending?

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** There is actually no specific early intervention preventative funding stream for Aboriginal women. There are some things that Djirra run, which are the Dilly Bag program and that. There is a partnership program between VALS and Aboriginal Housing Victoria for a facility, but that is for women exiting prison. What we need to do is we need to, you know, what we have been funded, what we have had up—we run women's strengthening programs, and we talk to women about their legal rights, culture, about programs that empower through information. We have also run programs where they feel that they contribute somewhat to community, like raising money for cancer and morning breakfasts and girls' nights in. We would love to do things that engage women in discussion through therapeutic programs like art and those sorts of things that engage women in the conversation so that we are able to talk to them and empower and strengthen them. But in terms of a strategic approach to funding for women in early intervention prevention, I do not believe that that exists—unless it is family violence. You know, unless it is tagged as family violence or some other sort of stream. There is not just a standalone funding stream for that to occur.

**Ms VAGHELA:** So if there are no specific programs, then whatever operates right now, how successful are these programs?

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** I think that Djirra do a wonderful job with their day out program and their Dilly Bag program. I think that we have been successful in engaging women in the women's programs that we

get, and we usually get it through the family safety, through the CIF funding. So we get small amounts for that, and I think that they are really empowering, and they are just about women being able to not only gain knowledge, because knowledge is power, but also a sense of belonging and a sense of connection and some sort of unified peer support that strengthens women. As I said, there are pockets of women's programs across the state where ACCOs and ACCHOs deliver women's programs and that, but there is no actual strategic approach to the delivery of those programs.

**Ms VAGHELA:** And those programs, they do help in addressing the root causes of offending and reoffending?

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** They do. I remember quite clearly—and it was through Corrections Victoria here in NEMA, and they ran a program where they made teddy bears, you know, and crocheted for women who were on community-based orders. And they then donated their work to VACCA for their children in out-of-home care, and that was so empowering for the women.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Yes. All right. Chair, is there time, or will I come back?

**The CHAIR:** You have got another minute.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Also you have highlighted the work VACSAL does at its Bert Williams Aboriginal Youth Services. What are some of the challenges Aboriginal young people are presenting to you with and how do you support them and their families through those challenges?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** This one is for me. As the manager of Bert Williams—we really try to work with the whole family. You cannot fix a child without having the family involvement. So we have the case plans and the care teams, and we make sure everybody that is involved with young people come together to actually make sure that we can build upon what they want for their needs. Education is a really, really important part of making sure our young people fit within communities, so we focus on the education part. We have our early school leavers program as well, which works with our youth justice program to keep the kids in school. And that is the whole family—so you are not just working with that young person, you are working with the whole family to keep them together, to keep them in school together. Can I just get you to repeat the second part of the question for me?

**Ms VAGHELA:** Yes. So what are some of the challenges that Aboriginal young people are presenting to you with—which you already said—and how do you support them? So once they come to you—I know you mentioned that it is not only just the young people; you have to get the families in order as well—how do you support them and their families through those challenges?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** I am sure everyone is quite aware that drugs and alcohol impact a lot on young people when they are not in programs, not doing school; boredom kicks in and they get together in groups and things. So one of the things that we find really difficulty is cohorts of young people hanging together. I suppose the best example is during this COVID time: they cannot go anywhere, they cannot meet up, so they are doing it in a way where we do not, in communities, see it as legal; so they are getting together at the wrong times of the morning and night. What we are doing at Bert Williams is talking to them about safety for everybody, and I think we put in the hard yards with the workers case management. They really sit down and take the time to make sure that they listen to the young people. One of the biggest things that I am finding right now is if you do not listen and you do not hear them, you are not going to get anywhere. That is the biggest thing that we find: you have got to listen, you have got to hear what they want and work towards what they need in their lives.

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** As I said earlier, I think one of the issues—our kids come to us and they have a multitude of issues, you know. The majority of the kids that come through Bert Williams have high, complex needs. They are quite often dual clients who come from out-of-home care. They have had low levels of education, and they have no aspirations; they do not have a particular aspiration to be anything because of their low education standards. Poverty is a big issue, so they resort to crime. Everybody has to have the latest designer something or other, you know. They do not realise that Nike is not the designer product but Gucci is—praise the Lord! You know what I mean. So they have to have all the right gear and that, and they do not have an income, so they will resort to crime.

As I said in my opening statement and earlier, it is about the protective factors—being grounded in your culture and strong in your cultural identity. Also the youth justice system is almost like a treadmill—like you have got a particular time to do a cultural support plan, you have got a particular time to do a case plan, you know, and

all of that jazz. What we try to do at BWAYS and at VACSAL is to see the kid, you know. We do not see his crime or his criminal behaviour. So we are not dealing with the criminal behaviour, we are dealing with the young kid.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Thank you both.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** And can I just add with that: the biggest thing for our young people is where they belong—that sense of self-belonging, where they fit in a community. We have got to nurture that, and we have got to make sure that we make them fit in within our communities.

**The CHAIR:** Tania.

**Ms MAXWELL:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, ladies, for joining us today. I will sort of just go off what Karin has just talked about—and Linda, you have informed us a lot about this. I am quite curious. I love that you talked about the early intervention, and we know that one of the ways to reduce offending is to have that early intervention and those wraparound support services. Where do you see cultural leaders and their responsibility in becoming involved in that young person's life to try and change their trajectory of becoming immersed in the youth justice system? Do you see they have a role? Because your culture is a very close-knit culture, and you have talked today about embracing that and having kids have a sense of belonging. So how do you see the leaders' roles in that? You are saying that a lot of them come from trauma. How do you address that trauma within the family at a time that is appropriate to prevent that young person from going on and offending?

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** The role of elders in our community is to lead and guide and to lead by example. You know, there is that saying that it takes a village to raise a child. Well, that is our community. If you are respected person in our community—and you can tell. I will give you an example. We run a number of sporting programs, like events and carnivals, across Victoria annually. I am not a big woman—I am big that way, but I am short. I have the capacity to intervene if people are misbehaving at these events, and that is the level of respect that is displayed—and displayed to elders. It has to be that our community understand that you are there for them. Not everybody fits that category, but everybody has the want to fit that category in our community. So that is really to provide mentoring to our young people. It is almost what our service is based on—it is around mentoring as well as the other practical supports that we have to provide. We would say cultural support, but in your language you might say mentoring. I am sorry, I forgot the second part to your question.

**Ms MAXWELL:** No, that is okay, Linda. I was just wanting to know how important those cultural leaders are—

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** Extremely important.

**Ms MAXWELL:** within your communities, and how—

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** Can I just say that leadership might not be like, say, the Linda Bamblett of this world, but the leaders within family and within family groups or whatever might be leadership among the peers who take that responsibility. So leadership is a really broad role in our community.

**Ms MAXWELL:** I think it is something that is important for us to understand as a committee, as to what involvement they have, what involvement you would like them to have, and does it need to be a more formal process in order to support organisations such as yourselves?

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** We have got the wonderful—sorry, I am interrupting you, but—

**Ms MAXWELL:** No, you go.

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** I wanted to give an example just in terms of if you look at the implementation of the Koori Court and the role of elders and respected people there and how critical that is to the success of the outcomes from Koori Court implementations. I think that is a great—I am lost for a word—

**The CHAIR:** Example, yes.

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** Yes, example. That's it.

**Ms MAXWELL:** I would love you to just quickly elaborate a little bit more on the resilience camps, because I think that for any child they can make or break a child's trajectory. Learning about their own capabilities and capacity to be resilient for a lot of children who have experienced trauma—they feel often quite worthless—and having them challenged in a very safe and supportive environment can make an enormous difference. I often do not understand why governments do not fund those camps more often. I know they are expensive to run, but they are far cheaper too than having that lifetime of expenditure around young kids who are incarcerated and then become recidivist offenders. So can you just elaborate a little bit more on that, Linda—on what you might like to see?

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** Certainly I would like to see a resilience program being funded, and I think that there is a need for it across the state. We have only had a small introduction to it and were not able to reach that many people—the amount of people that we know could be reached with such a program that was statewide. I think the success is based on the young people themselves being given an opportunity to articulate what they believe makes them strong young people. And quite clearly the answers were their culture, their family, you know, and their own capacity to be somebody to influence others, their peers. There are many things around the resilience camp, but it is about letting them lead the conversation about what resilience means to them and then hearing them and what they are saying and then looking at what next steps can be taken and what they need to do and what other supports are needed around that to ensure, you know—because when they talk about resilience they then begin to think about aspirations—what supports can be given to ensure that their aspirations are met.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Linda. Matthew.

**Dr BACH:** Thank you, Chair. And thanks so much for being with us. One of our terms of reference discusses the knowledge base of judges and magistrates. It goes on to say that we should consider the expertise that they have both when sentencing but also more broadly in understanding recidivism and the causes of crime. You have spoken a little bit about what you feel are some of the causes of criminality, especially when it comes to some young Indigenous Victorians, so I wonder what advice you would give the committee on that point in our terms of reference regarding the knowledge base and the training and the understanding of judges and magistrates to make really sound decisions—of course, in this case, especially regarding Indigenous Victorians and young Indigenous Victorians.

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** I am going to say something sort of fairly controversial, I think. I think Parliament needs to look at their *Sentencing Act* and the legislation that has been enacted. I have been involved in the Aboriginal Justice Forum since its inception—so that is 21 years old today—and I have met quite a number of the judiciary. One of the things that binds their capacity to deal particularly in a way are the sentencing laws and the *Sentencing Act*. I know with the changes—I know it was before COVID, but it was very recently before COVID—that magistrates were giving sentencing and then a community-based order. So people would be sentenced to time in prison, and tail ended to that would be a community-based order, which would be the sentence from the magistrate because the magistrate did not see the value in long-term imprisonment. So Parliament really needs to be in touch with their own judiciary, to tell you the truth.

I think that if you are looking for the influence of Aboriginal people and the support that Aboriginal people can give you, you only have to look at the Koori Court and the expansion and the other areas that that has reached into. It started off with the Magistrates Court, and there were two pilots—one in Shepparton and one in Broadmeadows. It has now expanded across the state. We now have the Children's Koori Court. We now have programs in the family court and family violence courts. So you only need to look at your own system to see the value that Aboriginal people play in assisting judiciaries in their findings and decisions.

**Dr BACH:** Thanks. Do I still have a little bit of time, Chair?

**The CHAIR:** You do still have a couple of minutes, yes.

**Dr BACH:** We had some discussions yesterday, Aunty Linda, about the manner in which, especially when it comes to the child protection system, we can do better, the government can do better, the Victorian Parliament can do better to really honour the fantastic work of community sector organisations that seek to support young Indigenous kids, vulnerable Indigenous kids. So I hear what you are saying. What sort of shift would have to occur, what would have to happen, to enable that to take place? I am not as across this particular space as the child protection space, but I do know that there everybody I talk to, from within government, from various community sector organisations right up to the peak in VCOSS, acknowledges the truth of what you

say, which is that to get better outcomes, especially for vulnerable Indigenous youth, we need to engage Indigenous-led organisations. So could you talk to us about what you think the block is on that occurring, because it seems to me there is so much agreement that what you say is true.

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** I think that there is—sorry, Karin. Did you want to say anything? Right. I think that there is agreement at a particular level about the level of engagement with the ACCO sector, and I think that is probably higher level. I find it interesting; it is about how that goes down to the worker level and the ability to engage, for our service, with youth justice workers. So it is certainly not at managerial level but it is at the worker level, and it is about the relationship that you are able to build with that level which will lead to whether you are involved early in the case management or whether you actually come in later, and generally quite a lot of the time youth services across the state are engaged later, when it is at a critical stage. So if we are there in the beginning, then we will provide all the support and help and be able to make great inroads in terms of diverting people away. If you are only called upon in crisis, it is extremely difficult. So it is about the ability to develop those relationships at that worker level that is really critical in terms of supporting young people through the justice system. We have been in operation since 1984, to tell you the truth, and quite often it is that there is change in management, there is change in workforce, and it feels like we are continually educating public servants about what is the right way and the appropriate way to engage with Aboriginal community members.

**Dr BACH:** All right. Many thanks. What you say makes great sense to me, Aunty Linda. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Indeed. Sheena.

**Ms WATT:** I am the lucky last one, Aunty Linda.

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** Hi, darling.

**Ms WATT:** Hello, hello. It is very good to see you all, and I had a tonne of questions, but I am just going to ask about men's behaviour change programs. Now, we have heard a little bit about their work, but I am interested in particular to hear from your perspective about Aboriginal men's behaviour change programs and from your perspective what are some of the good things about these programs and what can be built on, because we know that there is obviously some linkage between recidivism and of course participation in programs like this. So if you have anything to share with us, I would really appreciate it.

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** We have a program at VACSAL called the Aboriginal centre for males, which deals specifically with males. We do intake and assessment, we provide housing support and we will do case management in terms of [inaudible]. We will even support men in terms of child protection matters and that, because they may have lost engagement with their children and really want that back. Like I said earlier, we do some dads and kids camps that have been really successful and give men the opportunity to take the primary carer role while they have got their kids with them. That is something that has probably been lacking, because they are out of the family or are not in family and they have lost contact with their kids, so that is really great and fantastic.

I think one of the things is—very similar to young people who have the same high, complex needs—they have been through the mill and they have lost all aspirations and that. Even though the want is there—I can tell you the want is there—to change, to be better, to be a better parent, to be a better partner, it is about how you guide them through that journey to gain the skills that will get them there at the end.

There are some great healing programs. Dardi Munwurro has great healing program. We do wonderful work in terms of youth yarning circles. VAHS has yarning circles. I know that the men's healing service in Gippsland is a wonderful program. So there are men's programs across—and men's sheds everywhere. I think there is even a men's shed at ACES, where the men at ACES come together and just have a talk amongst themselves, where they do men's business and that.

It was interesting to me. One of our mob has always said that if men are 90 per cent of the problem with family violence, why don't they get 90 per cent of the funding? Because it is a very small budget. But I have to say I do not really agree with that. I think that with a lot of government funding it is crisis management. You know, if you look at the expenditure across government it is all around crisis management and that, and a very small portion is a portion for early intervention prevention programs, and I think that is where the shift needs to be.

I think men today want to be warriors. You see it everywhere. They want to be warriors in their community. They want to lead and that. And you can see a shift in our community where we have got some great male leaders and some up-and-coming young male leaders. That is just through lots of years of hard work of, rather than saying, 'You don't have the right', saying, 'You can'—you know?

**Ms WATT:** That is a really good point. In fact we heard from a young male leader only yesterday, Indi Clarke, and the work that he is doing at the Koorie Youth Council, and the report that he presented to us and that we had a range of questions from.

Yesterday I asked a series of questions around victims of crime and Aboriginal victims of crime, and I just wonder, is that an area that VACSAL works with—or Bert Williams? I am interested to hear more and explore really around Aboriginal victims of crime and what support services are out there.

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** Julie has probably done more work with clients around victims of crime. But before Julie begins, I will have to say that it is really, really difficult for Aboriginal people to consider themselves victims of crime and quite often to be seen by the system as victims of crime. If an Aboriginal person walks into a police station, police are more likely to say, you know, 'What are you here for?'.

**The CHAIR:** What have you done?

**Aunty Linda BAMBLETT:** Yes, what have you done? You know, 'What are you here for?' and that. So it is very difficult. If there is an altercation between an Aboriginal person and a non-Aboriginal person, it is always: what did the Aboriginal person do?

So we are working tirelessly to address racism within the system and that, and doing a lot of work, but truly it sort of comes back to that, and it sort of relates to victims of crime, because I do not see quite often that the system sees Aboriginal people as victims of crime. I will hand over to you, Julie. You have done some work with people.

**Ms WATT:** Thank you.

**Ms BAMBLETT:** Hi, Fiona. I just wanted to add, you know, that through the local justice worker program and CCS officers, there is now education in and around supporting Aboriginal clients, supporting victims of crime. It is a new initiative that I think runs through Djirra, their corrections neighbourhood house in Collingwood. They have a program. And the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service has a victim-of-crime worker going into their services. So we can then refer into them and support our clients that have been through it.

When you say victims of crime, you know, when there is family violence, are they a victim of crime or are they just women's family violence? Is it different lots of funding? Because it impacts so many people and the harshness of the funding—they apply for a grant to support them through their escape from family violence. How do people that have been in horrific assaults—where do they go? So it is about educating and following up with supports for people that are going through victims of crime and supporting them through court. That is what we are able to do and follow up from start to finish. Once we get a notification that they want to apply for victims of crime, it is supporting them through until they get their outcomes and are satisfied with the outcomes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Sheena, did you—

**Ms WATT:** No, I just wanted to say thank you so much, Julie. That was good.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. On behalf of the committee, thank you, Linda, Karin and Julie and all of the team at VACSAL. We really appreciate the time you have given us today and your candour. Again, we have really appreciated your submission. I think we could have spent another hour talking about a whole range of things. I know I had more questions, but they will have to be left to another time. Thank you so much.

As I mentioned, you will get a transcript. Please have a look at it and make sure we did not mishear you or misrepresent you. The committee will take a 10-minute break before the next witness.

**Witnesses withdrew.**