

RESOLUTION OF APPOINTMENT

The following general purpose standing committees be established to inquire into and report on matters referred to them by the Assembly or matters that are considered by the committee to be of concern to the community ...

... a Standing Committee on Social Policy to examine matters related to health, hospitals, nursing homes, welfare, employment, housing, social security, the ageing, people with a disability, the family, Aboriginal people, youth affairs, the status of women, multicultural affairs, industrial relations, occupational health and safety, education, the arts, sport and recreation.

Minutes of Proceedings, No.1, 9 March 1995, p 7.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Ms Kerrie Tucker (Chair)
Ms Roberta McRae (Deputy Chair)
Mr Harold Hird

Secretary: Ms Judith Henderson

PREFACE

Social policy covers a broad range of concerns and they are all inextricably linked to each other.

I would like to thank all the community groups and government agencies who gave their time and energy to this Committee's inquiry into social policy concerns in the ACT. It was a pleasure to meet such hard working and committed people and our region is well served by many groups and individuals. I am concerned, that there is not sufficient support or recognition given to the work that they do.

As an environmentalist, I challenge the reductionist view taken by some scientists and economists of the natural environment. It is also important to be aware of the problems that result from looking at each area of social policy, such as health and education, in isolation.

It was apparent from the briefings that an intersectoral policy approach is essential. There is an inextricable link between the built and natural environments, decision making processes and the economy and the social environment. For example, public transport and planning issues were paramount in the concerns of many of the groups. These were raised by advocates for the aged, youth, people with disabilities, residents of newer areas and so on.

Many of our social problems are related to individuals in our society feeling alienated. As a participant from one of Canberra's older suburbs stated:

“We are really concerned about the loss of the sense of neighbourhood”.

While a sense of alienation obviously has many complex causes, it is in everyone's interest to look at ways to build community. *Real* community participation in decision making has an important role here, and not just participation of articulate, English-speaking, middle-class individuals. It is essential that resources be made available to facilitate processes which will enable meaningful participation in decision making.

Information and education are essential starting points. It is well understood that information is power. However, despite all our technological advances, and the arrival of the so-called 'information age' a large number of our community cannot even access basic information relevant to their, sometimes urgent, needs.

An unstated, but very clear message underlying the recommendations of this Report is the obligation of Government to weigh up short term versus long term costs and benefits. The Committee views this Report as a ‘snapshot’, albeit incomplete, of the state of social services in the ACT. The Committee hopes that the Government will respond to the many concerns raised and that it will view this Report as an important first step in coming to terms with the needs of the community.

Kerrie Tucker MLA
Chair
June 1995

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During April 1995 the Committee held a number of briefing meetings with community organisations and government officials for the purpose of gathering information on social policy issues from the community's perspective and to assist the Committee in identifying areas for future inquiries.

Community groups were asked to comment on the following:

- the key social problems affecting their community or clients;
- major gaps in services;
- any duplication of services or inefficiencies;
- emerging needs; and
- effective methods of community consultation.

Based on the information presented by participating organisations, the Committee identified a number of issues, which are outlined in Part B of this report.

The Committee wishes to draw the Government's attention to the following matters.

1 Resources needed for the introduction of mandatory reporting

The Committee made the following comment.

The Committee considers that there is a need for additional resources in the areas of prevention, training, investigation and substitute care and it is essential that they are forthcoming before the introduction of mandatory reporting. (Para 2.9)

2 Services to people with a disability

The Committee made the following comment.

The Committee is very concerned about the current status of services to people with a disability. The Committee will maintain a watching brief on the implementation of the recommendations of the Dell Report and seek a progress report from the Government in six months. (Para 3.16)

The Committee believes that the issue of after school and vacation care for adolescents with a disability must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The Committee recommends that the Government allocate funds for the provision of after school and school holiday programs for adolescents with a disability as recommended by the Dell Report. (Para 3.8)

3 Stereotyping of the ageing

The Committee heard evidence that some staff in ACT Government agencies are using inappropriate and stereotyping language when referring to older people. The Committee believes that this should not be tolerated and made the following comment.

The Committee believes that the ACT Government should ensure that such terminology is not used by staff in its agencies. (Para 6.3)

4 Social Policy Coordination

The Committee heard a great deal of criticism from community groups about the new administrative arrangements. The Committee is concerned about the effect of the new arrangements on social policy coordination and made the following comment.

The Committee is yet to be convinced that the new arrangements for the former Social Policy Branch will ensure that social policy issues receive serious attention or that the social impact of Government policies will be considered in a coordinated way. (Para 9.7)

5 The need for an ACT Government Information Policy

The Committee recommends that the Government develop a policy on the provision and dissemination of information on ACT Government funded services. (Para 12.6)

6 Community consultation

The Committee has a strong interest in and has begun work on examining appropriate models of community consultation. The Committee made the following comment.

The Committee wishes to complement the work being done by government in this area. The Committee will not proceed with an inquiry on community consultation at this stage in anticipation of a policy direction to be revealed by the Government and the opportunity for Committee comment on that policy. (Para 13.6)

Of the issues considered by the Committee, it is evident that there is no single issue which stands out as being more important than others in terms of the need for a full inquiry. The Committee has decided to address some aspects of violence in the community.

As a first step at addressing violence the Committee will conduct an inquiry into Prevention of Violence in Schools. It is envisaged that such an inquiry will make a positive contribution to the understanding of issues faced by schools in dealing with violence and identifying strategies, approaches and resources for the effective management of the issue.

PART A - INTRODUCTION

1. Background and methodology

1.1. As its first activity the newly formed Standing Committee on Social Policy decided to seek the views of community organisations on social policy issues. The Committee felt that it was important to gain an overview of issues before deciding on areas for full inquiries.

1.2. The Committee invited a number of umbrella organisations and community based service providers to meet with it in early April. It also placed advertisements in *The Canberra Times* on Saturday 8 April, *The Chronicle* on Tuesday 11 April, and *Valley View* on Wednesday 12 April, inviting interested community organisations to make an appointment to meet with the Committee in late April.

1.3. Community groups were asked to comment on the following:

- the key social problems affecting their community or clients;
- major gaps in services;
- any duplication of services or inefficiencies;
- emerging needs; and
- effective methods of community consultation.

1.4. Twenty four organisations arranged to meet with the Committee in response to the advertisements and a further seventeen accepted the Committee's invitation to meet in early April. In addition the Committee accepted written papers from organisations unable to attend or wishing to provide further information. A list of participating organisations is at Appendix 1.

1.5. To assist it in developing an understanding of Government policy and service provision the Committee also held a series of private briefing meetings with Government officials in April.

1.6. The Committee thanks all participants for their time and very useful contribution to its work and looks forward to working closely with community groups and Government officials in its inquiries over the term of the Third Assembly.

1.7. This report outlines issues raised at the meetings with community organisations. The report does not presume to be inclusive of all social policy issues in the ACT at present or to represent the views of all community organisations. It is the Committee's perception of issues of concern to the community based on the information presented, which is relevant to the Committee's resolution of appointment.

1.8. Issues have been grouped around a common theme and are outlined in Part B, which follows.

PART B - OVERVIEW OF ISSUES RAISED

2. Child protection and the introduction of mandatory reporting

2.1. A number of Community Services and agencies working with families expressed serious concerns about child protection issues.

2.2. Overall the Family Services Branch of the Bureau of Housing and Family Services is perceived as having difficulty coping with its current child protection responsibilities due to a number of well documented factors including staff shortages and high demand. Specific problems cited by community groups were:

- agencies have to wait several days before there is evidence of any action on a report;
- links between Family Services and the community sector and other government agencies could be significantly improved;
- youth are not seen as a priority and therefore cases involving young people of high school age suffering serious abuse are not being dealt with for several weeks;
- the training and background of case workers does not equip them to deal effectively with youth; and
- at the casework level there is very little communication between Family Services and the community agency involved in the case. Case conferences are very hard to organise because no government agency takes responsibility for coordination of the case. The community sector does not see this as its role.¹

2.3. The proposed introduction of mandatory reporting of child abuse elicited comment from a number of organisations.

2.4. There is not unanimous support in the community sector for the introduction of mandatory reporting. Some groups are not convinced that it will result in a decrease in the incidence of child abuse. It could also result in a reduction in usage of support services by vulnerable parents who may not wish to risk being reported.²

2.5. Several community services and family support agencies expressed serious concerns about the impact of its introduction on services.

2.6. Funding for services which will support children and families is seen as crucial as a preventative measure. There is a fear that this area will be

¹ Transcript p 20, p 99.

² Transcript, p 86.

overlooked or inadequately funded and that resources will only be directed to the police, the Community Advocate and to education programs.

2.7. A related issue to support for children and families is the availability of foster carers. Barnardos Canberra is very concerned about the poor rate of pay for foster carers. The work is becoming more difficult as children coming into foster care are the more severely damaged or abused children. Recruitment of foster carers is also difficult because of the competition with the paid workforce.³

2.8. The Government has indicated a commitment to the introduction of mandatory reporting and that it will consider the need for additional resources for training, investigation and substitute care before making a decision on the timing of the introduction of mandatory reporting.⁴

2.9. The Committee considers that there is a need for additional resources in the areas of prevention, training, investigation and substitute care and it is essential that they are forthcoming before the introduction of mandatory reporting.

2.10. After discussing these issues with government departments, the Committee is confident that the officers are aware of the problems raised by the community groups. The Committee would like to commend their work but urges the government to act quickly to improve the delivery of services to children and young people at risk.

2.11. Whilst very concerned about child protection issues, the Committee has chosen not to inquire into these issues directly but to monitor the outcomes of current initiatives and to revisit the issues at a later date.

3. Support for people with a disability

3.1. Support for people with a disability came across as the issue of greatest concern at present. Response to the Committee's invitation to community groups to meet with the Committee to discuss issues of concern was overwhelming from groups involved with people with a disability. Almost half of the groups who requested an appointment were involved in supporting people with a disability. In addition issues relating to gaps in services for people with a disability were raised by all but one of the Community Services and by a number of umbrella organisations, such as the ACT Council on Social Services (ACT COSS) and the Australian Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled ACT (ACROD ACT).⁵

³ Transcript, p 294.

⁴ Weekly Hansard p 152.

⁵ Transcript p 78, p 225.

3.2. In 1994 the Government commissioned a review of Intellectual Disability Services. The report of this review, Dell (1994),⁶ covers many of the gaps in services raised by the community at its meetings with the Committee, including in particular:

- respite care;
- out of school hours and vacation care for young people with a disability aged 13 to 20 years;
- a range of accommodation options for people with a disability; and
- advocacy support for young people being moved from hostels to community based accommodation.

3.3. A shortage of respite care options to meet the current needs was reported by many groups and is clearly an issue needing urgent attention.

3.4. The Dell Report made several recommendations on respite care services including:

that additional funds be provided to existing home based respite services, FaBRIC and ACT Respite to meet at least the high priority waiting list requirements; and

*respite alternatives for adolescents and adults that offer individual and integrated support be considered for funding.*⁷

3.5. The Department of Health and Community Care provided the Committee with information indicating that the Government has agreed to both the above recommendations.⁸ Additional funding has been provided to meet high priority respite care needs. Individual funding packages have been developed for people with high support needs.⁹ These measures go some way to addressing the perceived shortages in respite care, however evidence from the community sector suggests that serious concerns still exist about the level of available support.

3.6. The lack of affordable, accessible, supervised and resourced programs for people with a disability aged 13 to 20 outside school hours ie after school and during vacations was raised by the regional Community Services and by Koomarri School Parents and Citizens Association.¹⁰ This issue is also covered by Dell (1994), who recommended that:

⁶ Dell Sunny, *A Review of Intellectual Disability Services provided by the ACT Housing and Community Services Bureau*, Canberra, ACT, October 1994.

⁷ *ibid*, p 20.

⁸ Lamont, David, Minister for Housing and Community Services, *Future Directions of Disability Services provided by the ACT Housing and Community Services Bureau*, December 1994 p 16.

⁹ *ibid*, p 16.

¹⁰ See for example Transcript of Evidence pp 2, 12, 86, 131.

*the ACT Government allocate funds for the provision of after school and school holiday programs for adolescents with a disability.*¹¹

This recommendation is also being considered by the Government, which is undertaking a mapping exercise of the availability of these services before a decision on its priority can be assessed.¹²

3.7. The Committee regards this issue as one that must be dealt with urgently. People are leaving full time employment and making extraordinary sacrifices to deal with the needs of their adolescent children with a disability. The Committee is confident that the Government is aware of the issues and believes an acceleration of activity in this area is warranted.

3.8. The Committee recommends that the Government allocate funds for the provision of after school and school holiday programs for adolescents with a disability as recommended by the Dell Report.

3.9. Housing options for people with a disability were raised by several organisations. For example the Belconnen Community Service reported that there is no affordable group housing in Belconnen for people with a disability. Many people with a disability are being cared for by aged parents and in the event of the carer being unable to continue, it is claimed that there would be nowhere for the person to go.¹³ Woden Community Service reported that it had been forced to recently close an accommodation service. This had highlighted to them the lack of alternatives available.¹⁴ The inadequacy of advocacy support to assist people with a disability in the move from hostel to alternative accommodation was also mentioned.

3.10. In its preliminary response to Dell (1994), the ACT Government agreed to establish a data base to assist in identifying unmet and future needs, which would include accommodation needs.¹⁵ The Government also plans to focus on expanding the range and type of accommodation options for individuals from 1995/96.¹⁶

3.11. The Committee was concerned to hear from many participating organisations that that they had not received feedback on the outcomes of Ms Dell's review.

¹¹ Dell Sunny, *A Review of Intellectual Disability Services provided by the ACT Housing and Community Services Bureau*, Canberra, ACT, October 1994, p 20.

¹² Lamont, op cit, p 16.

¹³ Transcript p 130.

¹⁴ Transcript p 88.

¹⁵ Lamont, op cit, p 14.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p 3

3.12. Widespread concern was expressed about the need for more day time activities such as employment, recreational or community access programs. The increased demand for suitable day time activities for people with a disability was reported by regional community services, accommodation services and umbrella organisations and is an issue for people with an intellectual disability, acquired brain injury, a learning disability, and psychiatric illness. Inflexible funding arrangements were reported as exacerbating this problem. For example, Focus ACT, an organisation which supports people with an intellectual disability to live in their own homes or small group homes, reported that because it is funded as an accommodation service it is restricted in applying for funding for day time activity programs.¹⁷

3.13. The cost of the provision of transport to enable people with a disability to participate more fully in community activities is prohibitive for community organisations. Workers are currently using their own vehicles but this is becoming an issue as vehicles can be damaged by clients and the worker has to meet the repair costs.¹⁸

3.14. The National Brain Injury Foundation Incorporated advised the Committee of serious gaps in the services available to brain-injured people, especially young people.

- Appropriate accommodation and care was a major concern. The Foundation stated that it is aware of a number of young people who are in geriatric nursing homes. Others, with very low functional levels are cared for at home, because the family is not prepared to leave them in an inappropriate institution. This places incredible stress on the family. Suitable accommodation for brain-injured people with limited independent living skills is also very difficult to organise. Places like Southside Caravan Park and Burnie Court are not considered appropriate.¹⁹
- Lack of rehabilitation services for some people is also a major concern. The Brain Injury Foundation stated that many of their clients have not been offered any rehabilitation because they look like being long-term dependent patients.²⁰

3.15. The Committee is of the view that greater coordination of services to people with a disability is needed.

¹⁷ Transcript, p 145.

¹⁸ Transcript, p 91, p 158.

¹⁹ Transcript, p 174.

²⁰ Transcript, p 178.

3.16. The Committee is very concerned about the current status of services to people with a disability. The Committee will maintain a watching brief on the implementation of the recommendations of the Dell Report and seek a progress report from the Government in six months.

4. Health issues

4.1. Mental health issues were raised by a number of groups.

- ACROD ACT stated that its members are very concerned about the inadequate infrastructure and support for people with a psychiatric disability. This is reported as being particularly critical in the areas of medical services, accommodation and accommodation support. ACROD ACT believes that increased resources are needed to ensure the requirements of the mental health legislation can be met.²¹
- Northside Community Service raised the problems it has with the expectation that the community sector provide support to people with mental illness or psychiatric illness, when it does not have the skills or the resources to meet these needs. Additional support is seen as needed for people with mental health problems and an intellectual disability accommodated in independent flats in North Canberra. Many of these people are reported as vulnerable to abuse or being used by unscrupulous members of the community. As Northside Community Service stated:

*Institutions are not acceptable, but neither is trying to mainstream without the relevant resources.*²²

- The Migrant Resource Centre stated that there is a need for bicultural and alternative mental health services for migrants.²³

4.2. The effects of the early discharge policy of hospitals was stated as a serious concern by several organisations. The impact of the policy on carers, the elderly and the coordination and planning of support services, such as community nursing, respite care, transport and home help needs addressing.²⁴ The community sector feels it is being burdened with additional responsibilities directly related to the policy. As one participant stated:

²¹Paper provided by ACROD ACT.

²² Transcript, p 10.

²³ Transcript, p 57.

²⁴ Transcript p 267, 336,

*We are getting old people and disabled people returned to our community when they are not ready to come home. Early discharge planning is not well addressed. I do not know whether it is not well enough staffed ... all we know is that at our end we are phoned up and told “Mrs Moggs is coming home. Put the community services in place.” The community services simply are not available. There are waiting lists a mile long in most home and community care agencies, but Mrs Moggs is still dropped on her doorstep and left to cope.*²⁵

4.3. Dental health was reported as an issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Brindabella Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations reported that the Aboriginal community in the ACT sees the establishment of a Dental Unit for Aboriginal people as a high priority along with community education programs.²⁶

4.4. The ACT Epilepsy Association reported that as the only organisation in the ACT it cannot meet the demand and provide the level of support needed to epilepsy sufferers, their families, health and education professionals and the community generally.²⁷

4.5. Organisations from Gungahlin and Tuggeranong are concerned about the difficulties faced by some members of their communities in travelling across town to hospitals.²⁸ The elderly and people with young children in Gungahlin can find the need to travel to Woden Valley Hospital stressful.²⁹

4.6. Whilst there are issues of concern in the health area, a review of, or further inquiry is not the solution at present. One of the Committee’s responsibilities is to monitor aspects of the mental health legislation. The Committee expects to receive its first report from the Government on the introduction of the *Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act 1994* shortly. The Committee will continue to monitor all health issues.

5. Issues relating to youth

5.1. The Committee met with two umbrella youth organisations namely the Youth Affairs Network of the ACT and Pathways as well as some members of a newly formed parent support group of parents of young people who have offended. In addition the Canberra Youth Theatre provided the Committee with a paper.

²⁵ Transcript, p 24.

²⁶ Transcript, p 46.

²⁷ Transcript, p 251.

²⁸ Transcript, p 66.

²⁹ Transcript, p 341

5.2. The following issues, which have been on public notice for considerable time, were raised:

- the establishment of an Adolescent Ward; This is seen as a priority by youth organisations.
- youth suicide;
- the problems of access to mental health services and long waiting times experienced;³⁰
- lack of appropriate, affordable housing options for young people;
- inadequate support for young people with behavioural problems in schools and in youth refuges;³¹
- no support for teenage mothers;³²
- easy availability of alcohol for underage teenagers;³³
- high levels of youth unemployment;³⁴
- duplication of youth services and agencies;³⁵
- accessibility to a range of affordable cultural activities;³⁶ and
- provision of outreach youth services to newer areas.³⁷

5.3. Concern was expressed about the lack of support services for young offenders and their families. Juvenile Justice Services provides a great deal of support, however some major gaps were reported particularly in the court system. The Committee was told that:

future policies regarding young offenders should consider the following: The provision of a counselling service within the Children's Court to assist young people and their families during court proceedings and in times of crisis; the allocation of a Presiding Magistrate within the Children's Court who deals solely with young offenders; awareness of the importance of separating juveniles from adult offenders; the need for more diverse sentencing options in Canberra, for example, access to rehabilitation centres outside the Canberra region and /or the establishment of the same in Canberra.³⁸

5.4. Some aspects of the implementation of diversionary conferencing were of concern to the youth sector. Of particular concern was the role of the police.

³⁰ Transcript, p 93.

³¹ Transcript, p 95, p 284.

³² Transcript, p 284.

³³ Transcript, p 277.

³⁴ Transcript, p 233.

³⁵ Transcript, p 277.

³⁶ Paper provided by the Canberra Youth Theatre.

³⁷ Transcript, p 94.

³⁸ Transcript, p 277.

The Committee was told that there are serious ethical questions about the police having control as well as concerns about the adequacy of training.³⁹

6. Issues relating to the ageing

6.1. Issues relating to the ageing were raised by a number of organisations.

6.2. Access to specialist information is seen as an important issue for the ageing. While recognising that the ageing need access to generalist information, the ACT Council on the Ageing (COTA) put a case for the need for a specialist information service to meet the needs of the ageing. It argued that because of the complexity of some of the information that should be available to older people it should be provided through a specialist outlet. Older people can find technology such as Austouch frightening and difficult to use and in fact a barrier to accessing information.⁴⁰

6.3. COTA and the Older Women's Network both commented on the inappropriateness of some language referring to the ageing which is in usage.⁴¹ Terms such as "granny flat", "grannies", "old girl" (referring to a vintage car) are frequently used in the media and the bureaucracy and create a negative image of the ageing.

The Committee believes that the ACT Government should ensure that such terminology is not used by its agencies.

6.4. COTA identified a number of other issues of concern to the ageing including:

- high land, water and sewerage rates, which are contributing to financial difficulties for some older people who wish to remain in the family home, which happens to be in an inner area;
- the need for financial assistance to eliminate safety hazards in the home;
- the need to maintain bus routes to ensure older people continue to have as much access as possible to services and recreational activities;
- the unavailability of adequate seating at supermarkets and national centres such as the Science and Technology Centre; and
- community safety in areas such as Civic, Manuka and bus interchanges.

6.5. Respite care and the needs of carers were also raised as requiring urgent attention in this context.⁴²

³⁹ Transcript, p 100.

⁴⁰ Transcript, p 117.

⁴¹ Transcript, p 118,

⁴² Transcript, p 78.

6.6. The Home and Community Care (HACC) program, a joint ACT/Commonwealth funded program which funds providers of services for people with a disability and the aged was raised by several organisations. Of particular concern to COTA and the Council of Social Service is the need for the ACT Government to get the benefit of any increase in funding from the Commonwealth by budgeting to match the Commonwealth funds.

6.7. The other area of major concern in relation to HACC is the identification of recipients of HACC services and the coordination of these services. The Committee was told that there is a need to look at the general provision of and access to HACC services and how they are coordinated, as at present there can be much duplication and overlap.⁴³

6.8. The viability and continued existence of small neighbourhood shopping centres is a matter of concern to older people. Older people wish to ensure the retention of local shopping centres, which are easily accessible from their homes. Local shopping centres provide important services such as medical services and chemists and are seen as a key element in maintaining a sense of neighbourhood.⁴⁴

6.9. Appropriate housing arrangements for older people were also raised. It was suggested that a range of options need considering to meet the needs of diverse groups, such as people from other cultures and women living alone. Suggestions such as an Abbeyfield type development for older women living alone, portable flats or stand alone cabins on the same block as a family home to accommodate aged parents were proposed.⁴⁵

6.10. Information on reliable, trustworthy trades people who charge reasonable rates was reported as an area which could be addressed to assist older people.⁴⁶

7. Family Support Services

7.1. The need for additional family support services was raised by a number of the large service providers and umbrella organisations.⁴⁷ Specifically low or no cost counselling services are needed across the Territory. At present in Belconnen, for example, it was reported that when the Belconnen Community Service is unable to take on a case, because of the high demand, there is no alternative service where clients can be referred.⁴⁸

⁴³ Transcript, p 110, p 119.

⁴⁴ Transcript, p 121, p 138.

⁴⁵ Transcript, p 58, p 267.

⁴⁶ Transcript, p 244, p 266.

⁴⁷ See for example Transcript, p 104, p 129, Paper provided by Lifeline p 6.

⁴⁸ Transcript, p 129.

7.2. Barnardos believe that more emphasis should be placed on a preventative focus to prevent child abuse and the need for children to be placed in care. Measures such as making respite care options, such as occasional care more affordable for single parents and providing a family support worker in the home were suggested.⁴⁹

7.3. The Committee was interested to hear of the work of the Prisoner's Aid Committee in supporting prisoners and their families. This organisation reported that its activities are limited by funding constraints.⁵⁰

7.4. Lifeline reported a need for additional resources for counselling in gambling addictions and financial management.⁵¹

7.5. The issues raised in relation to families highlighted the level of violence experienced in many families and the many difficulties which confront people on a daily basis. The Committee had no objective measure of the efficacy of family support services offered by government and community agencies, but it is clear that many people are enduring a great deal of hardship.

8. Planning and community facilities

8.1. Planning issues ranging across a number of areas relevant to the committee's Resolution of Appointment were raised.

8.2. The North Canberra Community Council is concerned about the effect of rezoning of neighbourhoods on existing residents. It argued that medium density three story developments such as in Kingston are not suitable for older people or young families and it does not want to see the "Kingstonisation" of North Canberra. The Council believes that access to local facilities is important in maintaining the neighbourhood. It is concerned that the library, school halls and recreational facilities such as the swimming pool are accessible and affordable for those who wish to use them. The Council summed up by stating:

*We are really concerned about the loss of the sense of the neighbourhood ... If we can grow communities which value their neighbourhoods and their community, then we can look at fewer impacts and costs of policing, more effective use of the assets such as schools and just a general well being of the community as a whole.*⁵²

8.3. Other community organisations also spoke about the importance of maintaining the sense of neighbourhood and the need for this to be considered in planning community facilities. The Kippax Task Force is keen to see the Kippax

⁴⁹ Transcript, p 294.

⁵⁰ Transcript, p 209

⁵¹ Paper presented by Lifeline p 5.

⁵² Transcript, p 140.

library retained and further developed to incorporate a community centre and arts centre.⁵³ Weston Creek Community Council presented some thoughts on a specific library service and sporting facilities for that area.⁵⁴ In new areas such as Gungahlin, level playing fields should be developed early in the suburb's life to provide a place for recreational activities for families.

8.4. The importance of planning for employment opportunities in Gungahlin is seen as a major issue to be addressed. Employment opportunities are needed in Gungahlin to offer people a lifestyle choice and the associated benefits of living close to work as well as to alleviate traffic problems in North Canberra.⁵⁵

9. New Administrative Arrangements

9.1. The Committee heard concern from the community sector about the new administrative arrangements in particular the lack of consultation. The linking of service provision for people with a disability and the ageing with health service provision has been seen as a retrograde step. The view was frequently expressed that people with a disability do not see themselves as sick. The other major issues raised on this matter was the division of youth disability and adult disability administration, which may lead to discontinuity in program delivery.

9.2. Similarly organisations representing older people are concerned that the new arrangements may lead to a negative community perception about the aged such as aged equals disability.⁵⁶

9.3. One organisation addressed the issue of corrections and police being put together. In their view the penal side should be separated from the human side of corrections.

9.4. The effect of the changed arrangements on the community sector is yet to be felt. However, community services are concerned that there is now no consolidated community service focus in one government agency. They fear that as their main point of contact with Government has been spread over a number of departments the community sector will lose its focus, become less important and be less resourced. This will result in less coordination, duplication in some areas and more gaps in others.⁵⁷

9.5. As a consequence of the new administrative arrangements the functions of the former Social Policy Branch in the Chief Minister's Department have been significantly changed. Social policy and service areas have been integrated as far as possible with the result that the Branch has lost policy functions relating to

⁵³ Transcript, p 270.

⁵⁴ Transcript, p 36.

⁵⁵ Transcript, p 203.

⁵⁶ Transcript, p 124.

⁵⁷ Transcript, p 104.

youth, disabilities and the aged. The Branch is now named Community Relations Branch with responsibility for:

*assisting to introduce or enhance policies designed to achieve better outcomes for people from non English speaking backgrounds, women, and Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders.*⁵⁸

9.6. Under the former Government the Branch was also responsible for:

- *supporting the Government's social policy commitment through developing, implementing, managing, and reviewing relevant policies and programs across Government;*
- *maintaining a high level policy perspective on current and emerging social policy issues which may affect one or more programs; and*
- *raising the level of knowledge and sensitivity to social policy issues and principles to achieve better integration of economic and social programs.*⁵⁹

9.7. The Committee is yet to be convinced that the new arrangements for the former Social Policy Branch will ensure that social policy issues receive serious attention or that the social impact of Government policies will be considered in a coordinated way.

10. Education and training

10.1. Comment on education issues was limited, with only a small number of organisations addressing the area.

10.2. The issue of students who are not coping with school was raised by the youth sector and the Council of Parents and Citizens.

10.3. The Youth Affairs Network of the ACT advised the Committee of the need for more resources to deal with students with behavioural problems. Teachers were seen to need more support. Counselling services for example are currently seen as being too thinly spread. It suggested that more places be made available in special intervention programs such as Dairy Flat or schools be resourced to develop their own off line programs to meet the needs of this group.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Government Briefing to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Transcript, p 94, 95.

10.4. In addressing the issue the Council of Parents and Citizens stated:

There are also resource problems ... in the high school. For example, teachers in high schools have major concerns at their inability to address the needs of all students within the present curriculum and school structure. They estimate that up to 20 per cent of the school population are alienated from schooling and are attending school without any real engagement in the curriculum. These students are described as performing not any or very little classwork, being irregular in their attendance, being abusive in their language and demeanour, with inappropriate behaviour inside and outside the class.⁶¹

10.5. Under resourcing was also raised in the context of addressing learning problems. The Council of Parents and Citizens presented figures indicating that a third of children identified as needing assistance through the reading recovery program are missing out. The Council also referred to the high demand for learning assistance in high schools with almost one quarter of students in year 7 to 10 being identified as needing learning assistance in 1993.⁶²

10.6. Gaps in the provision of training opportunities in English language and literacy for some groups of people of non English speaking background were raised. People identified as needing access to programs include early school leavers, young people entering college and people who have been in Australia for many years who may have missed out on or received inadequate ESL training. The latter group, often comprises women who are not interested in entering the workforce because of age or family responsibilities and who are ineligible for any Commonwealth funded ESL training.⁶³ The Association of Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages provided the Committee with a proposal to establish an ACT Government funded Home Tutor Program. The Committee believes this proposal has merit and has forwarded it to the Chief Minister for consideration.

11. Violence in the community

11.1. The Committee's attention was drawn to the high rate of violence in our society as something which is not being adequately addressed in the ACT. Violence is evident in homes the community and schools.⁶⁴ Violence takes many forms including child abuse, elder abuse, male abuse, spouse abuse and date abuse. Access to support is easier for some groups than others. Men especially have very few avenues for assistance at present.

⁶¹ Transcript, p 27.

⁶² Transcript, p 26.

⁶³ Transcript, p 238.

⁶⁴ Transcript, p 10, Paper provided by Lifeline.

11.2. Violence is also dealt with in different ways. Some violence is criminal and some is seen as acceptable or not even acknowledged. Sometimes it is dealt with by the police, sometimes by Family Services or the Community Advocate. It was claimed that problems of family violence and community violence are not being approached in the best way and a coordinated approach is needed.⁶⁵

11.3. The Committee was disturbed to hear evidence of serious instances of violence among primary school aged children. In one instance a special after school care program was established to cater for a group of 5 to 12 year olds who because of their behaviour had been banned from mainstream after school programs in the area.⁶⁶

12. Information

12.1. Access to suitable and relevant information was a major issue for many groups. In particular organisations dealing with people with a disability, the aged and carers reported serious deficiencies in the availability and suitability of information. It was argued by several organisations that because of the specific needs of the ageing and people with a disability a specialist information service is needed to meet the needs of these groups.⁶⁷

12.2. The delivery of information was also an issue. Handyhelp for example stated that in its experience the most effective way of imparting information is through face to face contact.⁶⁸ There was criticism of any idea that there may be a single solution to the delivery of information. The Austouch program, while being very good for some will not fill the gap in information for all and can only be seen as one part of information dissemination. As mentioned earlier older people and people with a disability can find technology very daunting and difficult to use.

12.3. The Committee supports the concept of a specialist information service for the aged and people with a disability and suggests that the establishment of such a service be considered in the context of an overall information policy.

12.4. The Committee received evidence of gaps, duplication, ad hoc development, lack of coordination and waste in the provision of information. The Community Information and Referral Service argued that the development of an ACT Government Information Policy would result in better coordination of information and more effective use of resources in the information area.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Transcript, p 10.

⁶⁶ Transcript, p 15.

⁶⁷ Transcript, p 290.

⁶⁸ Transcript, p 245.

⁶⁹ Transcript, p 290.

12.5. The Committee believes that there is merit in having an information policy.

12.6. The Committee recommends that the Government develop a policy on the provision and dissemination of information on ACT Government funded services.

13. Community Consultation

13.1. The Committee has begun work on appropriate models for consultation with the community by government and the Assembly. One of the issues organisations were asked to comment on was effective methods of community consultation in relation to social policy. The ideas and opinions expressed by community groups are to be incorporated in a paper to be tabled at a later date.

13.2. Comments in this report will be confined to two areas namely:

- the perceived lack of representativeness of some Ministerial Advisory Councils; and
- feedback from consultations.

13.3. In relation to representativeness, the Committee was told that the former Chief Minister's Youth Advisory Council was not seen as a good model for consultation because it did not comprise a very representative group of people. It was suggested that as the model used to develop and implement the mobile Youth Health Outreach Service seems to have been successful it may provide a good model for consultation with young people.⁷⁰

13.4. Similarly, the Brindabella Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations claimed that the former Chief Minister's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council was not representative of aboriginal people and its chair did not consult.⁷¹

13.5. The Committee was concerned to hear from many organisations that they had not received feedback on outcomes of consultations in which they had participated. These organisations felt that they had committed a great deal of time and effort in participating in a number of consultations and were very disappointed to receive no feedback. In particular disappointment was expressed on lack of feedback on the Dell Report, the Transport Report, the Rehabilitation Review, the Proctor Report on Independent Living Skills and the ACT Strategic Plan for Disability Services.⁷²

⁷⁰ Transcript, p 98.

⁷¹ Transcript, p 45.

⁷² Transcript, p 230*, Paper provided by ACROD, p3.

13.6. The Committee wishes to complement the work being done by government in this area. The Committee will not proceed with an inquiry on community consultation at this stage in anticipation of a policy direction to be revealed by the Government and the opportunity for Committee comment on that policy.

PART C - CONCLUDING REMARKS

14. Conclusion

14.1. It is clear from the information presented to the Committee and outlined in Part B that there are many areas needing attention.

14.2. The Committee was disturbed to hear of the many problems which still confront the ageing, young people and families. In private briefings provided to the Committee by government officials, it was evident that many of the issues had been discussed but clearly still need a lot of attention.

14.3. The Government has indicated that it is acting on a number of the major issues raised such as child protection and the introduction of mandatory reporting; some aspects of respite care; mental health; and services for people with a disability. With this in mind the Committee has decided to monitor the Government's action in these areas over the next few months. The Committee will be particularly interested in monitoring the implementation of recommendations made in the Dell Report.

14.4. The question of support to people of non English speaking background, their access to services and the availability of English language classes, is still not fully explored. The Committee is very interested in this area, but given that a new office of Ethnic and Multicultural Affairs has just been established will be awaiting developments from that office before seeking a further review of the area.

14.5. The Committee heard serious concerns about the lack of consultation on the implementation of the changed administrative arrangements and their impact on the community. The Committee shares many of these concerns, however believes that as the arrangements have only just been put in place it is premature to make any substantive comment or recommendations for change. The Committee will continue to monitor the impact of the changes on policy development and service delivery.

14.6. Several gaps in services emerged from the discussions.

14.7. Gaps and duplication of services were reported in the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program. Two reviews of the HACC program commenced in 1993-94. Responses to the reviews will be available shortly. The Committee will watch with interest the Government's action on these reviews.

14.8. Gaps in the provision and dissemination of information were identified. The ACT Government has no information policy which results in a lack of

coordination, duplication and gaps in information provision and dissemination. The Committee's recommendation on an information policy is at paragraph 12.6. There appears to be a major gap in information services for the aged and people with a disability. The Committee supports the establishment of a specialist information service for these groups within the context of an overall information policy.

14.9. A clear gap exists in the provision of out of school hours care for young people with a disability in the 13 to 20 age group. The Committee believes that this matter must be addressed urgently and that funds must be found. The Committee's recommendation is at paragraph 3.8.

14.10. Other major gaps reported included: support services for people discharged from hospital; English language training for some groups of people of non English speaking background; affordable counselling services for families; counselling services for young people with behavioural disturbance; and day time activities for people with a disability.

14.11. One of the purposes of holding this series of briefing meetings with community groups was to assist the Committee to identify the major social policy issue of concern, which could be followed up with a full inquiry. There are in fact a number of issues which need addressing. Some have already been the subject of recent extensive reviews and some action is in progress as outlined in the early paragraphs of this section. Others require no further investigation and the Committee has made its recommendations to the Government. The Committee does not believe it would be appropriate at present to inquire into areas which the Government has indicated it will address.

14.12. Of the issues considered by the Committee it is evident that there is no single issue which stands out as being more important than others in terms of the need for a full inquiry.

14.13. The issue of violence in the community is an issue about which the Committee is very concerned as it can impact on a wide cross section of the community. The Committee is most concerned about evidence of violent acts by young children.

14.14. As a first step at addressing violence the Committee has decided to conduct an inquiry into Prevention of Violence in Schools. It is envisaged that such an inquiry will make a positive contribution to the understanding of issues faced by schools in dealing with violence and identifying strategies, approaches and resources for the effective management of the issue.

14.15. The terms of reference of this inquiry are as follows:

inquire into and report on the prevention of violence in schools with particular reference to the following -

- (1) the current programs and need for programs for preventing violence, bullying and harassment across the different sectors of schooling;
- (2) training and support for teachers in managing programs;
- (3) resourcing of programs;
- (4) issues relating to case management within schools and the broader community;
- (5) evaluation mechanisms in place; and
- (6) any other related matter.

Kerrie Tucker MLA
Chair

APPENDIX 1: List of hearings and participants

A HEARINGS

Monday 3 April

Southside Community Service	Ms Vicki Mosely Ms Beris Senden
Northside Community Service	Ms Jillian Grant
Weston Creek Community Service	Ms Robin Vote
ACT Council of Parents and Citizens	Mr Richard Scherer Mr Trevor Cobbold

Tuesday 4 April

Weston Creek Community Council	Mr Bob Sutherland
Brindabella Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations	Mr Colin Williams M Lynne Holten Mr Noel Ingram Mr Tom Smith Ms Tanya Williams Mr Arnold Williams
Trades and Labour Council of the ACT	Mr Jeremy Pyner
Migrant Resource Centre	Ms Polly Keightley
Gungahlin Community Council	Ms Roma Hosking Mr Bruce Warren Ms Ingrid Zander Anhalt Mr Theodore Ruecroft

Thursday 6 April

ACT Council of Social Service	Mr Allan Anforth
Woden Community Service	Ms Betsy Gallagher

Youth Affairs Network of the ACT	Ms Judith Lovell Ms Lindy Sandrey
Tuggeranong Community Service	Mrs Julie Quaass Mrs Margot Strachan
Belconnen Community Council	Mrs Laurelle Murphy Mr Norman Henry

Friday 7 April

ACT Council on the Ageing	Mr Jim Purcell Mrs June Healy Mrs Phyllis Montgomerie
Belconnen Community Service	Ms Margot Mitchell Ms Felicity White
North Canberra Community Council	Mrs Joan Kellett Mr David Evans Mrs Elvie Munday

Wednesday 26 April

Focus ACT	Mr Rob Westcott
Lloyds Homes	Mr Bob Lloyd
Sharing Places	Ms Annamaree Reisch-Kleber Ms Phyl Crawford Mr Ty Emerson
FaBRIC	Mrs Glenys Morgan Mrs Shirley Sly
National Brain Injury Foundation - ACT	Hon Mr John Kelly Dr Peter McCullagh Ms Dorothy Sales Mrs Jeanette Budak

In confidence

Thursday 27 April

Carer's Association of the ACT	Ms Carole Radnedge Mr Anthony Yeates
Respite Care ACT	Ms Patricia Towning Ms Keris Delaney Mr Ted Quinlan
Maltese Australian Association	Mr Carmel Attard
Royal Australian Planning Institute - ACT Division	Ms Angharad Dean Mr Jan Martin Mr Malcolm Smith
Prisoner's Aid Committee	Mr Bill Aldcroft
Woden Senior Citizens Club	Ms Pat Cummins Ms Cynthia Roberts Ms Myra Hickey Mrs Kath Bourke
Australian Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled ACT	Ms Ngaire Whitehead Dr Ralph Farnbach
Pathways	Mr David Matthews Mr Adam Stankevicius
Association for Teachers of Languages other than English	Ms Pat Wenger Ms Melva Thompson Ms Mary Beattie
Handyhelp	Mr John White Mrs Helen Holgate
Epilepsy Association of the ACT	Ms Trish Johnston Mr Arnold Johnston Dr Graham Jackson
Koomarri School Parents and Citizens Association	Mr John Thorn

Friday 28 April

Older Women's Network Action	Ms Betty Searle Ms Pamela Rosenberg Ms Patricia Dent Ms Betty Vonow
Kippax Task Force	Dr Chris Watson Ms Norma Flint Mr Dirk Van Der Vliet
Lowana Young Women's Service	Ms Imogen Prior Mrs Veronica Sims-Wensing
Parent Support Group	Mrs Jenny Nesbitt Mrs Diane Debritt Ms Carolyn Joyce
Community Information and Referral Service	Mr Adam Stankevicius Mrs Pam Marsh Mrs Venetia Graham
Barnardos	Ms Jenny Kitchin

B PAPERS PRESENTED (in a addition to those submitted by participants at hearings)

Lifeline Canberra, *Gaps in Services*, May 1995.

Canberra Youth Theatre Co. *Youth Arts Resource Worker Cultural Animateur*.

APPENDIX 2: Glossary of acronyms

ACT COSS	ACT Council of Social Service
ACROD ACT	Australian Council for Rehabilitation of Disabled ACT Division
COTA	Council on the Ageing - ACT
ESL	English as a second language
HACC	Home and Community Care Program